

# **National Family Homelessness Project**

**A Longitudinal Research Project on Aboriginal Homelessness in Perth  
Western Australia**

by

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with

assistance and guidance from

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**Centrecare  
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Disclaimer: The opinions, findings and proposals contained in this report represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the attitudes or opinions of the commonwealth, State or Territory Governments.

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## Foreword

In 2001, the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) National Homeless Strategy Office considered demonstration projects around Australia and at that stage only one was allocated to WA. Other funding was already allocated elsewhere. After some background research on what was likely to be successful, Centrecare approached both Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and Department for Community Development (DCD) representatives with ideas and set up a joint meeting to discuss the options further. At that stage, nothing looked promising, but it allowed us more time to develop approaches we thought could be successful in obtaining funding to research what all three agencies believed, and also what we were aware other agencies believed, was a vitally important issue. *That is, the high rate of Aboriginal family homelessness in Perth and its consequent impacts, including the effect of agencies not working collaboratively across both government and non-government in this sector.*

From there, Centrecare sent a submission and followed up firstly to see if it had been received, then a few months later to see if the funding was likely to be approved. The State Homelessness Taskforce in WA came and went and some ten months after the proposal was submitted, we received confirmation that Centrecare had been successful. We then set to work to bring this project to reality. Centrecare, and many of its participants, consider the outcomes of this project simply amazing and we feel honoured to have been given the opportunity by FaCS to manage it.

The National Family Homelessness Project (NFHP or “the project”) was designed and developed through the establishment of relationships and through collaboration. Several years ago, a project such as this could not have been completed. Relationships take time to develop and require trust, respect, flexibility, the ability to adapt, a willingness to accept criticism and a willingness to continue working together towards better outcomes for all parties involved. When talking about professional relationships, we refer to those developed with our participants, our usual agency clients, colleagues and peers within the sector, and with government officers and funding bodies generally.

Sixty-one (61) Aboriginal families in the Perth metropolitan area initially agreed to participate in Centrecare’s NFHP. All participant families completed the first round of questionnaires for the study.

Although only 57 of the original 61 participant families remained in the project at its completion, Centrecare considers the low attrition rate of 4 participants, or 6.5%, a major achievement for a project of this type and involving these particular participant families.

For Centrecare there have been enormous risks in undertaking this project. We have placed our existing relationships on the line, especially those across the sector. Through the study, we have housed and supported some of the most complex families/couples with entrenched histories of homelessness, poverty, substance misuse, sexual abuse, and criminal offences. A number of the participants had come straight from the streets and in some situations had never been housed at all, or were deemed “never to be housed again”.

The successful completion of the project has come at a huge financial cost to Centrecare as a number of participant families created large tenant liability bills and vacated debts.

The extent of this cost is not yet known as the agency still has a large number of participants and control group families in its housing. Throughout the project, a number of the participant families have taken up a large amount of human resources due to the number of staff involved in supporting them. Enormous amounts of time have been expended in dealing with their presenting issues, neighbourhood complaints, writing letters in response to complaints, and addressing ministerial enquiries. Agency staff have also been required to attend meetings with various government department officers, members of parliament and departmental heads.

We have been judged and criticised by some who are not fully aware of the facts and by those who have been unwilling to undertake a similar project, nor who have a full appreciation of what it means to be a provider of either housing or support. We have also had many successes and assisted a very large number of Aboriginal families to exit homelessness. For many, this has been a unique and satisfying experience.

The Department for Housing and Works (DHW) in particular has been monumental in its assistance and support for this project and has not had "an easy ride". They were continually pressed by our organisation to provide accommodation to a large number of participants in this project, as well as existing clients. Similarly, although not to the same degree, the Department for Community Development (DCD) received ongoing requests by our organisation to implement alerts and ensure they remained fully operational during the study. We also exerted pressure for additional support for a large number of the participants in this project.

The non-government sector's contribution, and in particular those agencies which have been involved with this project, has also been excellent. Agencies such as those represented on the Project Advisory Committee have been collaborative and supportive in their approach, and their input is especially worthy of note as their support has been unfunded.

Lastly, and most importantly, we have felt honoured to be allowed to be included in the lives of the participants who have been involved in this project. These people have shared with us their stories, and have permitted us to share these with others in our attempts to improve their lives. Most of the stories we have heard are very sad. The majority of the participants have been affected by substance abuse, violence and illiteracy, each of which in itself can be a serious life long issue. Due to their behaviours, which are considered socially unacceptable by most people's standards, some of our participants may never get housed permanently unless service providers are willing to take a risk.

We have found during this study that it is far easier for some to work in isolation and to censure others than to work cooperatively with them. It is essential that such attitudes change if we are to successfully deal with the issue of homelessness in our community.

We thank all of our participants and the organisations involved in the study for having the courage and determination to take the journey with us.

## Description of Project Staff

### **Chantal Roberts – Project Officer**

Chantal completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences at Murdoch University, Western Australia, in 1993, majoring in Politics, Philosophy & Sociology, and Women's Studies. She has worked in various community organisations, as a youth worker, co-ordinator of two youth employment programs, researcher, employment counsellor and assistant electoral officer, local government offices and for a Member of Parliament, among other positions.

Chantal has worked at Centrecare for over six years, since April 1997, within the Outreach Support Services. She commenced in the organisation's SAAP program as a Community Case Worker, and then moved into the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP), a program funded by Homeswest (Western Australia's state housing body) and delivered by various community organisations within Western Australia.

In 1999, Chantal successfully applied for the newly formed Team Leader position in Centrecare's Housing and Outreach Services, including SAAP, SHAP and Solid – a newly developed service to support young people at risk of offending and their parents. Centrecare's housing and outreach services support an average of 175 families every week, 80% of whom are indigenous families. Chantal's current position at Centrecare is Acting Manager of the Housing and Outreach Services.

### **Leanne Burgess – Project Manager**

Leanne Burgess, the Manager responsible for overseeing this project, has a Bachelor of Social Work and Advanced Certificate in Human Services (Disabilities), a Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Housing Management and Policy.

Leanne, who has been employed at Centrecare since 1993, has had twenty years experience in the social service sector involving direct casework, community work, policy development and program management. This expertise has been in the areas of office based counselling services for the agency's Parent and Adolescent Family Services, at Djooraminda, a placement service for young Aboriginal children aged 0 – 15 years, and outreach services for young people, families and individuals who are at risk of homelessness and/or offending. All of these services have target groups with challenging behaviours. Leanne was also seconded to the secretariat of the Western Australian State Homelessness Taskforce for six months and co-wrote all taskforce reports in addition to facilitating consultations within the state. Prior to commencing at Centrecare, Leanne was also employed by the Disability Services Commission as a social trainer for five years.

Leanne has been Chairperson of Community Housing Coalition of WA since July 1999 and has been a board member of the Council for Homeless Persons Australia since 1996 serving at different times as Secretary, Vice President and Treasurer. Leanne is a former board member of the Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations.

## Executive Summary including Recommendations

### The Project

In June 2002, Centrecare undertook the National Family Homelessness Project to research Aboriginal family homelessness in Perth. This project was funded through the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services' 'National Homelessness Strategy'.

The project was a 15 month longitudinal study that examined the effects of homelessness on a target group of 61 Aboriginal families and a control group of another 31 Aboriginal families with a history of homelessness. Although the study was to initially target 50 participants, it was decided at the outset to aim for 60 families, to allow for natural attrition.

The objective requirements of the research were fourfold:

- identify the effectiveness of existing support services and accommodation options for Aboriginal people
- examine alternative pathways that may assist the target group to avoid future homelessness
- link people into accommodation and supports as required
- examine ways of developing effective collaborative working relationships between agencies in the community sector and also between the community and public sectors.

### Participants and Control Group

A Memorandum of Agreement between Centrecare, DHW and DCD was developed to allow for the two government departments to identify 75% of possible participants to the project. A delay of approximately six weeks was initially experienced in obtaining referrals from the two government departments.

Under the terms of the funding agreement, participants were interviewed formally through three rounds of questionnaires by the same Project Officer. At the initial interview, participants were asked to sign consent forms authorising Centrecare to obtain or release information from DCD and DHW to facilitate monitoring of housing and support requirements. All participants were also informed during that initial interview that while every effort would be made by project staff to link them into housing and/or supports, this could not be guaranteed. Throughout the project, and with their ongoing consent, the target group's housing situation was monitored to enable documentation of support needs and provision. As a consequence of the interviews and the monitoring systems put in place, supports were offered when any participant experienced difficulties that might impact on their continued housing.

It was initially intended that 50 families would be interviewed for the control group, however difficulties were encountered in accessing homeless families to complete a questionnaire and therefore only 31 took part.

Unlike the participant group in the study, these families were not assisted to access either housing or supports, although they were provided with extensive information about available options. The difficulties in relation to the control group are detailed later in this report, under the heading **Methodology**. The questions contained in the Control Group Questionnaire were derived from the three Participant Questionnaires. A copy of the Control Group Questionnaire is included at **Appendix II**.

All contact with participants, control group families, service providers, housing providers and the departments involved in the research was documented and analysed for this report.

At the commencement of the project, 52 of the participant families were considered primary, secondary or tertiary homeless (see **Definitions of Homelessness** page 20).

Results from an analysis of the data collected from the first round of questionnaires allowed a profile of the participants to be drawn up.

- 40 participants identified as sole-parent families (one was male-headed, while the other 39 were female-headed households)
- 18 identified as couples with children, and
- 3 identified as couples without children.

At the outset of the project, there were 198 accompanying children who were going to reside with the participants when they were housed. This equated to 280 people in total. This total changed from time to time with participants' changing circumstances in relation to partners and dependants.

A total of 52 participants received some kind of support during the project - 40 directly in supported accommodation programs, of whom 25 were still accessing support to maintain their tenancies at the completion of the project.

### **Advisory Committees**

Two advisory committees were established for the project. This included an Executive Committee to advise Centrecare project staff, monitor research progress and ensure the Memorandum of Agreement developed for the project was implemented as intended. The Executive Committee had representatives from Family and Community Services, the Department of Housing and Works, the Department of Community Development and Centrecare.

The Second Advisory Committee had representatives from both government and nongovernment agencies and was established to:

- set up ethical research principles and ensure action methods were utilised,
- monitor the progress of the project vis a vis the funding requirements, and
- oversee the research project.

### **Reasons for Aboriginal Homelessness within the NFHP**

Through its outreach housing and support programs, Centrecare has identified that some families repeatedly present for housing support for a multitude of reasons. There are some families who do not access support services at all.

In order to discern the most appropriate ways of assisting Aboriginal people to avoid homelessness, the participants were asked the reasons they believed led them to become homeless at the beginning of the project. The figures indicate that issues of family violence and conflict with family members are the highest contributors to Aboriginal family homelessness in WA. Other reasons are listed in Graph 8 on page 42.

## **Identifying Helpful Processes in Assisting Access of Housing Support Services**

During each of the three questionnaire interviews conducted throughout the life of the project, participants were asked to indicate the types of difficulties they had previously experienced, if any, or were currently experiencing, and to identify what would assist them to address these issues. This was done in order to get a sense of the types of supports which would be needed throughout the study.

It appears that the issues impacting on Aboriginal families in relation to homelessness cannot necessarily be addressed by simply providing information. From a variety of sources in the project, it became evident that participants were more likely to approach agencies with which they had past dealings. The Project Officer also noted that if participants required support, they were more likely to make contact following a visit from the Project Officer. However, they would be just as receptive to engaging a new support provider if regular contact was initiated by that provider.

Outreach support was shown to be extremely beneficial in helping most of the participant families to remain housed. What was most useful was the ability, through the participant alerts, to visit the participant families when difficulties arose.

## **Obstacles to Sustained Housing**

Information gathered through the first round of questionnaires suggests that a majority of participants were unaware of the existence of support services in the community. The interviews also revealed that the families who were aware of these services said they were always full and had been unsuccessful in their attempts to access them. This limited knowledge of available supports is the major factor inhibiting Aboriginal families in the ongoing maintenance of their housing.

Another issue which became evident through the participant alerts at DCD, was the impact of financial considerations, particularly resulting from unforeseen events such as funerals.

Dissatisfaction with allocations of housing led to abandonment and evictions. The data indicates that the location of properties for Aboriginal families is a crucial factor in assisting them to maintain their housing.

## **Gaps in Support**

The project has highlighted the need for additional and appropriate emergency accommodation. Household types proved to be a major factor in families' ability to gain access to a refuge.

It would also appear that decisions about assistance to homeless families can be arbitrary. Interpretation of departmental policies seems to affect the outcome of requests for assistance. When trying to access emergency relief or obtain a Homeswest priority listing, participants are more likely to be successful if a community agency is involved.

Problems with SHAP processes indicate a need for service providers to review their policies. Funding bodies also need to provide additional funding for more appropriate services as the services often operate at full capacity.

## **Results**

On completion of the project, 55 of the 61 participant families, or 90%, were housed. Fifty two of the 61 participant families were supported during the project, although only 40 had stated at the initial questionnaire interview that they would require support to maintain their housing.

Participants overwhelmingly responded that changes need to be made to existing housing services in order to make it easier for homeless Aboriginal families to be housed. Suggestions as to what types of changes are listed on page 89.

Centrecare considers that the NFHP has been extremely successful in facilitating participant families to identify what they saw as solutions to their homelessness.

Although only 57 out of the original 61 participant families remained in the project by its completion, Centrecare has included the housing situation of all 61 families at the end of the project, insofar as whether they were still housed, as this information was known to project staff at that time. While these four participants did not complete some of the questionnaires, consents continued to be valid until the end of the project. The low attrition rate of four families is considered a remarkable achievement given the itinerant nature of the participant families and that the vast majority of families were not previously known to Centrecare.

The development of relationships, and especially collaborative working relationships, is continually touted as being easily achievable. In reality, these relationships take sheer determination, persistence, commitment, faith in others, and a willingness to keep going despite setbacks. This project has demonstrated that positive outcomes can be achieved when those involved have the same commitment to the outcome of assisting people to exit homelessness. Through the experience of the project it is evident that there has to be a driving force to monitor and facilitate this collaboration.

The project further revealed that people regularly slip through the gaps for a multitude of reasons unless someone is monitoring them and is able to assist them. With the assistance of the Memorandum Partners and the non-government sector, staff have almost daily been able to prevent people slipping through these gaps. This is an astounding outcome not just for the participants involved but also for the people who have assisted.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations for change were developed partly in response to questions asked of participants in the three questionnaires. In addition, the participant responses led to questions being asked of a control group of thirty-one Aboriginal families and seventeen housing service providers. The questions were used to elicit the views of the wider community and thereby adapt the suggestions for change made by participants into recommendations developed from resources already available in the community. Some of these recommendations are in line with those made in the WA Homeless Taskforce Report in relation to collaborative practices (WA State Homelessness Taskforce Final Report, 2002).

## **1 Marketing Strategies**

Findings from the National Family Homelessness Project have revealed that a high percentage of Aboriginal families are unaware of the existence and processes of housing support services in the community. It is therefore highly recommended that appropriate marketing strategies are undertaken by the sector to increase community awareness of services such as emergency accommodation, transitional accommodation and the various housing support services available.

The first strategy would entail the Department of Family and Community Services, in partnership with State Government departments, undertaking a comprehensive media marketing campaign to increase community awareness of the existence of services which assist Aboriginal people to access and maintain housing.

Secondly, information about specific services within the housing sector needs to be publicised in order that Aboriginal people become aware of them, how to access them and the requirements of utilising such services. Marketing strategies should include culturally appropriate posters in strategic locations, as well as verbal dissemination of information by specific groups.

In order that these marketing strategies are effective, however, changes also need to take place to address the inadequacies of the housing sector as it currently exists. These changes are discussed under the next heading.

## **2 Actions that Government and Non-Government Agencies can take to minimise the Likelihood of Homelessness**

Some of the following recommendations will require newly created funded positions. Other recommendations will necessitate that government bodies facilitate innovative ways of working collaboratively between government departments and the non-government sector to maximise the resources already available in the community, but which at times go begging.

### **2.1 Establishment of Family Housing Co-ordinator Program**

The availability of an outreach service and well-developed relationships are both major requirements in addressing Aboriginal homelessness proactively. They are also vital for crisis response, and could be run through a housing and support co-ordination program. Participant responses to why they thought they were housed more quickly after participating in this study also support the notion that having an advocate speak on their behalf helps greatly in accessing housing. With strong links developed between the housing and support co-ordinator and the central register, it could be ensured that appropriate housing is provided, in accordance with what families want, whether supported, crisis, emergency, or independent.

The family housing co-ordinator differs from tenancy housing workers in that, if required, support is provided on an outreach basis to assist persons to link into appropriate housing and support services. Direct advocacy to the housing body at a senior level is also facilitated by the development of collaborative relationships as is required for this sort of position to be successful. For the position to be successful, it must be supported at a government level, through provision of resources in the form of funding and departmental co-operation at least by the four departments most impacted by Aboriginal homelessness – Health, Housing, Justice and Community Development and that it would need to be facilitated by non government providers.

For the program to be beneficial there would need to be a family housing coordinator for each of the four Perth metropolitan regions, as well as a limited number for regional areas of WA.

The advocate role would provide crisis support and also impart appropriate information. The advocate could refer for any needs which people may have with respect to accessing and/or maintaining housing, including referrals for outreach support, financial counselling, general counselling, furniture, loans, and information about available services, support options etc.

## **2.2 Central Social Housing Register**

During the course of the study, a large number of participants suggested they were not happy with the current processes for registering interest in accessing short, medium or long term supported accommodation and that a one stop Central Housing Register would be the way to overcome this problem.

It emerged that participants lacked information about available support service options and they found current processes for accessing SAAP unsatisfactory because of the lack of co-ordination of available services. Most of the participants stated they would access a central register and that it would more efficiently assist them to access SAAP by putting them in touch with all the options available to them.

Most participants also responded that a social housing register would save them time, money and the need to remember various telephone numbers for the agencies contacted initially. Most said it would also increase their chances of being housed and negate the need to repeat their stories to several housing providers.

It also emerged during the study that, due to a lack of viable alternatives, many homeless people who only require housing opt for supported accommodation. In addition, it became evident during interviews with participants that the concept of SAAP is not clear to a lot of people who use its services. Most service providers, like participants, also agreed that a central housing register would be effective. It would also allow for people to be referred to the appropriate housing and/or service providers.

A central register would be a one-stop point where information could be obtained about various types of support options, to access and maintain accommodation. A central register would also act as a co-ordinating point for SAAP availability and referrals, and to assist with accessing other types of support, such as SHAP, support to engage with the private sector (which is just beginning to be set up around WA), HAAC and Disability Services support.

A thorough assessment process would be required to distinguish between people who need supported accommodation, crisis housing, community housing, refuge accommodation or only housing, so the appropriate information can be given and referrals made. The assessment would also be needed to ensure certain steps are taken to maintain the safety of individuals escaping family or domestic violence. It would therefore be expedient if the central register did not include DV accommodation places or refuges specializing in domestic violence. To ensure confidentiality principles are adhered to, potential clients would need to sign consent forms to enable liaison with SAAP and other housing and/or support providers.

### **2.3 Addressing the Inadequacies of the Private Rental Sector**

Addressing the inadequacies of the private real estate market in relation to Aboriginal families will require ways of working which use collaborative principles and resource sharing. In its report, the State Homelessness Taskforce (WA State Homelessness Taskforce Final Report, 2002) recommended government departments work together to address homelessness.

Funding for this proposal, including maintenance and distribution of real estate and directories of support organisations, co-ordinating meetings between agencies, drawing up, printing and distributing minutes, mailing lists, distribution lists etc, would need to be sought from those government departments impacted by Aboriginal homelessness (Health, Education, DHW, Aboriginal Affairs etc). In WA, DCD have a mandate to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and should therefore be the lead agency in co-ordinating an all-of-government approach to the issue. Other departments such as DHW, Health, Education and Justice would all need to contribute (with DCD providing in kind contribution), with an injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government.

DCD, as the recommended lead agency, would need to enlist the participation of other government and non-government Aboriginal housing providers and develop reciprocal arrangements in relation to support and housing.

As a starting point, negotiations should be undertaken with the private rental sector in relation to housing Aboriginal people, and the types of supports which would assist it to maintain positive tenancies. Once a number of private rental agencies agree to become involved, a directory of real estate companies willing to participate in this type of venture should be developed and distributed to participating agencies. Relationships can then be developed between agencies dealing with Aboriginal homelessness and those real estate companies within their local areas.

In order to assist clients to maintain their tenancies once housed, and thereby promote the continuing goodwill of participating real estate companies, relationships also need to be developed with services able to provide various forms of support to those tenants. Support services would include emergency relief, furniture, general and specialist counselling, financial counselling, health services, tenancy advice and information, assistance with parenting issues, and support to maintain acceptable property standards.

### **2.4 Hostels**

Some participants have suggested additional hostel accommodation is needed as a response to recurring homelessness, for families who have no other housing options due to their rental history and/or housing debts. Participants suggested that hostel applicants could sign a contract to work on certain issues and reside for a specific time in the hostel before being able to be housed by DHW or moving into private rental or even externally supported accommodation. DHW and DCD could jointly fund the building of several hostels in Perth and surrounding metropolitan areas, with DHW providing the infrastructure and DCD funding the support staff. Other government departments would contribute to this scheme by providing visiting staff to the hostels, such as education officers, recreation officers, health workers etc.

Due to issues of feuding and family conflict within the Aboriginal community, prospective residents would need to be interviewed to determine whether their introduction would create difficulties with existing residents.

Several hostels need to be available for different needs, including families with children, couples and single people without children, women with accompanying children and men with accompanying children. Some hostels would need to be only for Aboriginal families, although both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal management staff would need to be employed, in accordance with results from NFHP research.

The hostels could be cluster units which have a 24-hour worker on the premises. They would include an indoor, supervised play area for children, as well as an outdoor play area. Another area to allow for family group gatherings could also be included. Support would include substance misuse counselling, grief and loss counselling, DV and child counselling, as well as living skills development, transport to appointments, property viewings, child-care, parenting skills development, communication and conflict resolution. Residents would also be referred to health specialists, and specialist counselling, or domestic/family violence groups if required. The hostels would also incorporate recreational activities for family groups, children and residents as a whole. Children would be required to attend school or other educational facilities and undergo specialist counselling if necessary.

Furniture, linen and kitchen equipment would be provided, and residents could make fortnightly contributions so they could take these items when leaving the facility. Links would need to be developed with second-hand furniture providers to enable this.

The hostels could operate along similar lines as refuges, with stays of up to six months, and exit points to public or private rental. Some meals could be provided, and residents may be required to assist in their preparation on a rostered basis.

## **2.5 Emergency Housing**

Development of protocols between crisis and short/medium term transitional accommodation providers and DHW are necessary to allow this proposal to be effective. DHW would provide a stock of emergency housing for up to six months from older housing stock earmarked for redevelopment or demolition. Families unable to access alternative emergency accommodation because of poor rental history could make use of this accommodation. This would allow an exit point for those in crisis and supported accommodation, and enable a reasonable turnover within that sector.

Outreach support would be provided to those tenancies by the crisis and short/medium term service providers. Such support would assist tenants to develop the necessary skills to maintain a successful tenancy. It would also help them address issues that have impacted on previous tenancies, or which have been identified by the service provider during the family's crisis or short-medium accommodation stay.

Referrals to other agencies may be required where specialist counselling is deemed necessary. Service providers would also provide support to an agreed number of additional families in emergency housing who have not been housed under the protocols. The service providers would understand that the housing stock may be old and that only emergency maintenance will be carried out by DHW. Emergency tenants with a poor rental history would be required to sign a lease with a clause relating to participation in support, allowing the tenancy to be terminated if support is not accessed. Tenants would be transferred to permanent accommodation after they have demonstrated a willingness to address the issues which led to their homelessness. If it is considered by the service provider that the family still requires support, this could then be transferred to a SHAP provider.

Housing in emergency accommodation would be similar to that provided by SAAP, in that prospective tenants are given a limited choice of tenancies. However, due to issues of feuding and family conflict within the Aboriginal community, it is important that allocations are made sensitively, and information is sought from the prospective tenants about any areas where they cannot be housed, or families near whom they do not wish to be located. In addition, consultation with the service provider should take place to ensure that families are housed in areas where they would be able to access required community support.

## **2.6 Department of Housing and Works Policies and Processes**

A review of DHW policies and processes is necessary to assist Aboriginal families with a poor rental history and/or recurring homelessness to access housing and/or maintain positive tenancies:

- Aboriginal families who have been homeless for an extended period of time, or experienced recurring homelessness, should be linked to supports through SHAP for the first six months of a new tenancy. The tenancy agreement could include a clause which enables termination of the tenancy if the family does not engage the support. This would include any issues that have been identified by DHW as impacting on previous tenancies, including substance misuse by adults and children, parenting issues, and non-participation by children in education. This is similar to some SAAP tenancy agreements. DHW would need to consult with relevant government bodies to explore the option of mandatory SHAP involvement for people with recurring homelessness.

For this type of program to succeed, collaborative relationships need to be developed and, to enable this to occur, prospective tenants would be required to sign consent forms enabling the support agency to liaise with DHW, DCD, Department of Education, Police and/or Department of Justice depending on the issues identified.

The SHAP worker would also need to be available to assist with completion of the Property Condition Report (PCR) when the families are housed. The project has revealed that a large proportion of the Aboriginal families participating have proposed that assistance to complete the PCR would be beneficial in reducing debts for items which should have been included on the PCR. A vast number of the participants in the study did not complete their PCR when they occupied their current tenancies.

- When a housing application is made by families with a poor tenancy history, it may assist to ask for permission to refer to SHAP for a one-off visit to provide an explanation of the program if the SHAP program is full.

Referrals could also be obtained to have Centrepay forms completed<sup>1</sup> so that any outstanding utilities debts can be addressed before the family is housed. SHAP would need to encourage the family to maintain these direct debits before and after being housed, to minimise difficulties in having the utilities connected to the new tenancy, and ensuring connection is maintained throughout the tenancy.

- DHW could also consider completing the in-going property condition reports with the tenants, as it would seem a large majority of Aboriginal public housing tenants fail to complete the PCRs.

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<sup>1</sup> See above under separate heading - Recommendations on marketing strategies.

As an alternative, additional funding to SHAP could be provided so one full-time SHAP worker could be employed for this purpose. The central register could coordinate the provision of such support to DHW tenants, between the housing coordinator and SHAP workers.

- DHW would need to update PCRs on all properties systematically. In many cases, PCRs provided to in-going tenants have not been updated to reflect the current property condition, and if tenants do not complete them when taking occupancy they are then charged for damages which may have already been charged to other vacated tenants.
- DHW needs to consider providing facilities for tenants to install curtains if they wish (i.e. curtain hooks or rods). People who have experienced homelessness are unable to fit curtains and hooks to windows without damaging the property, as they lack the necessary tools to carry out the task. These people often lack life's necessities, such as clothing, furniture and appliances, much less luxuries such as power or hand tools needed for property maintenance.
- DHW to review their priority policy, which requires applicants to demonstrate they are unable to access private rental accommodation, especially in the case of single parent Aboriginal families. There is widespread evidence that Aboriginal families encounter discrimination when enquiring about property vacancies with private real estate agencies. Single parent Aboriginal families find it extremely challenging to afford the key deposit if allowed to view vacant properties. They cannot necessarily afford child care costs or access child care (and must therefore take their children with them when attending the real estate agency, further adding to their vulnerability to remaining homeless). They also find it extremely challenging getting around to view properties using public transport with children.
- DHW and used furniture providers could also work collaboratively so that tenants who require furniture can access this more easily. To facilitate this, prospective tenants could be asked whether they require furniture when they view the property, so sign-up can be arranged for the appropriate day.
- DHW may need to review policy relating to property inspections so more frequent inspections take place to enable issues to be picked up before they become problematic. In the case of families with a history of homelessness, property inspections should be undertaken every six weeks to three months for the first nine months, or until it is obvious no difficulties will occur with the tenancy. This would ensure maintenance issues are addressed regularly. It would also minimise tenant liability and vacated debts resulting from property damage and would alert the accommodation manager to any concerns more quickly.

## **2.7 Department for Community Development Policies and Processes**

A review of DCD policies and processes is also required to more efficiently and adequately address Aboriginal homelessness in WA.

- DCD need to review all policies relating to financial assistance to Aboriginal families and individuals regarding travel to and from funerals. Aboriginal people have a cultural responsibility to attend funerals of family members, and are often shunned by other family members if they do not participate in this responsibility.
- Professional development for all DCD and Crisis Care workers who are likely to have involvement with Aboriginal people in relation to cultural requirements and responsibilities.

- DCD and Crisis Care workers to undertake an education program on housing and/or support options, including outreach supports, available for this particular group.
- DCD and Crisis Care staff to be provided with professional development opportunities that enhance their ability to work collaboratively with other government departments and non-government agencies.
- DCD and Crisis Care to review the manner in which emergency accommodation is allocated and the way availability of emergency accommodation places are determined. It has come to light during this study that Crisis Care is not always accurately informed of bed counts by refuge accommodation providers. Refuges sometimes set aside a certain amount of beds for women escaping domestic violence, in case someone presents to them for this reason. However, it would appear inefficient for all refuges to do this, and the practice should be co-ordinated in order that beds do not remain empty when homeless families require emergency accommodation.
- A review of the way emergency funds are expended is required by DCD, to alleviate the inefficient use of funds on motel accommodation for homeless families. It is suggested that funding unnecessarily spent on motel accommodation for this client group in the past could have been utilised to pay clients' housing debts to allow them access to housing. An alternative would be to pay the ingoing fees on a private rental property and refer the client for support. A further option could be for DHW to provide some untenanted properties for DCD to head lease so this client group could be housed with support to address issues that have led to their homelessness.

### **3 Provision of Housing Leases for Aboriginal Family Groups**

DHW could co-ordinate an all-of-government funded response to Aboriginal homelessness, by providing properties for the use of particular Aboriginal family groups, specifically those who have experienced long-term cyclical homelessness. These properties would need to be located at a reasonable distance from each other to prevent conflict between family members. The properties could be leased to those family groups, with each family involved contributing to the lease costs. Agreements with an extended lease would need to be signed by each family intending to access the properties. All members accessing the housing would pay part of the lease payments which could go towards the maintenance of the properties, and all would pay any tenant liability repairs to be completed on the properties.

Support should be linked to the properties rather than the families, and the group would decide who is to live where. Due to the transient nature of Aboriginal families, each family could move from one to the other and make plans within the family about the living arrangements, and decide whether some properties should be left for emergency situations.

If the properties 'belong' to those families, it is reasonable to expect that they are more likely to look after them. If the whole family is responsible for lease payments and repairs, then when particular individuals cause damage, other family members would be responsible for communicating to those individuals their discontent with having to pay for damages they have caused. Most importantly, members of the family would always have access to housing. No member of the family is to be denied this access.

This can be co-ordinated by DHW with resources also provided by other departments affected by Aboriginal family homelessness, such as Justice, DCD, Health, and Education.

#### **4 Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness**

In order to break the cycle of homelessness, education projects are required to change attitudes of young Aboriginal people whose family history has been one of homelessness and dependency. One such project could be an art project offering young people the chance to experience positive aspects of the Aboriginal culture and the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge to which they have had limited access in the past

Proposal – invite Aboriginal youth to participate in a six month art project, which incorporates all aspects of completing a piece of artwork. This could include paper-making, frame construction, art tuition, drug education, sex education, living skills (budgeting, shopping, bill-paying, communication, job hunting, etc), exhibiting and sale of artworks. All proceeds of sales go to the artist. Exhibitions can be arranged at the end of the project and invitations can be given to all agencies in the housing, youth, health, drug and alcohol sectors.

Target Group – predominantly young Aboriginal people, but also young people of families experiencing long term homelessness, through SAAP services, drug services, Education Department etc. This project would target youth from those families who have a long history of homelessness. The intention is to break the homelessness cycle through helping younger family members to develop an alternative view of themselves and their life situation.

Funding Body – joint funding can be sought from the Education Department, Department of Justice, Health Department, DCD, Alcohol and Drug Authority and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

#### **5 Facilitating Collaborative Working Practices**

##### **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program**

Service providers to set up collaborative working practices including:

- SAAP funding bodies to investigate and take steps to address the support variances between SAAP services, so support between agencies is equalised. This may include the requirement of certain tertiary qualifications for SAAP support workers. It may also include requiring client feedback forms to be completed by SAAP clients at support end dates, or when exiting refuges and/or other SAAP provision. Ideally, feedback should be sought in such a way that clients do not feel pressured to only report in a positive manner but can provide honest comments and responses about the support provided, the condition of the accommodation, and the knowledge of homelessness issues by staff.
- Regular meetings to be held by SAAP service providers to discuss different ways of working with clients to maximise successful tenancies once clients are exited from SAAP tenancies.
- Developing collaborative working relationships to address the lack of exit points from emergency and short-term accommodation, to medium term accommodation, to long-term accommodation, to community, public and private housing options.

Agreements could be drawn up between agencies providing different lengths of support, to provide exit points for short-term and medium term clients.

- Medium and long-term housing providers developing collaborative relationships with the private housing sector, and housing support agencies working with private sector tenants.
- SAAP funding bodies and refuges to investigate ways of maximising the number of emergency accommodation places available in refuges, so beds left empty as a result of requirement that they be held aside for victims of DV (as reported by some participants) can be utilised after a certain time of the day.

### **Supported Housing Assistance Program**

Service providers need to address the discrepancies of service provision between agencies, as well as the incidence, in recent years, of waiting lists for the program.

- Regular networking meetings to be held by management staff of service providers, to discuss best practice models in relation to support of clients, so that SHAP support provision is more uniform between the various agencies.
- During the networking meetings by management staff of SHAP providers, discussion of staffing issues needs to take place so that staff qualifications and/or experience in the particular service areas are also uniform.
- Waiting lists should be avoided, as referred clients often require immediate support to alleviate risk to their continued tenancy. If SHAP providers are unable to assess the referral when it is received, the referring DHW officer has to be informed, so alternative support can be provided or referred back to the tenant.
- As SHAP is not designed to provide indefinite support, clients who have to be supported for more than 12 months should be referred to alternative agencies, including government agencies, if it is expected that they will not succeed without ongoing support.

## Description of the Study

In June 2002, Centrecare undertook a 15 month longitudinal study, the **National Family Homelessness Project** (NFHP or “the project”), to examine the effects of homelessness on a target group of 50 Aboriginal families in the Perth metropolitan area, and to identify the effectiveness of existing support services and accommodation options for Aboriginal people who had experienced recurrent homelessness. The study also examined alternative pathways that might assist the target group to avoid future homelessness.

As a part of the study, target group participants were linked, where possible, to accommodation and supports as required and, with their permission, had their progress monitored through the duration of the study. To facilitate this, a Memorandum of Agreement was developed between Centrecare, the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and the Department for Community Development (DCD). A copy of the funding proposal is included at **Appendix I**.

The research aspect of the study was completed in October 2003, and the final paper completed in December 2003.

## Definitions of Homelessness

Centrecare acknowledges and appreciates that many Aboriginal people may not accept the definitions of homelessness used within this research, and consequently do not consider themselves as fitting any of these categories. In contrast however, the wider community would consider that they do fit within these categories and as such would be considered homeless. Our approach to the project was to include Aboriginal participants within this project who did consider themselves to be homeless and had experienced either ongoing or intermittent periods of homelessness and wanted to find the accommodation, solutions and or supports to exit homelessness.

Memcott et al (2002 and 2003: i) stated that “homelessness is not always simply created by a lack of ‘housing’, nor simply addressed by its provision”. Homelessness can be multi-dimensional as well as structural and individualistic in its causes (Memcott et al; 2003; i). Further to this is the factor that the majority of policy makers, research papers, governments and views of service providers within Australia and a national context (Memcott et al;2003;i) consider that holistic approaches to homelessness require a whole of government response. Indigenous homelessness, while needing to be considered within the context of Australian homelessness, also requires specific attention in terms of culturally appropriate definitions, inclusiveness of dispossession, policy development, service delivery, and Indigenous input into decision making processes. These concepts or definitions of homelessness do little to assist with solutions unless Aboriginal homelessness is considered a ‘multi-layered and multi-dimensional concept’ that is vastly different from non-Aboriginal homelessness in its form, nature, context, causes and visibility. (Memcott et al 2003, Keys Young 1998, Berry et al 2001, ABS 2001 and Memcott & Fantin 2001)

Memcott et al (2003) do acknowledge that there are shared meanings of homelessness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal homelessness with respect to being at risk of not having a roof over one’s head or no shelter at all. However, it has been proven that Aboriginal people are more likely to be staying in substandard accommodation that does not meet either their basic living or health needs. High rates of mobility, cultural obligations of sharing resources, substance usage, escape from violence, lack of culturally appropriate services, discrimination from within the wider community, higher rates of illiteracy, lower rates of education retention, limited employment options and the impacts of colonisation also further increase the likelihood and risk of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness (ABS,1994: ABS,1996).

Definitions developed in a cultural context are also affected by the norms and values of the group defining and usually reflect the meaning understood by the majority of what would be considered as the mainstream culture of that country. Therefore, Aboriginal people considered as experiencing homelessness could easily be defined within several categories of homelessness or not be considered homeless at all because they have a roof over their heads. The stability of remaining under this roof, the fact that it may not be their home, or the impact they are having on others by remaining under this roof may be considered appropriate housing for Aboriginal people within the context of the dominant accepted definitions of homelessness.

This is not to say that appropriate cultural definitions of Aboriginal homelessness have not been attempted. For example Keys Young in 1997 undertook a study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness with the intended outcome of identifying implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Within this study, five different categories of Aboriginal homelessness were specified which are as follows:

1. Lack of access to any stable shelter, accommodation or housing – literally having ‘nowhere to go’ which is regarded as the worst form of homelessness.
2. Spiritual forms of homelessness, which relates to separation from traditional land or from family.
3. Crowding, where it causes considerable stress to families and communities.
4. Relocation and transient homelessness, which results in temporary, intermittent and often cyclic patterns of homelessness due to transient and mobile lifestyles, but also to the necessity of a larger proportion of the Indigenous population (relative to the non-Indigenous population) having to travel to obtain services.
5. Individuals escaping an unsafe or unstable home for their own safety or survival is another form of homelessness affecting large numbers of Indigenous people, especially woman and young people. (Keys Young 1998: iv).

In more recent times there have also been more attempts to include spiritual homelessness and inclusion of historical events of dispossession that Aboriginal people experienced as a result of colonisation. The lack of acknowledgement of this factor inhibits appropriate policy and solution development (Berry et al 2001). In an ABS 1999 report on the ‘Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’, five categories of homelessness on a continuum were defined as ‘living on the street; living in crisis accommodation; living in temporary arrangements without security of tenure (eg staying with friends or relatives, living in squats, improvised dwellings or boarding houses); living in unsafe family circumstances; and living on very low incomes and facing extraordinary expenses or personal crisis’ (AIHW 1999A: 297 – 298). The 2001 report developed by Strategic Partners following the Technical Forum on the Estimation of Homelessness in Australia also identified that a ‘cultural audit’ would need to be undertaken to better understand homelessness within an Indigenous perspective.

The predominant categories of homelessness or variations of it utilised today within the Australian context were originally developed by Chamberlain and McKenzie in 1992 and then adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1996 and 2001. These categories, also adopted by the Commonwealth National Homeless Strategy and the different Australian states and territory governments, are as follows:

**Primary homelessness** – People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or cars or railway makeshift dwellings for temporary accommodation – sleeping rough.

**Secondary homelessness** – People who move frequently between various forms of temporary shelter eg friends, emergency accommodation, hostels and boarding houses.

**Tertiary Homelessness** – People in marginal accommodation, who live in single rooms in private boarding or rooming houses – without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure – on a medium to long term basis.

While all of the abovementioned parties utilise this definition, most acknowledge its shortfalls. It is considered 'a reliable starting point for consideration of the issue of homelessness' (South Australian State Homelessness Strategy 2003; WA State Homeless Taskforce 2002). The original project proposal for this study was developed out of concern that the Western Australian Homeless Strategy might only focus on primary homelessness and this would then, in turn, impact on the extent of solutions possibly implemented to address Aboriginal homelessness in Western Australia. Another factor of concern at the outset of the project was that Aboriginal homelessness frequently presents as 'hidden homelessness' rather than secondary homelessness. Hidden homelessness arises as a result of individuals and families staying with other relatives, not necessarily presenting for assistance or housing for a variety of reasons and are therefore considered as having a roof over their heads and not homeless.

## Context of the Research Project

Aboriginal homelessness today remains largely hidden in metropolitan Perth, for a number of reasons, which include cultural obligations that require individuals to support extended family members who are unable to access their own housing. Other reasons have an individual and community aspect to them and have their genesis in both present and past experiences. Aboriginal homelessness may be due to an individual's poor housing history and/or be the result of direct racial discrimination in the private rental sector and/or the public housing system. The majority of this discrimination appears to come from neighbours of Aboriginal tenants who would prefer that they lived elsewhere.

On a daily basis, housing support agencies encounter families who are in public, community and crisis housing and who are supporting not just their own family members, but many of their extended family as well. In many situations, these extended family members make use of the housing provided by their relatives because they cannot access their own. Consequently, these people live on the edge of homelessness or are homeless depending on who is seeking the statistics and why.

At the same time, some Aboriginal people do not perceive these shared living arrangements as *living on the edge of homelessness* or as *being homeless* but as a way of life. These people may only seek their own accommodation because of social pressures that require individual nuclear families to reside in separate dwellings. Living with family, no matter how crowded, may be acceptable to some because it provides everyone with a place to sleep, a place to call their own or gives a sense of belonging.

To others, however, especially those with children, the experience of living in overcrowded conditions can leave them with feelings of dependency, hopelessness and in continued poverty. We also encounter individuals and families living 'on the streets' who, when asked, express a wish to be housed. Once housed, however, these people seem either unwilling or unable to fulfil the requirements of maintaining a tenancy, such as paying the rent, maintaining the property and controlling their own or visitors' behaviour that may impact on their tenancy. This unwillingness or inability to maintain a tenancy can be the direct result of alcohol and/or substance misuse. For some, the absence of role models, past and present, has impacted on the participant's inability to manage a tenancy. Parents or grandparents may have been removed from their families as children and raised in missions, or may have been homeless all their lives and unable to pass on any skills to their children.

Centrecare, through its outreach housing and support programs, identified that some families repeatedly present for housing support. They are assisted, maintain their tenancies for some time, and then again experience homelessness. This has been referred to as 'the revolving door syndrome'. Other families, however, do not appear to approach support agencies, opting instead to live on the streets, or move from one relative to another until they are again able to access public housing at some stage.

Part of the impetus for undertaking this research was to find out why some families experience the 'revolving door syndrome' in their homelessness, why some do not access support services and how housing services could be improved to minimise these types of situations.

In Western Australia, we have come to see an opportunity for change in addressing homelessness, which, in turn, has and will continue to effect possible practical outcomes for homeless people. In the second half of 2001, the State Labor Government implemented the State Homelessness Taskforce.

This Taskforce was made up of both government and non-government representatives and, following widespread consultations, handed down its final report in January 2002. The outcome from that report has seen the Western Australian Government fund an additional \$32 million over four years to assist people who are homeless to access housing and/or support to exit homelessness.

Some of the strategies that have been implemented to date include:

- An increase in funding by \$0.5 million in 2002/3 to existing Supported Housing Assistance Program services, to rise to \$1 million in 2003/4, which translates to a total of \$2 million in funding for these services.
- \$0.5 million in 2003/4 for a newly funded program for support and advocacy for people in private rental accommodation, rising to \$1 million in 2003/4. Services have just commenced in five metropolitan locations and will also be operational in three regional areas later this financial year.
- Funding of \$0.25 million has been provided to a non-government agency to assist homeless people not requiring support to access accommodation.
- \$0.5 million pa to assist people at risk of homelessness, including a 15% increase to 52 established financial counselling services and the establishment of a new service this year for young people experiencing financial difficulties.
- Funding of \$400,000 per annum to provide services to children in supported programs in the Perth metropolitan region.
- Funding of \$150,000 per annum for in-home practical support for Aboriginal families.
- Funding of \$200,000 per annum for support services for young parents who are in youth supported accommodation services.
- Funding of \$ 600,000 per annum to assist young people leaving care.

An across government and non-government Implementation Committee has been established to ensure that the recommendations accepted by the State Government are actually introduced.

## Methodology

The NFHP aimed to make a contribution to the social dilemma that is Aboriginal homelessness in Western Australia, while also researching the housing difficulties and concerns of the particular target group.

### An Overarching Action Research Methodology

Action research methodology was employed during this study, using both quantitative and qualitative data sources. Data was collected as a result of relationship-based interviewing, participatory observation, documentation of observed and collected information through questionnaires and interviews with participants, a control group and key stakeholders over a period of 16 months.

Qualitative research is designed to explain the social context of a human phenomenon (Myers 2000). This study's use of qualitative data helped the researchers to understand the social and cultural context of Aboriginal homelessness in an attempt to address the situation of the participants involved in the study. The project commenced in June 2002 and was due to finish in September 2003. However, the study was extended for 14 weeks due to difficulties experienced by research staff at the beginning of the study in setting up collaborative agreements and obtaining referrals for both the participant and control group interviews. The longitudinal aspect of the study extended to 16 months and finished at the end of October 2003.

### Relationship-based Interviewing

Sixty-one Aboriginal families who were homeless or had a history of homelessness were initially invited to participate in the NFHP. Each participant was informed that participating in the project was voluntary and while every effort would be made by project staff to assist participants to access housing and/or support, this could not be guaranteed. Participants were also made aware that reports emanating from the research would have no identifying information. Questionnaires were coded in order to maintain participant confidentiality.

Each participant family was interviewed through three rounds of formal questionnaires. These questionnaires sought to obtain information about past and present housing history, family size, participant's knowledge and assessment of available support services and the period since the family last had their own home. In addition, information was also gathered about housing debts, public housing application status and likelihood of being housed by Homeswest.

A control group of 31 homeless Aboriginal families<sup>2</sup> was also interviewed in the latter stages of the project to enable an evaluation of participant responses in the context of the wider Aboriginal community. Criteria for eligibility of participation by the control group were the same as that of the participant group. Control group families were not assisted to access accommodation.

However, information was provided to participants and control group families, where applicable, about housing resources and processes for accessing these.

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<sup>2</sup> The funding proposal specified fifty families for this part of the project; however difficulties were experienced in obtaining that number. Those difficulties are dealt with under **Difficulties Experienced With This Type of Research**.

Questionnaire interviews were then undertaken with housing and/or support providers who supported the participants during the study.

Another group of service providers was interviewed at the end of the study, in relation to changes they believed were required in the social housing sector.

### **Documentation of Observed and Collected Data**

All interviews and interactions with participants, control group families, service providers and other stakeholders were recorded and tracked in order to identify any emerging patterns. Each participant in the project was allocated a file in which all relevant information was documented throughout the study. Participant files remained locked at all times in a fire-proof filing cabinet in the offices of the research staff. All completed questionnaires were alpha coded to ensure participant and control group anonymity and to adhere to confidentiality principles. The data from completed questionnaires was input by DHW staff, who also developed a data analysis program to enable the responses to be evaluated.

Recording systems were developed for these purposes and are discussed under the heading ***Development of Research Tools***.

### **Critical Reflection**

During the first and second rounds of participant questionnaire interviews, the researchers identified some of the pitfalls with this type of research project in relation to the target group. However, the use of action research methodology allowed processes to be adapted to more adequately cater to the target group and to gain the best possible outcomes. A feature of action research is its ability to be both responsive and emergent. Interpretations developed early in the research can be tested and the questions refined to adapt the emergent situation (Dick 2000).

At the outset, a considerable amount of time was spent in trying to locate the target group to complete the interviews and in following up on alerts. In addition, glitches in the alert systems were identified, which led to further meetings with the Memorandum Partners and subsequent further delays. As part of the action research methodology, project staff reflected on the delays and consulted with the Advisory and Executive Committee members, for proposals to overcome the time delays. This involved project staff using a third party to conduct the service provider and control group questionnaires while the Project Officer continued to undertake the third, and final, target group questionnaires, as well as the data analysis.

Similarly, in assessing the findings of the analysis of the first and second participant questionnaires, the Memorandum Partners raised a number of questions in relation to the type of information to be sought in further participant questionnaires. In line with action research principles, project staff were able to reflect on the information required, devise possible participant questions, seek feedback from the Advisory Committee and incorporate these questions in the third round of participant questionnaires in order to elicit the required information.

### **Development of Collaborative Relationships**

Extensive promotion of the project was undertaken and meetings were arranged with DCD Intake Team Leaders, DHW Regional Managers, women's refuge co-ordinators, transitional accommodation SAAP providers and other co-ordinators of community organisations throughout the Perth metropolitan area.

In the first three months of the project, numerous subsequent meetings took place with DHW upper management personnel, DCD Team Leaders and their teams, and with co-ordinators and staff of women's refuges, SAAP providers, and other community organisations.

During the life of the project, some 86 meetings have taken place with housing and service providers, excluding those to complete questionnaires, to ensure the project was successful.

From the outset, collaborative relationships had to be developed with participants, housing and/or support providers, community advocates, private rental housing agents, and government departmental representatives. Developing and reinforcing these relationships was a challenging task and required constant vigilance to maintain them at a level which would ensure the success of the project during its entire life.

At no time during the study were any of the families participating perceived as a respondents, or research subjects - they were families requiring assistance to access housing and maintain a tenancy. All the families participating in the study had experienced housing crises either in the recent past, or at the time they were referred to the project. Some had had a history of recurring homelessness, several public housing tenancies in the past, and had accumulated considerable debt, which some had paid off, or were in the process of paying off.

### **Memorandum of Agreement**

A Memorandum of Agreement between Centrecare, DCD and DHW was developed at the outset of the project to allow for the two government departments to identify 75% of possible participants to the project. All participants signed consent forms allowing Centrecare to liaise with DCD and DHW and for information about consenting participants to be provided to the Project Officer for the life of the project. The Memorandum of Agreement also allowed for the two government departments to place alerts on participant files, in order that the Project Officer could be contacted when participants presented for assistance at either DCD or DHW.

The alerts also facilitated monitoring of the participants' situations by the Project Officer, and documentation of the types of supports accessed by participant households. Depending on the information received as a result of the alerts, subsequent interviews with participant households were arranged if it appeared they were experiencing difficulties. A secondary, and initially unforeseen, function of these systems was in locating families whose whereabouts were unknown. This additional benefit of the alerts came to light when a regional DCD caseworker was successfully able to locate extended family members to arrange contact visits for a Ward of the State. However, due to the itinerant nature of many of the participant families, it has also been very useful in locating participants to carry out interviews.

A total of 89 referrals were initially received from various sources. A breakdown of the referrals received is as follows:

- DHW - 44 referrals
- DCD - 13 referrals
- Non-government housing sector - 32 referrals

Eighty-six interview appointments were arranged for potential participants, of which 67 led to interviews. Of those 67 families and couples interviewed, three were not eligible to participate, one left the metropolitan area before being interviewed, one failed to attend personal interviews arranged (following several telephone contacts and home visits), and one did not wish to participate without a guarantee of accommodation.

From those interview appointments for potential participants, 61 Aboriginal households agreed to participate in the project.

The breakdown of referral sources for the 61 families participating in the project is as follows:

- DHW - 23 participants
- DCD - 10 participants
- Non-government housing sector - 28 participants (including 12 from Centrecare)

Due to the aforementioned delays in obtaining referrals, initial interviews with potential participants were also delayed. This resulted in a hold up in data being collated and analysed, which in turn put the project behind by about six weeks. DHW upper management personnel agreed to provide the resources necessary to analyse the data obtained through participant and service provider questionnaires, and this was completed for all questionnaire data collected during the project.

Whilst DHW staff were provided a copy of all completed questionnaires for the purposes of data input and analysis, the confidentiality of the participants was assured at all times. Participants' names did not appear on any of the completed questionnaires, which were alpha coded to protect the identity of the participants.

Copies of the three participant questionnaires, the control group questionnaire and the two service provider questionnaires are attached at **Appendices II, III and IV**.

### **Ethical Framework and Advisory Committees**

All participants signed consent forms to enable Centrecare to exchange information with DCD and DHW for the purpose of setting up alert systems when participants presented for assistance at either of the government departments.

As required under the funding agreement and as per original proposal, an Advisory Committee was established to give advice to Centrecare's National Family Homelessness Project staff in relation to the research, for the life of the fifteen-month project. The advisory committee was established as an *unincorporated* body, to assist Centrecare to set up ethical research principles and utilise action research methods, to monitor the progress of the project viz a viz the funding agreement requirements, and to oversee the research project. Members of the advisory committee include representatives from DHW, DCD, FaCS, the co-ordinator of Noongar Mia Mia, the manager of Anglicare's housing programs, the housing worker of Gosnells Community Legal Service, as well as the manager of Centrecare's Accommodation and Outreach Services and the project officer. It was suggested at the first Advisory Committee meeting that steps should be taken to invite another Aboriginal representative to join the Committee, preferably a female member of the Noongar community, to balance the Committee.

Since that time, enquiries were ongoing and several invitations made to prospective Aboriginal women. Despite many obstacles, a new member, from the Department of Indigenous Affairs, joined the Committee towards the end of the project. Members of the advisory committee all signed Confidentiality Agreements to prevent discussion of any confidential aspects of the project or individual participants outside this forum.

Meetings were minuted and Centrecare project staff ensured that any business arising from these meetings was actioned before the following meeting. Advisory Committee meetings took place monthly for the first three months, June, July and August 2002, then every two months. The December 2002 Advisory Committee meeting was cancelled due to some members' conflicting commitments, but was held in January 2003. Meetings were also held in March, May, August and October 2003.

An Executive Committee was also formed to advise Centrecare project staff, monitor research progress and ensure the Memorandum of Agreement developed for the project was implemented as intended. **(See Appendix V for the Memorandum of Agreement)**. Some delays were experienced in relation to the Memorandum of Agreement, due to changes in executive staffing levels in DCD. In addition to numerous telephone conversations and e-mails to executive staff at DCD and DHW, there has been one preliminary meeting with DHW executive staff, and Executive Committee meetings in September 2002, January, March, May, July September and October 2003. The DHW executive member also changed between the preliminary meeting and the first executive committee meeting.

Centrecare has been strongly encouraged by the support provided by both the Government and non-government representatives involved in both the advisory and executive committees. All committee members expended their valuable time and resources in attending meetings, providing feedback following meetings, setting up alerts, and putting in additional resources to ensure the alerts operate as they were designed to do.

During the project, Centrecare was particularly grateful for the assistance provided by the non-government agencies, who have greater constraints on their time and resources, and were very supportive in allowing staff to sit on the project committees and provide useful feedback and responses to guide the project and research being undertaken.

### **The Development of Research Tools**

All research tools used during the project were developed following consultation with the Advisory and Executive Committees for the study.

An Initial Participant Questionnaire was developed to identify reasons for homelessness, the size of families, previous knowledge of accommodation and/or support programs and their helpfulness or otherwise to participants. The second participant questionnaire was developed to determine the types of supports required by participants to either maintain their housing, or access accommodation in the case of those not yet housed through the project, and to document self-assessments of risks of further homelessness. The third participant questionnaire was developed to determine whether further supports were needed by participants, whether difficulties had been experienced and how participants had dealt with them, and to elicit information about the types of changes participants believed were necessary in the community to address Aboriginal homelessness. **(See Appendix II for all participant questionnaires)**.

A Control Group Questionnaire was also developed, using relevant questions from all three participant questionnaires. **(See Appendix III for the Control Group Questionnaire).**

A Service Provider Questionnaire was developed to monitor the supports provided to participants during the life of the project. **(See Appendix IV for the Service Provider Questionnaire).**

Statistics forms were also developed for the Project Officer to record time spent with each participant, service provider, government personnel and in meetings relating to the NFHP. **(See Appendix VI for all Statistics Record Forms).**

Quantitative and qualitative data from participant questionnaires 1 and 3 and the service provider questionnaire was analysed using Microsoft Excel, while Microsoft Access was used to analyse responses to participant questionnaire 2. Other qualitative data was analysed manually from information gathered on participant files.

### **Researchers' Experience of the Study**

Extensive promotion of the project was undertaken at the commencement of the study, to encourage government and non-government housing bodies to refer families for participation.

Delays were initially experienced in setting up the project, due to changes in staffing within the offices of the Memorandum Partners. These staffing changes initially hindered the free flow of information.

At the outset, DHW appeared more open to collaborate in the study than DCD, although both Memorandum Partners had had the same timelines to prepare. This was reflected in the number of referrals received from each of the government departments, responses to information required, requests made and meetings attended to get the project off the ground. Before referrals were received DHW senior personnel became apprehensive that the project aims, as outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement, were in fact not the same as those previously agreed to, and which initially led to the submission of the funding proposal. This apprehension by DHW, as well as the perceived lack of initial participation by DCD, resulted in a delay of about six weeks in obtaining referrals from the two government departments involved. It also caused a delay in getting the Memorandum of Agreement signed by all parties; however this was finally executed on 4 September 2002.

When referrals were finally received, some had no contact details to allow the Project Officer to contact potential participants. In view of the delays in obtaining referrals, contact was again made with the non-government housing sector in an attempt to identify prospective referrals, which had not been forthcoming from that source either. Centrecare also resolved to contact families who had registered their details for its Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, or any other Aboriginal families who presented for housing assistance at that time.

Along with these initial setbacks of about six weeks, delays also occurred at the latter stages of the research in relation to the Control Group Questionnaire, which was developed in response to participant findings from the three questionnaires. The project was also further delayed when difficulties were experienced in obtaining control group referrals.

Complications also arose in trying to locate some of the participants for second and third questionnaire interviews. During the second round of questionnaires, 55 participants, out of the 59 still involved in the study, were able to be located and interviewed. Four of the families were unable to be found at that particular time.

One family had moved to a private rental property in the country, which was ascertained through the DHW alerts showing that a bond loan had been processed for the family. There were no telephone contact details for this family, and written correspondence to the address failed to elicit a response.

The second family unable to be contacted for an interview had been housed in a Homeswest property since agreeing to participate. However numerous visits to the property (there was no telephone contact for the participant), and several letters failed to find the participant at home. Contact by the Project Officer to the DHW Accommodation Manager resulted in enquiries to other tenants of the complex, which determined that no-one had seen the participant for several weeks. It was feared that the participant may have abandoned the property, even though the rent continued to be paid and there were no other issues with the tenancy. Continued enquiries revealed that the participant had been sighted briefly at the property from time to time, which stayed DHW from taking the property back. It was later discovered during the course of undertaking third questionnaire interviews that the participant had been in the country for extended periods of time, because of the isolation experienced in the current location.

The third family unable to be located was still homeless and sleeping rough – living on the streets, sleeping in parks, alleyways or squats. Four visits to the area, including two stints of “walking the beat” with the local Police Sergeant did not assist in locating the family. The participant, on one occasion was appearing in court and on another had gone away to the country for a funeral. Numerous other enquiries failed to track down the family, or even locate an agency willing to provide the intensive support they required to find and maintain suitable accommodation.

The fourth family not able to be interviewed for the second round of questionnaires was also housed in a Homeswest property. The telephone numbers on file for that participant were no longer operational and written contact initially failed to elicit a response from the family. Contact was made to the referring agency and the Memorandum Partners however the participant still could not be located. Another letter (the fifth) was sent and the participant contacted the Project Officer to make an appointment to meet at Centrecare’s office, which was the preferred location of the participant. The participant did not attend the meeting and further contact failed to obtain a response at that stage. It was later discovered that the participant had been working at the time. The participant also spoke of difficulties remembering appointments, which was said to be the result of unrelenting physical abuse by the ex-partner.

Only 52 third questionnaire interviews were completed, although 57 participants remained in the study. The other five families were unable to be contacted to complete the questionnaire.

One of these families had been attempting to access housing in Perth when they were first referred to the project. When they were unable to be housed in Perth, the family had returned to the north of Western Australia, from where they had originated.

The second questionnaire interview with this family took place by telephone, following contact information provided by the Homeswest Accommodation Manager. By the time of the third questionnaire interviews, the family had broken down and the participant (the partner was not a participant because of non-Aboriginality) had been transferred to another property. Telephone contact was made with the Homeswest Accommodation Manager, who visited the property and requested that the participant telephone the Project Officer. When this did not occur, two letters were sent to the property asking for contact to be made, and encouraging the participant to reverse the telephone charges. However, no contact had been made by the time the third participant interviews were closed off.

The second family had been residing in a SAAP tenancy when the third questionnaire interviews commenced. At least eight appointments at the property were arranged by the Project Officer, both in writing and verbally, but the participant failed to keep any of the appointments. This particular participant had also recently started to use substantial amounts of illicit drugs which impacted on their ability to manage their tenancy and to adequately care for their children and themselves. The participant eventually vacated the property and went to reside with family. For a short time support continued to be provided to the participant on an outreach basis by the agency concerned but after several appointments were not kept by the family, support was withdrawn. Three further appointments were made by the Project Officer in an unsuccessful attempt to have the questionnaire completed but no appointments were kept by the participant.

The third family had been housed in a Homeswest tenancy and vacated following severe episodes of domestic violence and had gone to a refuge for a time. In fact, the second questionnaire interview took place at the refuge, after an extensive search finally located the participant there. At the time the third interviews were being undertaken, several messages were left at that refuge, and other enquiries were made with DCD and DHW in an attempt to locate the participant. When the deadline was reached for third participant questionnaire data to be analysed, attempts to interview the family ceased.

The fourth family had been evicted from their SAAP tenancy, but had been assisted through a refuge to access a private rental property. The refuge refused to provide the participant's address to the Project Officer, even though there was a consent form signed by the participant allowing this information to be divulged. The information was obtained as a result of the DHW alert, which revealed that a bond loan had been provided for a private tenancy. Nine impromptu visits to the property were made in an attempt to make an appointment with the family. There was no-one at the tenancy on any of the occasions the Project Officer visited, and contact to the refuge revealed the participant had gone to the country for a few weeks. The Project Officer made contact with a refuge in that country region, where the participant had previously stayed, however the refuge had not seen the family for some months. Presumably, the participant was staying with family and there was no way to make contact. By the time third participant interviews were brought to a close the participant had still not returned.

The fifth family was the only family still participating in the project who was not interviewed for both the second and third rounds of questionnaires. A decision was made, and the reasons agreed to by the Project Advisory Committee, that it would be futile attempting to interview this particular family for the third questionnaire, which required fairly in-depth responses and an ability to consider responses.

The participant family had been misusing substances and alcohol since about the age of seven years old, and it was believed by at least two service providers in the area that they suffered brain damage as a result. Based on the initial interview and contact made by the family and information from support workers, the Project Officer believed the family lacked the cognitive ability to be able to answer most of the questions in the third questionnaire. However, Centrecare has still continued to search for this couple to provide advice and options of support and housing. Centrecare will also be endeavouring to work more closely with this couple under alternative funding options in the near future.

### **Attrition Rate**

At the commencement of the study, it was believed there would be a certain amount of attrition, given the longitudinal aspect of the research, as well as the itinerant nature of the target group. Initially, 50 participants were to be targeted, however, to allow for attrition, project staff decided that at least 60 families would be included in the study. When the project was under way, 61 families completed the first participant interview and were accepted as part of the study. At the end of the project, 57 participant families remained on the project.

During the second round of participant questionnaires, two families stated they no longer wished to participate in the research, leaving a total of 59 families in the project. One of the families who withdrew from the study had initially been contacted to participate in the project after registering for SAAP accommodation.

This was at the beginning of the project, when participant referrals were not forthcoming from the two Memorandum Partners on the project. The family had indicated their willingness to participate in the study if there was a possibility of being housed. A SAAP intake interview was subsequently arranged and attended by the participant, following a cancellation and rescheduling of the appointment. The initial participant interview had already taken place by that time. The participant then failed to attend follow-up SAAP assessment interviews, and contact by the Project Officer revealed that the participant had found the assessment interview intrusive and no longer wanted any form of contact with the agency concerned. When second questionnaire interviews were being undertaken, several appointments were made to meet with this family over a period of four weeks, but none was kept by the participant. On two occasions, the participant was home but stated it was not a good time for an interview and the appointment was rescheduled. Finally, after repeated questioning from the Project Officer, the participant admitted they were no longer willing to participate in the study.

The other family who withdrew from the study was being supported on an outreach basis while staying at an Aboriginal hostel, after contact from an Aboriginal community agency worker requested assistance to house the family. The external support provided culminated in the family being housed by DHW following a successful appeal to be listed for priority assistance by the public housing body. The outreach SAAP caseworker had advocated at the appeal on behalf of the family, and a housing offer was made about two months later. Once housed, the participant's partner also resided at the Homeswest tenancy and the participant indicated that the partner did not wish her to continue participating in the study. Severe family violence was an issue within the household and project staff believed that this was the major factor in this participant not continuing within the project.

When third questionnaire interviews were being conducted, one family discontinued involvement in the project, and a second family was precluded from continuing the interview. In relation to the second family, during the third questionnaire interview the Project Officer felt threatened by the language used and the content of the conversation. For safety reasons, it was therefore decided to discontinue the interview. This particular family had been renting privately and was in the process of a court eviction when initially referred to the project. The family was subsequently housed in a Homeswest tenancy, and provided SHAP support until the support agency withdrew due to a lack of commitment by the family.

The other family informed they no longer wished to participate in the study. This family had been recently housed in a Homeswest property when the project commenced, but was happy to participate because of their recent experience of homelessness. During the nine months the family participated in the project, they made several contacts to the Project Officer for information about local services for emergency relief and other requests, which they were able to obtain. One call concerned the possibility of assistance from the Project Officer to obtain a transfer from their current tenancy, because of the limited space available for the children to play in the unit complex in which they lived. Enquiries were made by the Project Officer to DHW about this request, and the family was subsequently informed by the Project Officer that they would need to undergo an interview with their Accommodation Manager. The family was notified that if the application was unsuccessful at that time, it may be successful through appeal. The family indicated they were not prepared to expend that much energy to achieve a transfer. When the family was contacted for the third questionnaire interview, the Project Officer was informed they no longer wished to be part of the study.

Centrecare considers that the attrition rate of 4 participants, or 6.5%, over a period of 15 months, is a major achievement for a study of this type. Families who initially participated in this project were known to be itinerant, by the very nature of their housing situation, and it was expected that this would at times pose difficulties in relation to the longitudinal aspect of the project. Project staff also considered that maintaining these families on the project for 15 months would be extremely challenging, given that the vast majority of the families were not previously known to the agency. Of the 61 families participating in the project, 14 were already known to the agency, although Centrecare had only worked with seven of those families in the past. At the time of the commencement of the project, Centrecare was working with only three of those families.

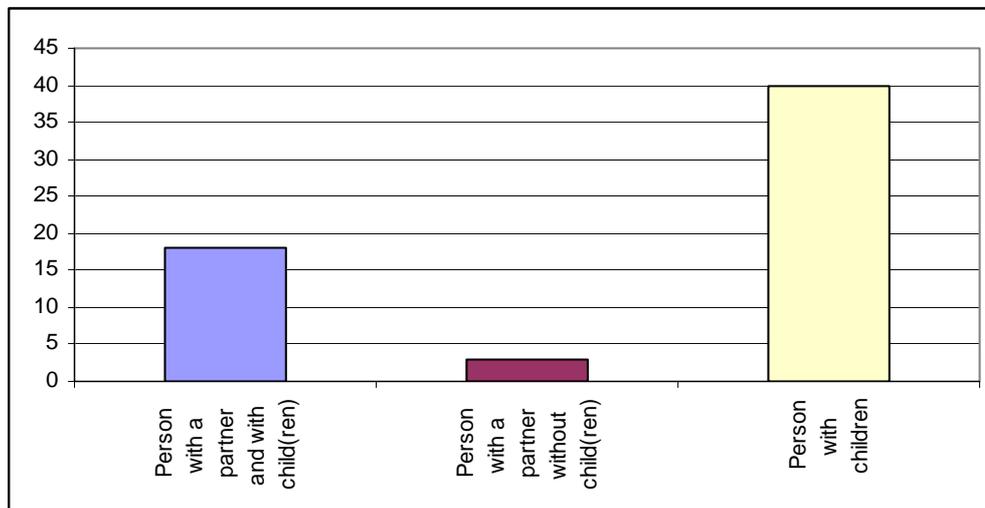
## Research Findings

### Profile of Participants

The analysis of the first participant questionnaire responses allowed a profile of the participant families to be drawn up. Participants were asked to identify either as *Person with a partner and with child(ren)*, *Person with a partner and without children*, or *Person with child(ren)*.

It was established that 40, or 65.6%, of the 61 participating households on the project identified as sole-parent families. Another 18 of the 61 households on the project, or 29.5%, identified as couples with children, and three households on the project, or 4.9%, identified as couples without children.

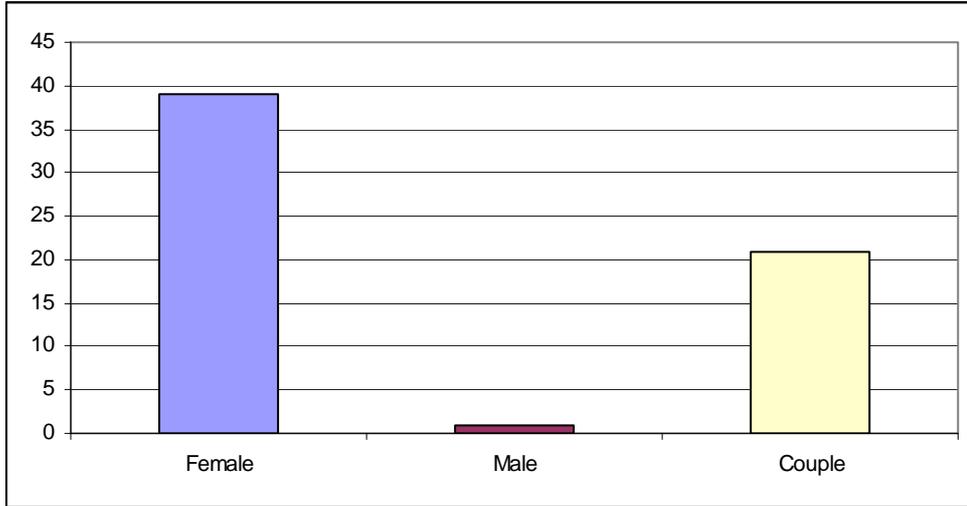
**Graph 1**  
**Description of Participants**



At the time of the first participant interviews, participants advised there was a total of 198 accompanying children who would reside with participants once housed.

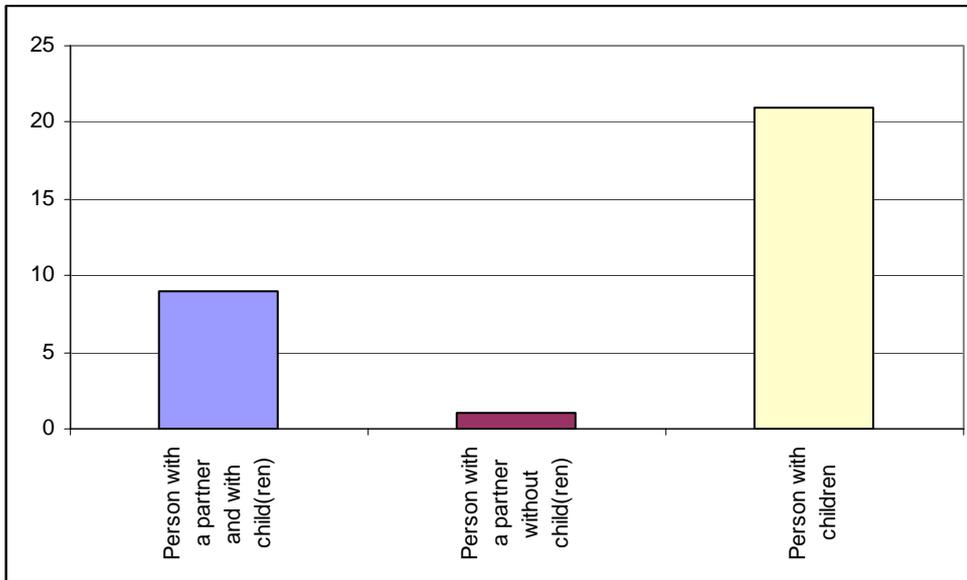
It also emerged that of the 40 participant families who identified as being without a partner, only one was a male-headed household. Therefore, the participant group consisted of 39, or 63.9% female-headed sole parent households, 21, or 34.4% partnered households, and one, or 1.6% male-headed sole parent household, as depicted in Graph 2 below.

**Graph 2  
Household Types**



A profile of the control group families was also developed from the information gathered in the control group questionnaires. Within that group, there were 21, or 67.8%, sole parent families (person with children), nine, or 29% couples with children (person with a partner, with children), and one, or 3.2%, couple without children. This is represented in Graph 3 below.

**Graph 3  
Description of Control Group**



Again, as with the participant group, it emerged that of the 21 families who identified as *person with children*, or sole parent families, 20 were female-headed households, and only one was male-headed. Therefore, the control group consisted of 20, or 64.5% female-headed sole parent households, 10, or 32.3%, partnered households, and one, or 3.2%, male-headed sole parent household.

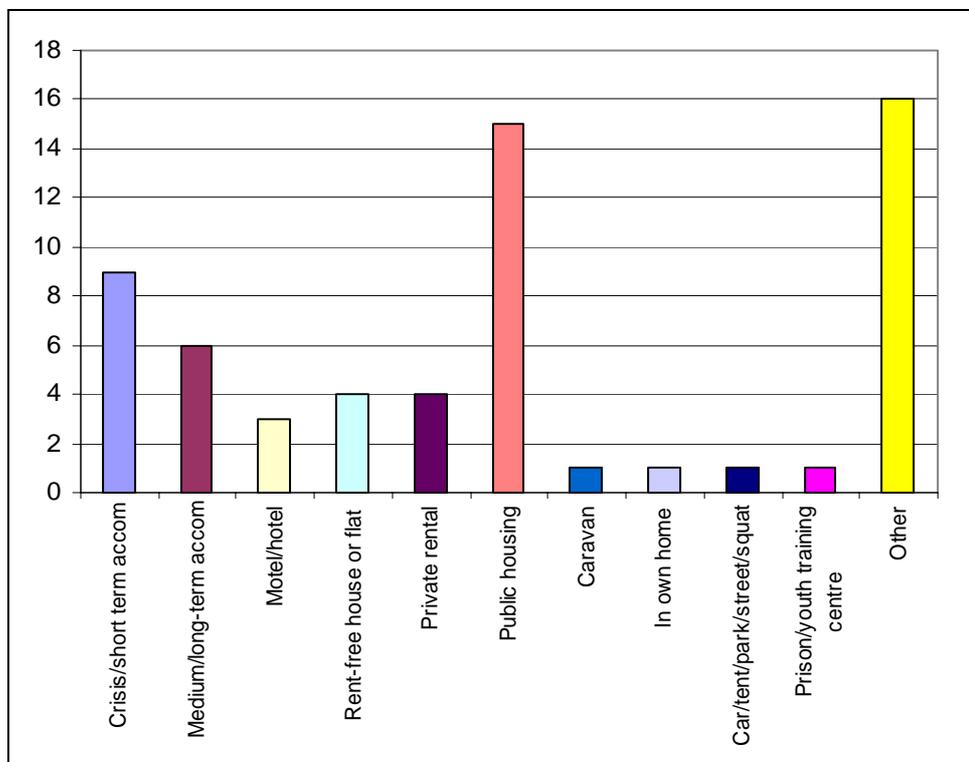
As can be seen, the composition of both groups in relation to household types was fairly similar. Both the participant and control groups were over-represented by female-headed sole parent households. It could be inferred from this information that single women with children make up the majority of Aboriginal homeless families. However, caution needs to be taken in making these sorts of assumptions, due to the changeable nature of the households once housing is accessed, which was discerned during the course of the study. This is discussed further under the heading **Gaps in Services**.

### Participant Housing Situations at Project Commencement

During the initial participant questionnaire interviews, families were asked to indicate where they had slept the previous night and how long they had been homeless. This was to determine the types of situations in which they were staying and how long they had been without their own home.

Fifteen participants, or 27%, slept in a public housing property the night before being interviewed. Nine slept in a refuge or other crisis accommodation, six were in medium/long term transitional accommodation, four were in rent-free accommodation, another four were in private rental accommodation, and three were in motels. Another 16 participants stated they slept in other types of situations, including at a friend's property, with extended family, or in hospital. One participant was incarcerated at the time of the initial questionnaire interviews.

**Graph 4**  
**Participant accommodation situation on night before questionnaire**  
**"Where did you sleep last night?"**

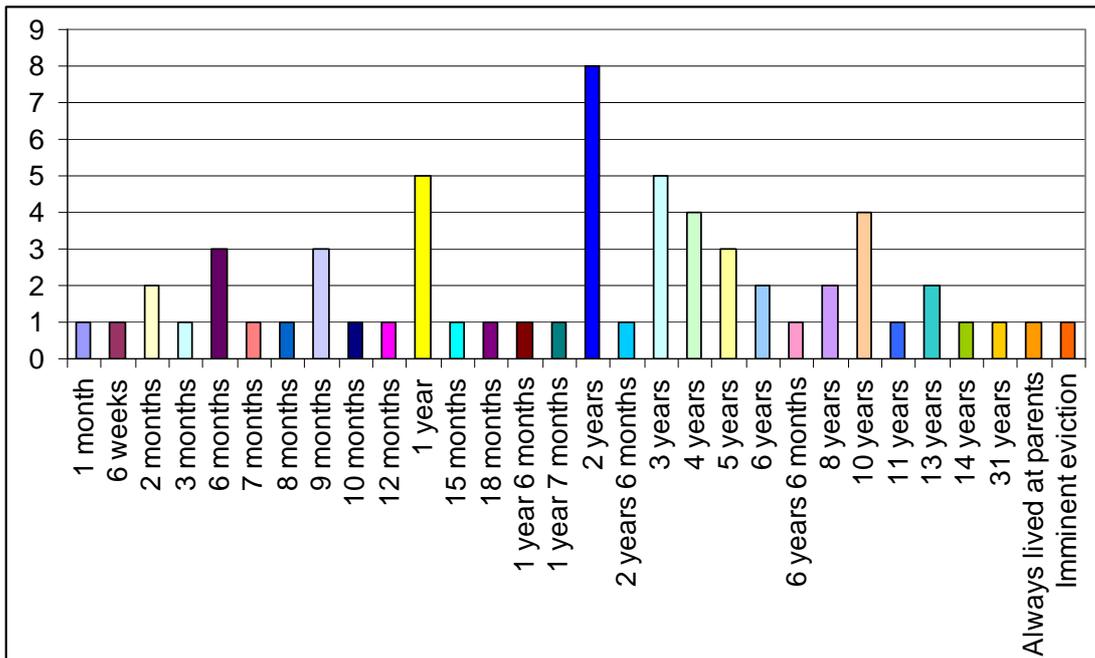


Other Includes:

Friend, friends, mother, mother's place, parents, cousin's house, Princess Margaret Hospital, sister's, sister's property, with brother, with daughter, with extended family in Homeswest tenancy, with family

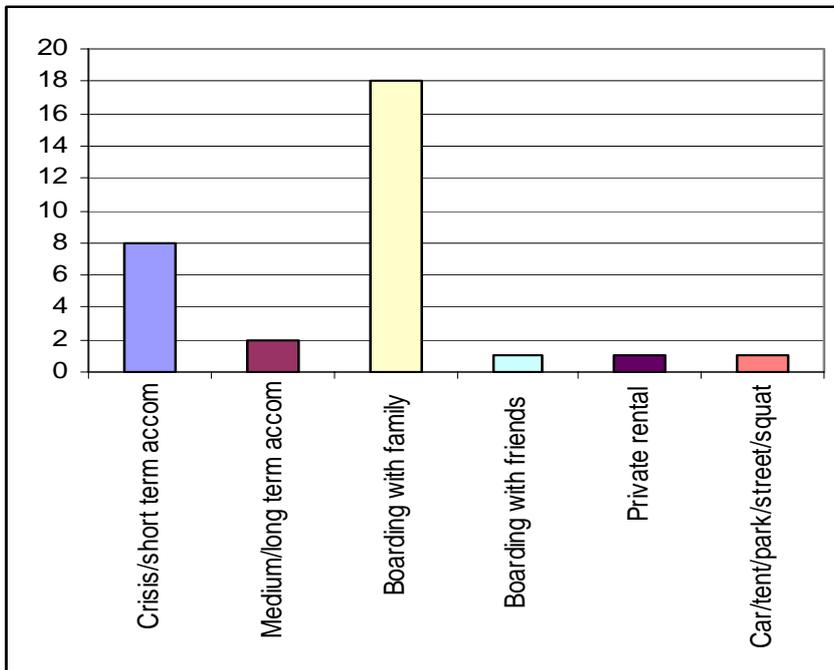
The overwhelming majority of participant families – 45 families, or 73.8% – had been homeless for over twelve months. Eight participants stated they had been homeless for two years, six had been homeless for one year, and four for ten years. One participant stated he had been homeless for 31 years. Only seven participants had been homeless for three months or less. An aggregated list of participants’ responses is depicted in Graph 5.

**Graph 5**  
**Participant Responses in relation to time lapsed since last having a home**  
**“How long since you have had a home?”**



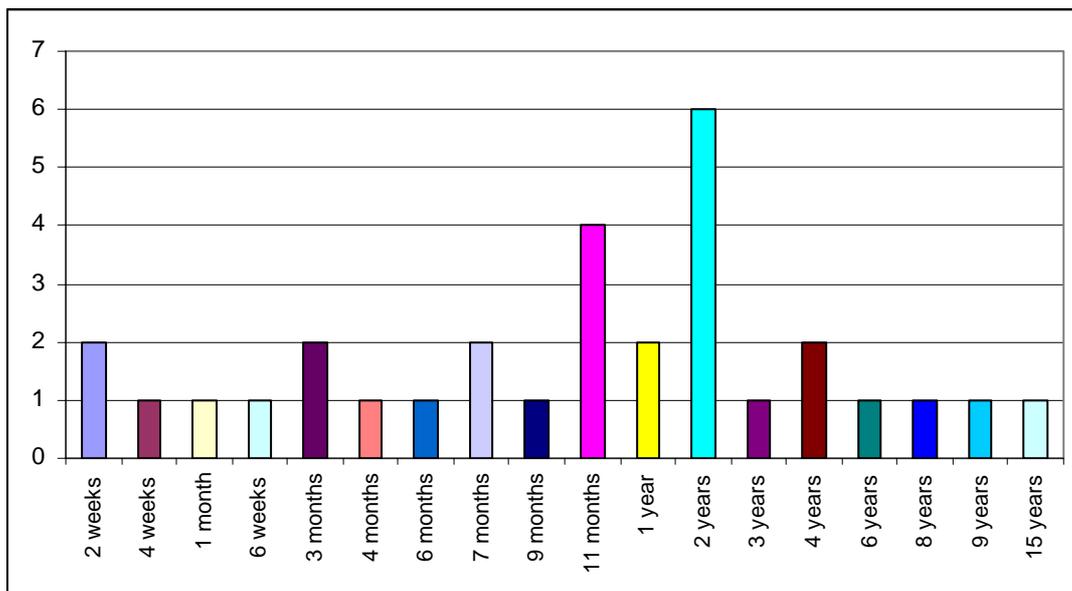
The control group responses in relation to where these families spent the previous night were slightly different to those of the participant group. Eighteen families, or 58%, stayed with family, and eight, or 26%, were in crisis or short-term accommodation. Graph 6 provides an illustration of the responses from the control group to that question.

**Graph 6**  
**Control Group responses as to housing situation the night before interview**  
***“Where did you stay last night?”***



The control group families were also asked how long since they'd had a home. About half had been homeless for 12 months or more. Like the participant families, the most common response was two years, with six participants nominating that duration.

**Graph 7**  
**Control group responses in relation to time lapsed since last having a home**  
***“How long since you have had a place to call home?”***



The differentials may not be so great if it were known whether those participants who responded that they had stayed in a public housing property had been staying with family, which was not asked specifically for the participants. Furthermore, with respect to these two questions, the differentials between participants and the control groups of families may be have been determined by the different referral sources of the two groups. A large number of control group families were referred by community advocates and refuges, as opposed to SAAP providers and public housing officials who referred the participant families.

Overall, however, the night before questionnaire interviews a greater number of families from both groups stayed with family than at any other venue, and the vast majority of families from both groups had been homeless for more than three months, with a large number over twelve months. This would confirm anecdotal evidence that Aboriginal families experiencing homelessness are more likely to stay with extended family. This information opens up all sorts of questions about the impact of overcrowding on both the homeless and the host family, including how the children are affected, and the detrimental impacts on the host family's tenancy.

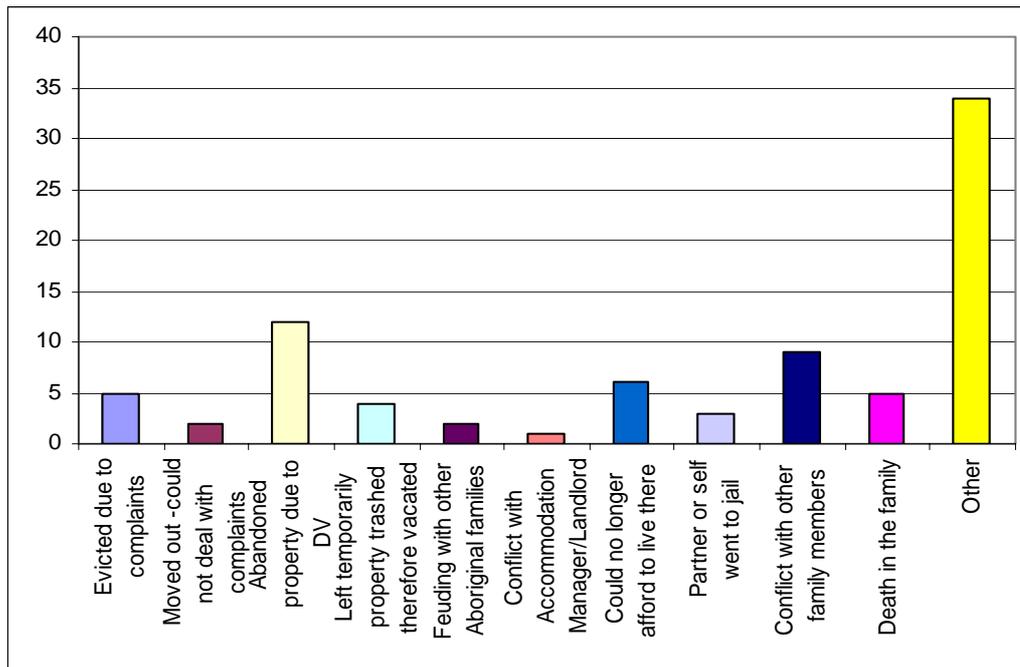
## Reasons for Homelessness before the Study

At the commencement of the project, 52 of the participant families were considered primary, secondary or tertiary homeless - nine were in refuge (or crisis) accommodation, five were in transitional accommodation tenancies (four in short-term accommodation), two were in private rental properties but had received eviction notices, one was in the process of being evicted from their Homeswest tenancy, two were living on the streets and one was incarcerated and due to be released in two months. Another eight families had recently been housed in Homeswest tenancies (public housing). The eight families housed in Homeswest tenancies all had a history of recurrent homelessness, five were considered at high risk of losing their housing, and in fact two became homeless again in the early stages of the project. The two families in private rentals both became homeless shortly after agreeing to participate in the project.

The first questionnaire findings in relation to how the 61 families participating in Centrecare's NFHP considered they had become homeless were as follows:

- 12 participants abandoned their property following domestic violence;
- 9 participants became homeless following conflict with other family members;
- 6 participants stated they could no longer afford to maintain their tenancy;
- 5 participants were evicted due to anti-social complaints against their tenancy;
- 5 participants became homeless as a result of issues impacting on their tenancy following a death in the family;
- 4 participants left their property temporarily, found it trashed when they returned and subsequently vacated;
- 34 participants listed their reason as 'other', ranging from becoming homeless after the property was burnt down, to overcrowding, to entering drug rehabilitation etc.

**Graph 8**  
**Reasons for Homelessness**



Other includes:

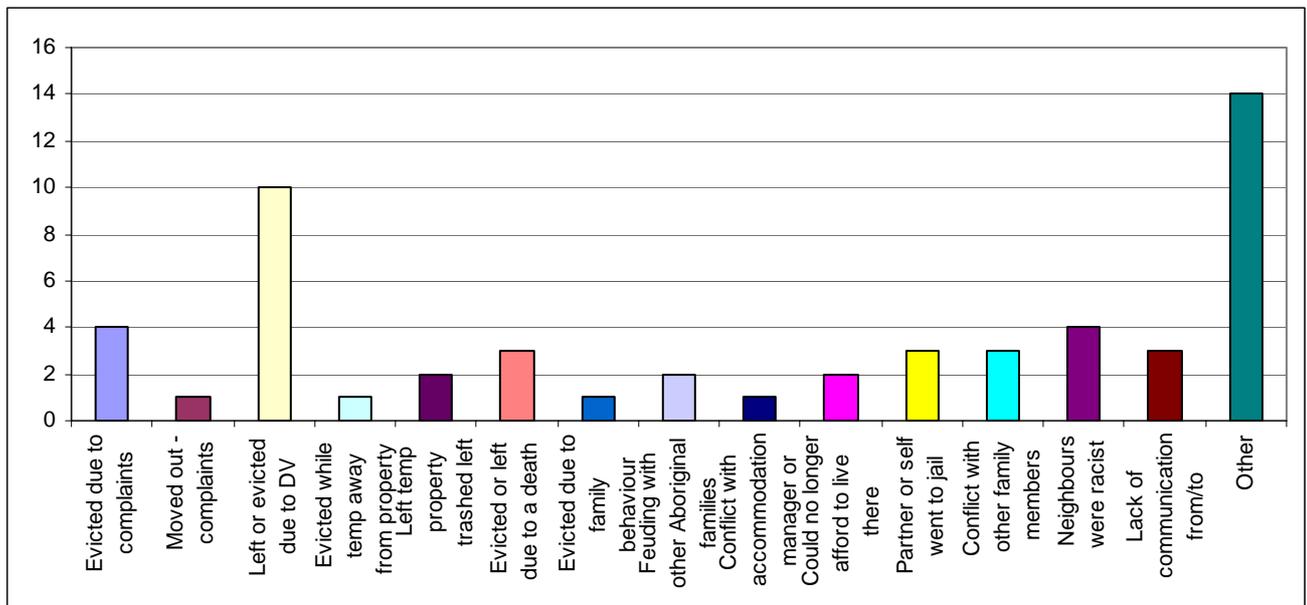
- Alcohol and substance abuse by visitors
- Arson
- Came home for a funeral and was homeless
- Care for sick adult daughter
- Child abuse by partner
- Child removed by DCD
- Damages and rent arrears
- Death of brother I left the property and moved in with mother who got a transfer from Armadale to Kensington
- Family moved to the country and I stayed in Perth
- Family stress, death of family member
- Got incarcerated and had to leave the house. Got out in 98 but had to stay with mum and dad. Had a few complaints due to extended family.
- Had to be near children's hospital
- Had to come to Perth as my daughter was sick and in hospital for 2 weeks. We stayed in Perth for another six weeks and I applied for a transfer.
- Had to go into drug rehabilitation
- Homeswest took property thought it was abandoned, was in Perth picking up mother, furniture stolen while away.
- House was sold
- Left property due to numerous break ins
- Left property for 3 months but did not pay rent
- Left temporarily due to mental health issue, Homeswest convinced me to hand in keys.
- Moved to Perth for employment
- Moved to Perth from country to care for sick daughter.
- No support
- Overcrowding
- Prejudice
- Relationship breakdown
- Substance abuse by other residents
- Substance abuse issue
- To be closer to work
- Transferred due to Homeswest request
- Unable to cope with the house without partner

Control group participants were asked what caused them to leave their last home. The findings from that question are as follows:

- 13 families, or 42%, nominated domestic violence as the cause
- 5 families, or 16%, stated they were evicted due to complaints
- 4 families, or 13%, nominated racism by neighbours as the cause

Other reasons given by the control group included conflict with other family members, lack of communication from or to Homeswest, being incarcerated, and difficulties experienced following the death of a family member. Three families stated they left their property because maintenance was not being undertaken by Homeswest and the property was in poor condition. A description of responses has been illustrated in Graph 9.

**Graph 9**  
**Control group responses relating to causes for leaving last home**  
**“What caused you to leave your last home?”**

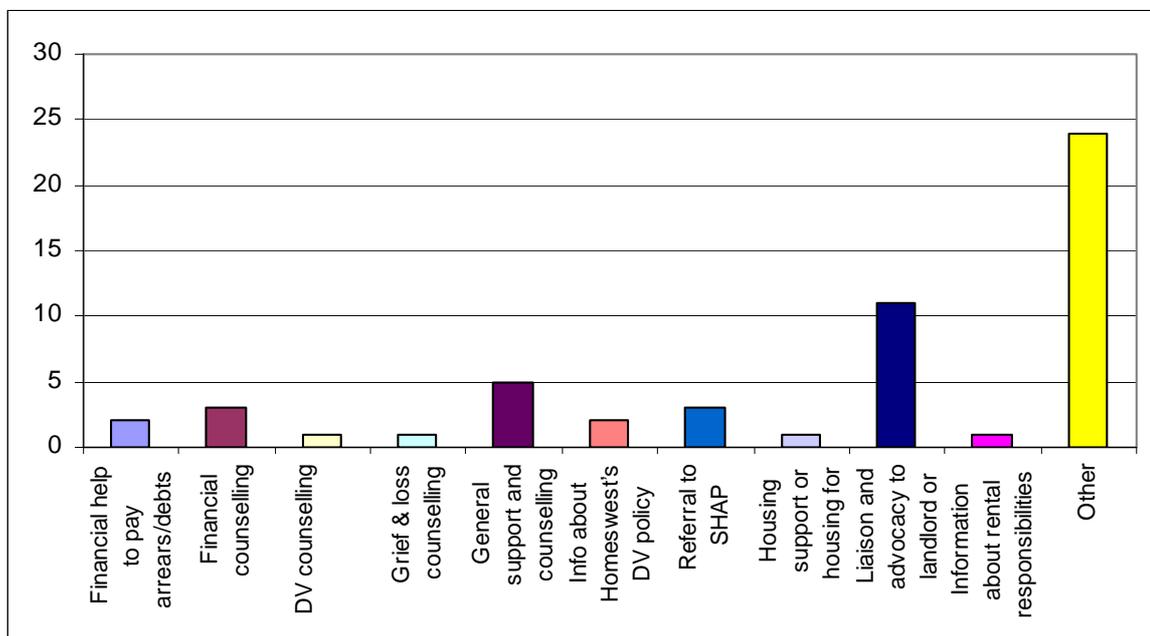


Other includes:

- Neighbour was very nasty and got all neighbours together to sign a petition to Homeswest to have me evicted.
- Moved to Perth to attend University
- Maintenance on property not done, especially the floors which were dirty – carpet needed replacing.
- Left house in Queensland to attend a funeral in Perth and look after sick father
- Left because Homeswest did not fix house and house was in a bad condition.
- Left after receiving eviction notice.
- I left the property due to home invasions and applied for priority transfer. HW wouldn't approve despite police reports.
- Family breakdown/separation. Couldn't afford 3 bedroom home on own.
- Domestic violence
- Children were voluntarily placed with family by FAYS in WA due to DV.
- Community members took our house and furniture when we weren't there for a short period of time.
- To be back near family.
- Waiting for HW transfer. I'm homeless because I can't return home due to violence by ex-partner.
- House run-down, infested with mice, cockroaches, uninhabitable.

The initial participant questionnaires also asked whether something could have been done to assist participants to remain in their last home, before they became homeless. Thirty-two participants responded negatively, and 29 answered in an affirmative manner, stating that something could have been done. Of those 29 participants, 11 stated that liaison or advocacy to the landlord or Homeswest would have prevented them losing their housing. Nine participants suggested support and counselling would have been helpful, including four for Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) support. Five participants stated that a transfer would have resolved the issues and prevented their eventual homelessness. Other responses included “more consideration from Homeswest”, “better communication by Homeswest”, housing of homeless extended family, higher security. A breakdown of the responses to Q. 14 of the First Participant Questionnaire appears on the graph below:

**Graph 10**  
**Support which may have prevented past homelessness**

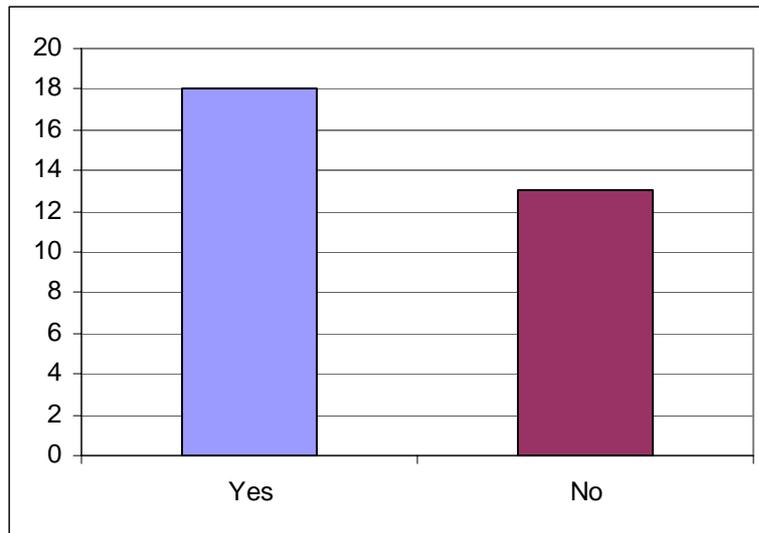


*Other Includes:*

- *Communication from Homeswest*
- *Co-ordinated approach from DCD, DHW and DOJ*
- *Didn't answer this question*
- *For Homeswest to listen when told I had to be transferred because of problems with other Aboriginal families.*
- *Have never had own home*
- *Help from Homeswest*
- *Help to access Homeswest housing*
- *Higher security on property*
- *Homeswest should have given us a house for my mum and the younger children*
- *I should have returned to the property sooner*
- *I was miserable there and the house was run down*
- *Immediate transfer*
- *More understanding from Homeswest*
- *Mum has a gambling problem, N/a*
- *Needed to meet with caseworker*
- *No comment*
- *Prior notice*
- *SHAP support*
- *Too much was happening at the time - the children were taken into care. I was not there at the time*
- *Transfer (five respondents stipulated that a transfer would have prevented their homelessness)*

When asked whether something could have been done to assist them to remain in their last homes, 18 control group families stated something could have been done.

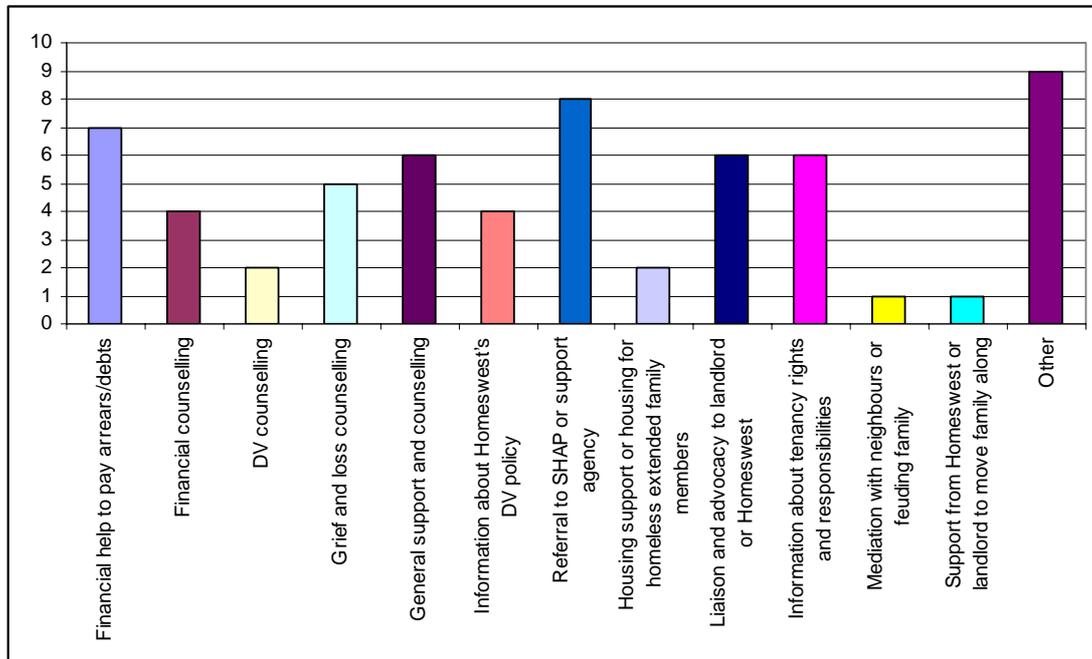
**Graph 11**  
**Control group responses gauging assistance required to remain housed**  
*“Could something have been done to assist you to remain in your last home?”*



The type of assistance required by those 18 families indicated overwhelming support through SHAP or another housing support program, with eight, or 44%, providing this response. Seven families stated that financial assistance to pay arrears or debts would have been helpful. Six families, or 33%, stated that liaison or advocacy to Homeswest or the landlord would have assisted. Six also suggested that general support and counselling would have assisted, and another six families would have benefited from information about tenancy rights. A representation of responses from the control group is shown in Graph 12.

As can be seen, control group responses to how families became homeless, whether something could have been done to assist them to remain housed, and the type of assistance are comparable to those of the participant group.

**Graph 12**  
**Control group responses to type of assistance required to remain housed**  
**“If yes, what assistance do you think you needed at that time?”**



Other includes:

- Assistance for son
- Homeswest to address maintenance. Homeswest to visit and provide information and support to move from rental to buying due to income increase.
- Community members could have waited for us to return (this happened three times)
- Help to clean the property respite.
- I was waiting for a transfer due to DV for 8 months but eventually left because I didn't get one.
- Lack of services in the town for children and adults
- Maintenance being completed or relocating us to another property. Traffic safety for children – extremely busy road for buses. Referral to SHAP.
- Needed more support from FAYS and Police and my children. Son had left home and was using drugs and I couldn't get any assistance from FAYS or police.
- Security on Windows. Priority transfer.

Given this finding, it would seem reasonable and acceptable to make generalisations about the types of supports which could be offered to Aboriginal families to access and maintain accommodation based on the results of findings from both the participant and control group of families combined.

## Self-Identified Solutions to Homelessness

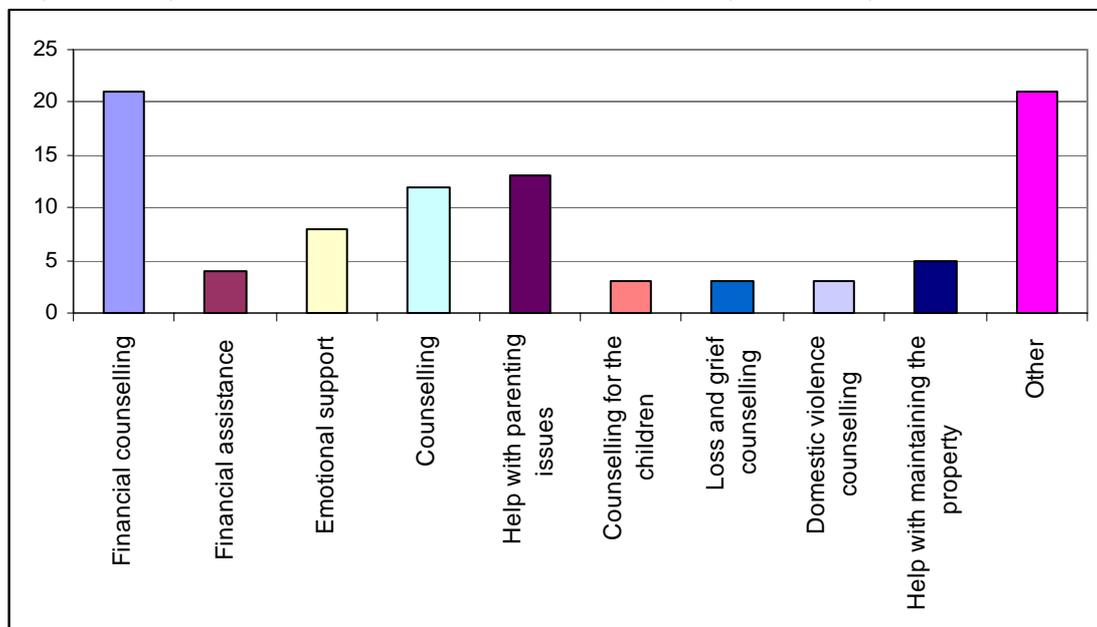
In order to assist participants to access and maintain accommodation, the study first needed to determine what supports these families believed they required to access and maintain their housing, as it was considered they were the more appropriate people to provide this information. During each participant questionnaire, families were asked about their current support needs. During the third questionnaire, questions were also asked in relation to what changes participants believed should be made to the current social housing sector.

During the first questionnaire interviews, participants were asked whether they would require help to keep their next home when they were housed, and 40 out of 61 of the participant families responded they would require help. The breakdown of the type of help participants stated they would require is illustrated in the following graph.

**Graph 13**

### Participant Responses as to types of support required

***“If you said you will need help, what sort of help do you think you will need?”***



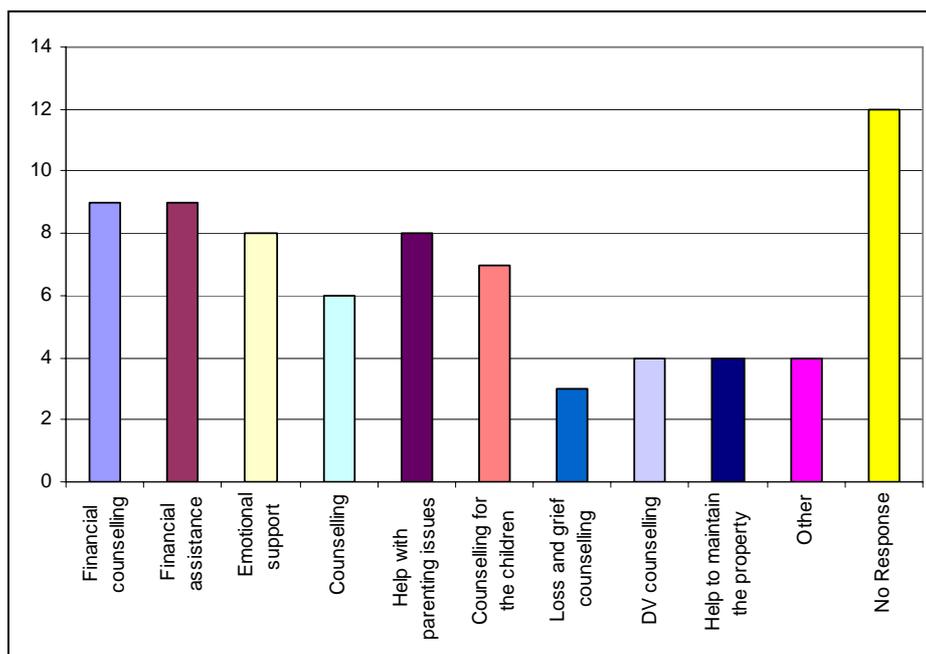
*Other includes:*

- Address debts to get on waiting list
- Advocacy to DHW
- Assistance to minimise complaints
- Furniture
- Have been referred to SHAP have not seen them yet
- Help with child on drugs
- Job search daycare
- Liaison
- Maintain a positive tenancy
- Need support to get transfer
- No comment
- SAAP
- SHAP
- SHAP or SAAP
- Someone to ask visitors to leave
- To access appropriate housing
- To control visitors

As can be seen from Graph 13, 21 or 55% of families stated that financial counselling would assist them to maintain their accommodation once they were housed. This percentage includes one participant who nominated financial assistance in 'other'. In addition, 13 or 32.5% of participants suggested that parenting assistance would help, and 20 or 50% nominated counselling or emotional support to assist them to maintain their accommodation. Six participant families stated that a referral to a housing support agency would assist, and another two families stated they would require someone to liaise or advocate to Homeswest. The suggestion by more than half the participants that financial counselling would assist them to keep their housing is an interesting finding, given that a very small number of participants had initially indicated that they lost their last housing due to financial difficulties. It is also interesting in view of the findings which highlighted that a large number of these families believed that liaison and advocacy to the landlord or Homeswest would have prevented their homelessness.

The control group of families was also asked whether they would require help to keep their next home, once they were housed. Eighteen of the 31 families interviewed for this group, or 45%, said they would need help. The breakdown of the type of help the control group of families nominated to help them maintain their tenancy once housed, appears below in Graph 14. Again, as with the participant group, financial counselling and assistance were the areas where control group families stated they would require the most help, with nine families, or 50% of those who responded that they would require assistance, nominating each of these areas. Responses from the control group were in line with those of the participant group, with six families, or 33% stating that counselling would assist, and eight families, or 44%, nominating emotional support to assist to maintain their tenancy.

**Graph 14**  
**Control Group Responses as to the type of support required to maintain tenancy**  
*"If you said you will need help, what sort of help do you think you will need?"*



- Other includes:*
- Support letters to confirm what is going on
  - Support worker
  - Help to keep visitors away
  - Children need care and to be with parents - stability

## **Support for Participants to Access and Maintain Accommodation**

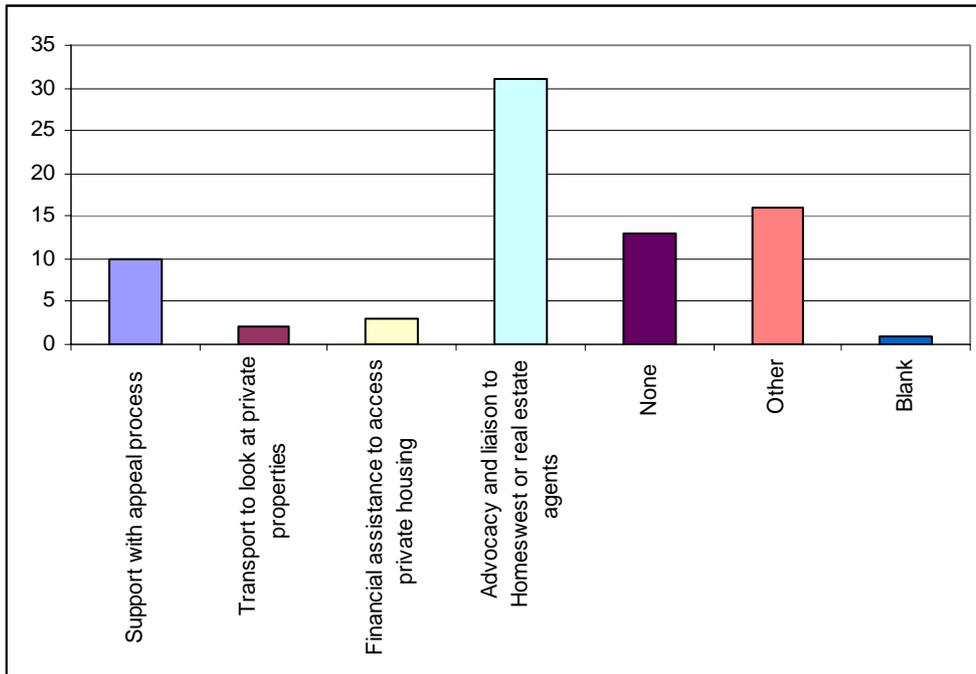
Support was provided to participant families throughout the project to access accommodation in various ways and in accordance with their needs and what they stated they required. The Project Officer advocated on behalf of 46 participants to assist them to access accommodation during the project. This included liaison and negotiations with DHW, attendance at appeals to support participants to obtain a priority listing, providing supporting documentation where appropriate, advocating to private real estate agencies, the Homeless Helpline, and SAAP providers on behalf of families.

The Project Officer also negotiated with various parties throughout the project to keep participants housed and/or to link supports to tenancies, where this was found to be required following participant interviews.

During the first participant questionnaire interviews, participants were asked what type of assistance they required to access housing, if they were not currently housed. Control group participants were also asked this question, to allow for a comparison of the responses between the two groups, to determine the types of supports Aboriginal families are likely to require to access accommodation. Throughout the project, and within each of the three questionnaire interviews conducted with participants, the study sought to discover whether participants were experiencing difficulties with their tenancies, and the types of difficulties, if any. Participants were also asked to identify what would assist to address these issues in order to get a sense of the types of supports they may require, make appropriate referrals or advocate on their behalf if that was what they required.

Initially, therefore, participants were asked what would assist them to access housing. A copy of participants' responses to this question is shown below at Graph 15. One participant did not respond to this question, and 13 other families did not require any support (those already housed at the time of the interviews). As can be seen from those responses, 31 participants, or 66% of families who believed they required support, stated they required advocacy and liaison to Homeswest or a real estate agent in order to access housing. Ten participants, or 21%, stated they required support to appeal a Homeswest decision. Five families stated they required transitional accommodation.

**Graph 15**  
**Participant Responses to type of assistance required to access a tenancy**  
**“What assistance do you think you need to get a home now?”**

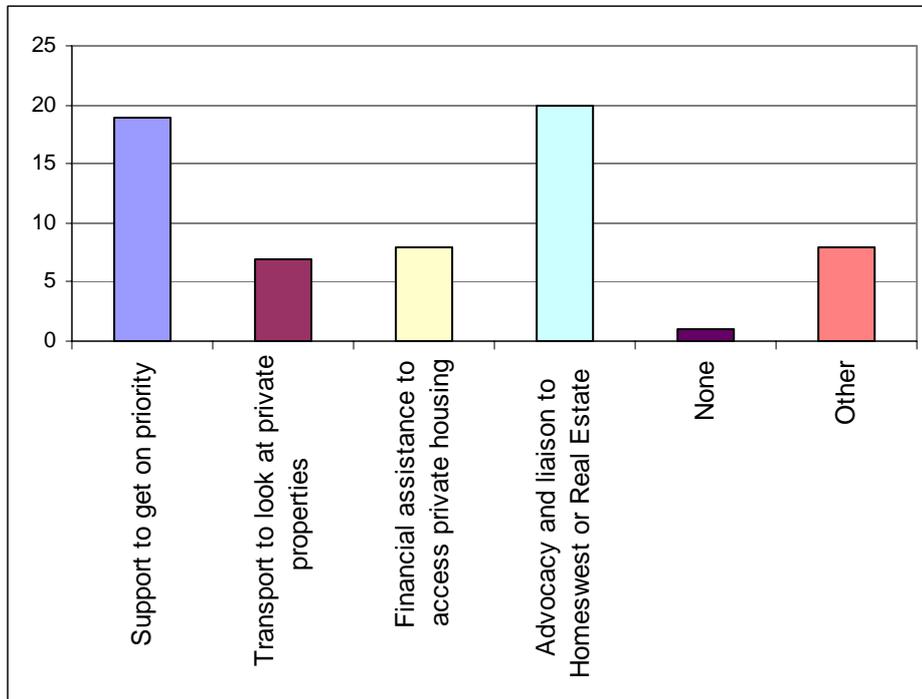


*Other includes*

- *Can get bond assistance but unable to get private rental*
- *Counselling and support to address issues*
- *Don't know*
- *Don't know have many support letters*
- *Funding for white goods*
- *Furniture*
- *Help to address debts*
- *Referral to SHAP*
- *Refuge advocating to Homeswest to get back on wait list and then priority*
- *SAAP*
- *Support with Vic Park Youth (SAAP)*

Graph 16 depicts how the control group of families responded to this question. One family stated they did not require assistance to get a home, therefore the responses relate to 30 control group families. As can be seen from the graph below, 20 of these families, or 66%, stated they required advocacy and liaison to Homeswest or a real estate agency in order to access housing. One family required assistance to find a real estate agent who does not discriminate against Aboriginal people. Nineteen control group families, or 63%, stated they required support to get on a Homeswest priority housing list.

**Graph 16**  
**Control Group Responses regarding type of assistance required to access a tenancy**  
**“What assistance do you think you need to get a home now?”**



*Other includes:*

- *Some assistance with furniture, assistance to pay bills.*
- *Need a house*
- *Financial counselling to save and buy a home.*
- *HW to stop giving me the run around. I have appealed probably 20 times.*
- *Need HW or agency to give us a place. Safe haven for our family.*
- *Dylan helped us to get on Priority (Comm Legal Serv). We found private housing ourselves. Run down property and we knew we would get it.*
- *Need HW to house me ASAP. On priority recently approved. Delays on file being transferred from Kalgoorlie.*
- *Real estate agent that doesn't discriminate against Aboriginal people*

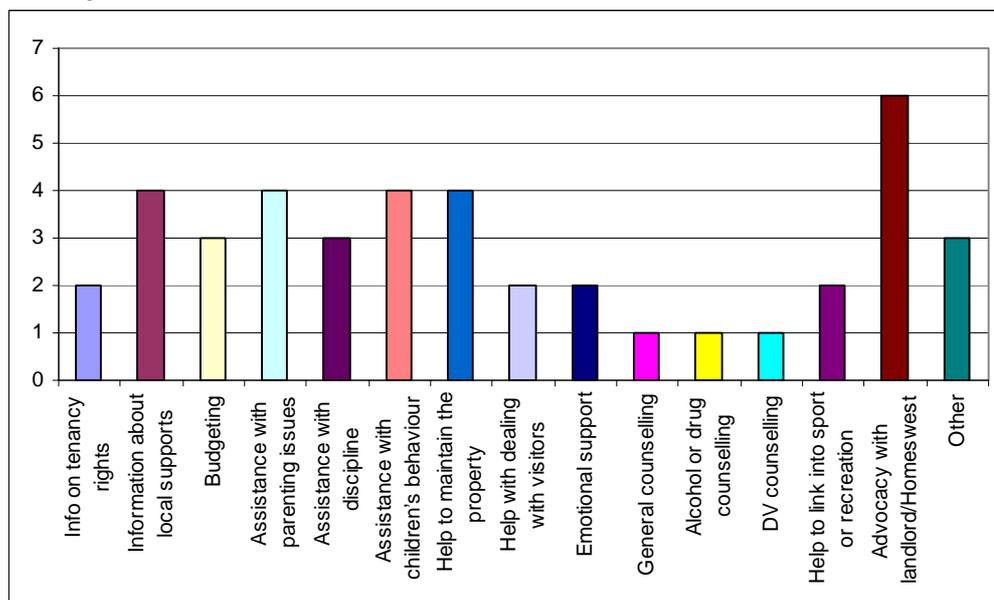
Responses from both the participant and control group of families were along fairly similar lines with regard to the type of assistance required to access housing. In total, 77 families responded to this question. When both groups are taken into account, 51, or over two thirds, stated the type of assistance they required to access housing is advocacy and liaison to Homeswest or a real estate agency. Twenty-nine families from both groups combined stated that they required either support to get on priority listing or to appeal a decision with regard to being placed on the public housing priority waiting list. This would indicate that homeless Aboriginal people experience considerable difficulty in accessing a priority listing for public housing if they do not have an advocate who is able to successfully liaise with Homeswest or private real estate agencies for housing on their behalf. Some participant families indicated they did not know what sort of assistance they required to access housing, as they had already unsuccessfully attempted, at times more than once, to obtain a priority listing and although they had numerous support letters this did not appear to assist.

As already discussed under the heading **Self-Identified Solutions to Homelessness**, within the first questionnaire participant families were asked to indicate the type of help they may require to maintain their housing once housed. Eight families were already housed in public housing tenancies. Five of the families already housed stated they did not require support. One of these families who did not require support had already been linked to an Aboriginal support agency through the refuge where they had been staying prior to being housed. In response to requests for support from two other families, referrals were made by the Project Officer to SHAP. The other family required advocacy to obtain a transfer – the family had been listed for a transfer for two years, but had not been offered a property to move to and was residing in overcrowded conditions. Negotiations continued throughout the project to assist this family to obtain a transfer to a larger property. The Project Officer eventually (by the end of the third questionnaire interviews) located a housing and support agency willing to house the family in transitional accommodation until DHW was able to locate a property for the agency as a replacement.

During the second round of questionnaire interviews, participants who had been housed and initially stated they did not require support were asked whether they now believed they required support to maintain their housing. Of the 55 participant families interviewed for this second round, 47 families were housed at the time of the interviews, and 21 of these 47 families were already linked into housing supports, or had previously been accessing support. Nine of the remaining 26 families housed stated they required support.

Six of these families stated they would require weekly support, two requested fortnightly support, and the other family did not state what level of support was required. Graph 17 below reveals the types of supports participants stated they required at the time of the second questionnaire interviews.

**Graph 17**  
**Participant Responses as to the type and level of support required to secure their tenancy if no support worker has been engaged**  
***“If you do not have a support worker and require support to maintain your tenancy, what type and level of support do you need to make sure your tenancy is secure?”***



- Other Includes:*
- Sexual abuse counselling
  - Food voucher occasionally
  - Yard maintenance – aged pensioner couple on disability pensions

In response to this information from participants, four families who were housed in public housing tenancies were referred by the Project Officer to DHW for SHAP. Two of these families had recently been transferred from other properties and should have been referred to the program at the time of the transfers, however this did not occur. In fact, in both cases, it was at least three months before support workers commenced the assessments of the tenancies.

A fifth family had been recently housed in a private rental property and negotiations between DHW and the Project Officer prior to the private lease being signed resulted in an agreement that the family would remain on the priority waiting list (given that the lease was short-term, and the property was located through the Homeless Helpline) and would be supported through SHAP while waiting to be offered a property. The referral had only recently occurred at the time of the second questionnaire interviews and the support provider was still assessing the referral.

The other four families who required support were all referred to appropriate services – an Aboriginal garden maintenance service, and an Aboriginal health service – and linked to local agencies for support.

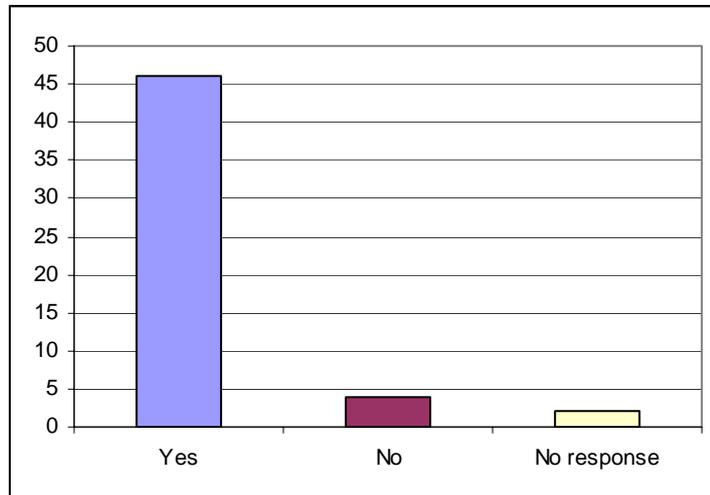
One of these latter families was already housed in a transitional accommodation SAAP property but was unhappy with the level of support received and requested advocacy to Homeswest to be listed for priority housing. This should have occurred some months prior under the SAAP protocols set up between the public housing body and SAAP housing providers, however it had not. The SAAP caseworker stated it was an oversight as they believed it had been done months before. Several requests to the SAAP housing provider by the Project Officer to carry this out failed, therefore the participant family was eventually advised to approach Homeswest directly, while the Project Officer simultaneously advocated for the priority listing to occur. The family was eventually listed for priority and housed through a head lease arrangement near the end of the project.

Another family was housed in a private rental property and referrals were made to two Aboriginal family support agencies for support with parenting issues, discipline strategies and financial counselling. However, support was only sporadic, in part due to the participant family's absence from the property and also due to the support provider's infrequent visits. This was not discovered until the third questionnaire interview was conducted; by which time the tenancy was already at risk (a termination notice had already been issued). Advocacy and liaison with the real estate agency was then undertaken by the Project Officer however the participant no longer wished to return to the property, although the estate agency was prepared to negotiate a positive outcome. Further advocacy was then undertaken with DHW to house the participant family and a head lease arrangement was organised by the department by the end of the project.

During the third round of questionnaires, 46 participant families out of the 52 who completed that round of questionnaires were housed, as indicated by the responses below.

**Graph 18****Participant Responses as to current status of housing**

***“If you were housed while participating in this research, are you still housed now?”***



Four families had been housed at some time during the project, but were homeless when the third questionnaire interviews were conducted. One family was already homeless at the time of the second questionnaire interviews and had still not accessed accommodation when the third questionnaire was completed. This was despite assistance to the participant family by the Project Officer to apply for private rental accommodation, and an offer of a private property through the Homeless Helpline. A second family had moved out of their private rental property due to what they said were feuding issues with other Aboriginal families in the area, although virtually no rent had been paid in the five months the family was housed and the real estate agency had issued a termination notice. The other two families had both vacated their SAAP tenancies – one to be closer to family supports (this participant returned to live with a parent in overcrowded conditions while awaiting a priority Homeswest allocation), and the other due to feuding issues in the complex of units where they were housed. The two families who did not respond to that question had not been housed during the course of the study, up to that point in time. One of these families was later able to be linked into a SAAP tenancy.

Participant responses from the three questionnaire interviews were also correlated to determine whether those participants who initially stated they would require support to keep their housing once they were able to access accommodation:

- Were able to access support once housed
- Still considered they required support
- Had found that the support had assisted them to remain housed and/or maintain their tenancies.

Participants who had *not* been housed during the project were unable to have their responses to these questions analysed, as they were not in a position to determine their tenancy support needs. In addition, those families who *chose* to terminate their involvement in the study were likewise not referred to in this analysis.

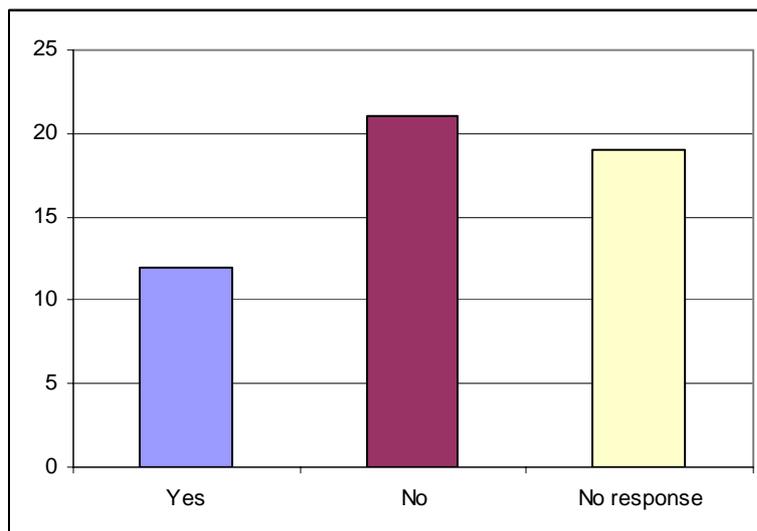
An exception was made in the case of the participant family who did not formally discontinue their participation, but whose housing information continued to be known to the Project Officer. The correlation of questionnaire responses therefore relates to interviews and information about 56 participant families.

Documentation of other information gathered during interviews, as well as that provided by service providers supporting the participants, and DHW and DCD as a result of alerts set up on participants' computer files, has also been included in reporting this analysis. The analysis considered responses from all three questionnaires. As a part of the analysis, the Project Officer's knowledge of the difficulties experienced by participants in relation to tenancies, and the type of support links made or accessed by participants, were also taken into account in determining the findings.

Generally, excluding the families' needs for appropriate housing, which had already been met, participants were able to access, or be linked to the types of supports they required to address difficulties after they were housed, following interviews with the Project Officer. In most cases, the support was only obtained as a result of the interviews, and participants struggled with the difficulties until then.

Of those 46 participant families interviewed for the third round of questionnaires who were housed at that time, 27 had already been linked to support services, either in SAAP or in SHAP if they were housed in a Homeswest tenancy. Those participants who were housed at the time of the interviews and not linked to some type of support were again asked whether they required supports to maintain their tenancies and the types of supports they may require. The responses to whether participants required supports at the time of the third questionnaire interviews are outlined in Graph 19.

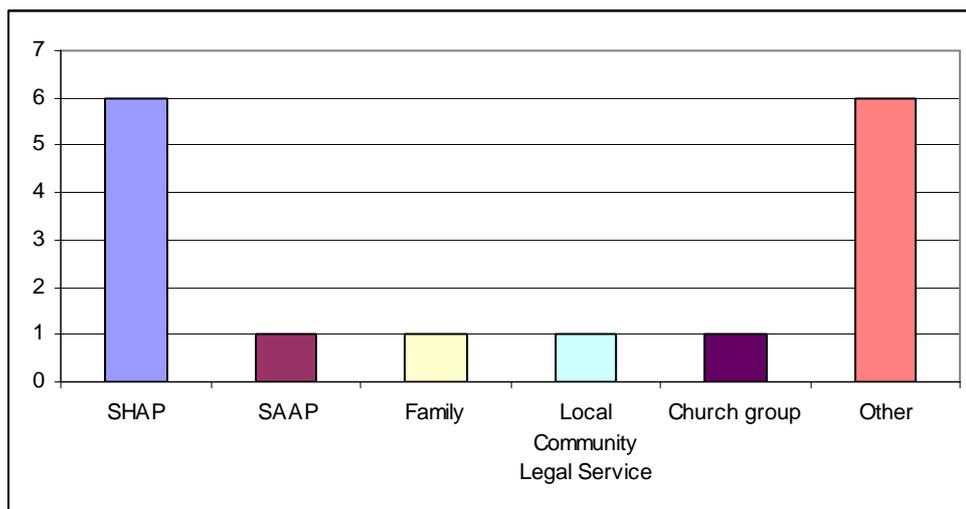
**Graph 19**  
**Participant Responses as to whether support was required to maintain tenancy**  
**"Do you require support to maintain your tenancy?"**



Nineteen participants did not respond to this question, including six families who were homeless at the time of the interviews. The other 13 families who did not respond were already linked to support to help them to maintain their tenancies. Twenty-one families stated they did not require support, four were also already linked to support to maintain their tenancies – three were in SAAP tenancies and already receiving support, and one had been referred to SHAP (this was done following the second questionnaire interview although the referral had not been processed by the time of the third interview some months later). This left 17 participant families who considered they were able to maintain their tenancies without support.

As outlined in Graph 19, 12 participant families responded that they did require support to maintain their tenancies. This included one participant family who was housed in a SAAP tenancy and already receiving support. This family did not respond to the question asking for the type of support required, as they were already receiving support. The responses of the 11 families who stated they required support is correlated in Graph 20 below (please note that some participants may have listed multiple responses):

**Graph 20**  
**Participant Responses as to type of support required**  
**“What type of support do you require?”**

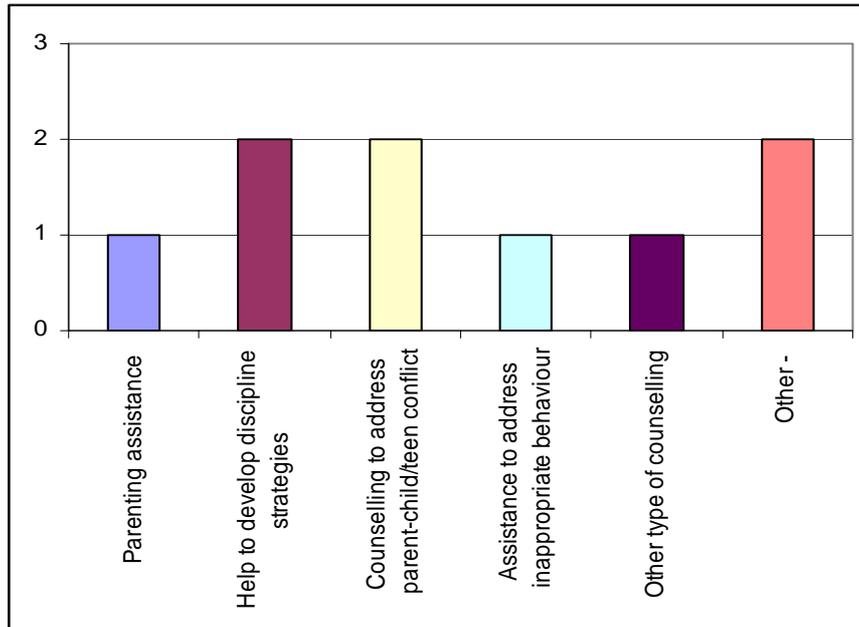


*Other includes*

- SHAP may be possible as I'm on priority listing
- Support with mental health issue
- HAAC for garden maintenance
- Housing for my daughters
- Garden maintenance
- Don't know yet until we get into Homeswest

Participants were also asked whether they thought their children’s behaviour might put their tenancy at risk. Four participants responded that they did believe their children’s behaviour may put their tenancy at risk, however only three participants considered they required support to manage their children or those of their visitors. A breakdown of the supports nominated by these participants is outlined in Graph 21 below:

**Graph 21**  
**Participant Responses as to types of supports required with their children**  
**“What type of support do you think would assist?”**



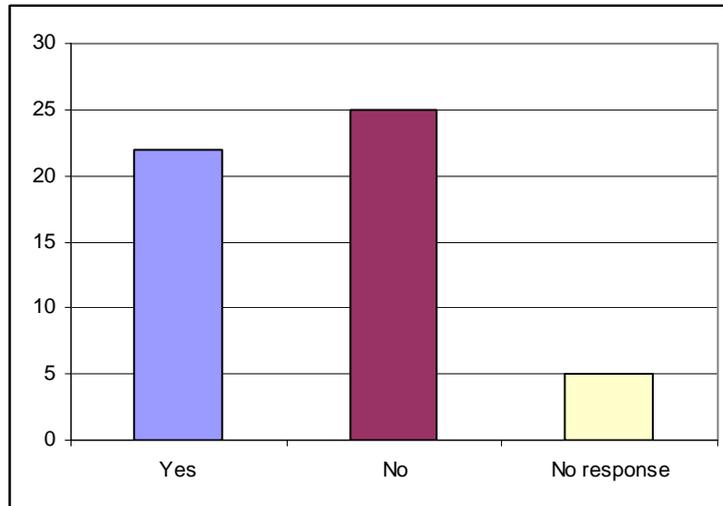
*Other includes:*

- *Help with managing visitor’s children*
- *No longer housed*

Two of the participant families who stated they required support with managing children’s behaviour were linked to a housing support provider and were both advised to approach their caseworker for assistance. The third family was already accessing support through DCD, however was provided with other information in relation to alternative support and counselling.

Participants were also asked whether they had experienced any difficulties since being housed, and the types of difficulties. Participants' responses to these questions have been illustrated in Graphs 22 and 23 respectively.

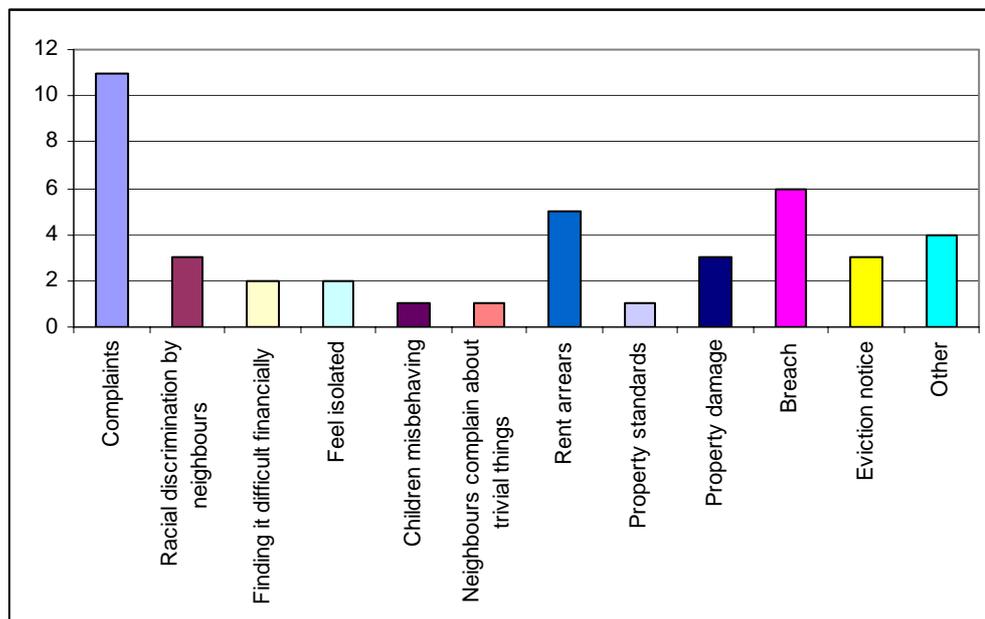
**Graph 22**  
**Participant Responses as to any difficulties experienced since being housed**  
**“Since being housed, have you experienced any difficulties?”**



Five participants did not respond – they were the families not housed at the time the interviews were conducted.

However, 25 participant families stated they had not experienced difficulties, which in fact correlates with responses to Question 40 which is discussed later. From the graphs, it can be seen that 22 families experienced difficulties including 11 families who had received complaints against their tenancies, six families who had been issued breaches, and five families whose rental accounts had been in arrears.

**Graph 23**  
**Participant Responses as to types of difficulties experienced since being housed**  
**“If yes, what type of difficulties”**



- Other includes:*
- Harassment from extended family
  - Difficulties maintaining yard
  - Power has been cut off
  - Haven't really stayed there

A total of 52 participant families received some kind of support during the project, 40 of whom were able to access housing and/or supports through either SAAP or SHAP. Twenty-six of these families were still linked to housing supports at the completion of the project.

Eight of the 40 families linked into housing supports during the study were no longer accessing that support at its completion. This included four families who moved out of transitional accommodation and into Homeswest housing without requiring further support. The other four families chose to either withdraw from housing support programs or discontinue their engagement, and three of these tenancies, all Homeswest, subsequently experienced varying risks of being terminated, with one resulting in an eviction.

The fourth family who discontinued support had moved from a SAAP tenancy to a private rental and was accessing outreach support for several months, but later ceased involvement with the support agency and the tenancy became at risk of being terminated.

### **Participant Self-Assessments of Risk of Homelessness**

Self-assessment questions were developed in the second and third questionnaires (See Appendix II for the third questionnaire). The third round of questionnaires commenced at the beginning of May 2003, with 15 participant families interviewed up to the time of this report. During this final round of questionnaires, participant families who were initially linked into housing and supports but have since become homeless are again being asked how they became homeless. This round is continuing and therefore responses cannot yet be analysed in relation to that round.

However, during the second round of questionnaires, the 45 participant families who were housed at that time were asked to assess their risk of homelessness on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is a very likely risk and 10 is very unlikely.

- 22 participants, or 49%, scaled their confidence of remaining housed at 10
- 9, or 20 % scaled at 9
- 5, or 11% scaled at 8
- 2 families, or 4%, scaled at 7
- 1, or 2%, scaled at 6
- 2, or 4% scaled at 5
- 2, or 4% scaled at 4
- 1, or 2%, scaled at 2 and
- 1, or 2%, scaled at 1

Hence, only six of the 45 participants who were housed during the second questionnaire interviews considered they were likely to become homeless again, and 36 participants were very confident of remaining housed.

During the third round of questionnaire interviews, participants who were housed at the time of the interviews were also asked to scale how confident they were of remaining housed, on a scale of 1-10, where 1 was they were very likely to become homeless again, and 10 was they will never be homeless again.

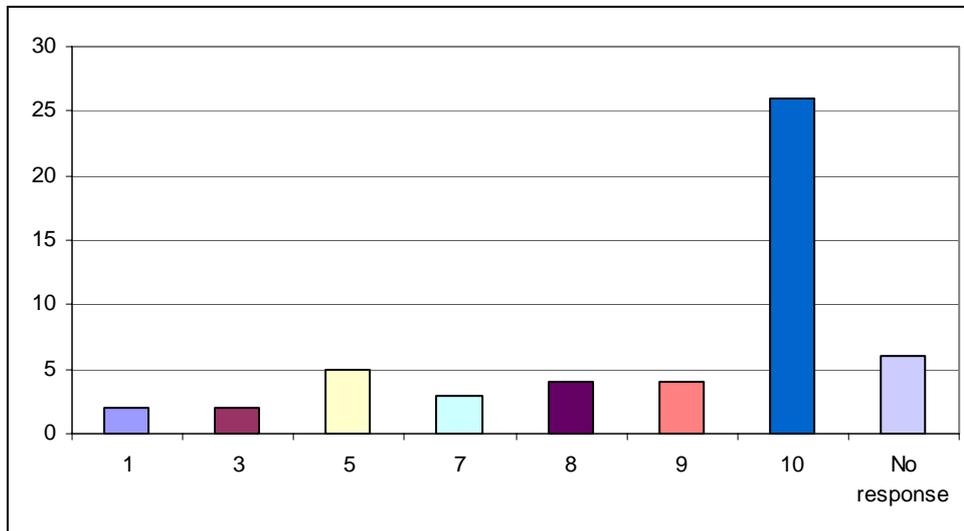
The graph below shows the responses to this question in Questionnaire 3:

**Graph 24**

**Participant Responses as to confidence of remaining housed**

***“How confident are you of remaining in your housing on a scale of 1-10?”***

*(1 being very likely to become homeless, and 10 being will never become homeless again).*



The six participants who did not respond were those not housed at the time of the third questionnaire interviews. The graph shows that 34 of the 46 participants housed at that time were very confident of remaining housed. Some of these participants were not housed during the previous interviews, and therefore did not respond to this question. Another participant who was confident of remaining housed when the third questionnaire interviews took place was not interviewed for the second round.

Two of the participants who were very confident of remaining housed had only scaled their chances of remaining housed at 4 and 5 respectively during the second interview. At that time, both participants were experiencing difficulties in relation to the SAAP tenancy in which they were housed. One left the property and became homeless for a period of two months but was later housed in another SAAP tenancy by a different service provider. The other participant was transferred to a different property within the same SAAP agency. The difficulties had ceased for both participants and their tenancies were relatively successful by the time the third questionnaire interviews were conducted.

Only two participant families believed they were likely to become homeless again, and two participant families considered they had a 30% chance of remaining housed. These four participants were all fairly confident of remaining housed when the question was raised during the second questionnaire interviews.

When the third questionnaire interviews were conducted, these four participants had all recently experienced difficulties with their tenancies, which was reflected in their responses. Three of these participants remained housed until the end of the project. The other participant vacated a private rental property when the difficulties escalated and was housed soon after in a Homeswest tenancy.

## **Factors that Assist or Inhibit Maintenance of Accommodation**

During the course of the project, factors that assisted or inhibited the maintenance of continued accommodation for participant families were documented on an ongoing basis. While specific questions asked of participants and the control group families allowed for links and referrals for support to be made, they also enabled project staff to elicit information which would determine the factors that have assisted them to maintain their accommodation.

In addition, participant alerts were put in place on the client systems of the Memorandum Partners - DCD and DHW - and all information derived from these two departments was recorded by the Project Officer in participant files. Non-government service providers also collaborated with research staff by informing the Project Officer when participants were experiencing difficulties while being supported by their service in order that this information could also be obtained.

Furthermore, documentation of the factors that assisted participants to maintain positive tenancies were also recorded, both within the questionnaires completed by participant families, and during interviews with participant families and their housing providers at crucial periods during the project. Documentation of whether support was provided as required, factors which may have prevented provision of support and any other relevant information to participants' situations were also collected and recorded during the life of the project.

Finally, information was also gathered in relation to those tenancies which failed during the project. This includes feedback provided by the participant families themselves and by service providers at the end of the support period.

## **Factors that will Determine whether Families Seek the Support they Need**

As already discussed, with the exclusion of the families' needs for appropriate housing, which had already been met in most instances, participants were able to access, or be linked to the types of supports they required to address difficulties after they were housed, following interviews with the Project Officer. At each interview, participants were also provided information on available supports and community resources in the event they required assistance with issues. In most cases, however, the support was only obtained by participants as a result of the interviews, and participants struggled with the difficulties until then.

During the course of the project, it was found that participants were able to access support from particular service providers if the support had been helpful. In view of this, research staff needed to find out what participants had found helpful about the support links made, where support had been linked.

During the third round of questionnaires, participant families who had been supported through a transitional accommodation program, or the SHAP program, were asked what had been helpful about being on that type of program. Twenty-eight participant families had been linked to housing supports during the project at the time the third round of questionnaires was conducted - 18 had been supported in SAAP properties, and ten had been referred to SHAP for assistance to maintain their Homeswest tenancies. One family who had been supported through SHAP did not complete the third questionnaire; therefore that family's views on this question were not recorded.

**Responses from Participants to what had been Helpful about the Support include:**

*"A house and someone to talk to"*

*"Being housed/kids are doing really well at school/support and understanding by the agency in dealing with issues of racism from the neighbour"*

*"Everything from relationship-wise to kids-wise"*

*"Foodbank has been handy; there's been no other support. I do need support around parenting issues some financial support/support to deal with eldest child's behaviour."*

*"Getting a house and furniture"*

*"Getting a house/the counselling was good"*

*"Getting housed /support worker has been trying to get the girls enrolled in school"*

*"Haven't commenced yet - referred today"*

*"Haven't heard from them. I was also referred at last property before being transferred but no-one attended"*

*"Having a support worker and having support with other issues outside the immediate family that are affecting us"*

*"Having a yarn. They also said they would write a letter for a transfer"*

*"Having the house"*

*"Helped me realise that things couldn't go on the way they had been"*

*"If we need help we just ring up and our support worker comes and visits. Being housed has also been helpful"*

*"It was very good. I liked the help with a bit of food and other requirements"*

*"My caseworker has helped me with my bills budgeting etc and mediating between myself and the children's father. The program has helped us settle down and make plans"*

*"My confidence has increased as has self-esteem/budgeting has improved. Headway with H/west has improved. Better communication with the children"*

*"No-one has come to work with us"*

*"No-one's come out to see me"*

*"Nothing"*

*"Talking to someone about the issues affecting us. We're no longer in SHAP"*

*"The emotional support"*

*"The emotional support, advocacy and assistance with practical issues"*

*"The understanding the caseworker has. Able to communicate and be heard. "*

*"Having someone who is patient and understanding."*

*"They got a lot of good help such as furniture. Discuss the house and if the kids are ok"*

*"They listen and advise/provided accommodation liaison with H/west"*

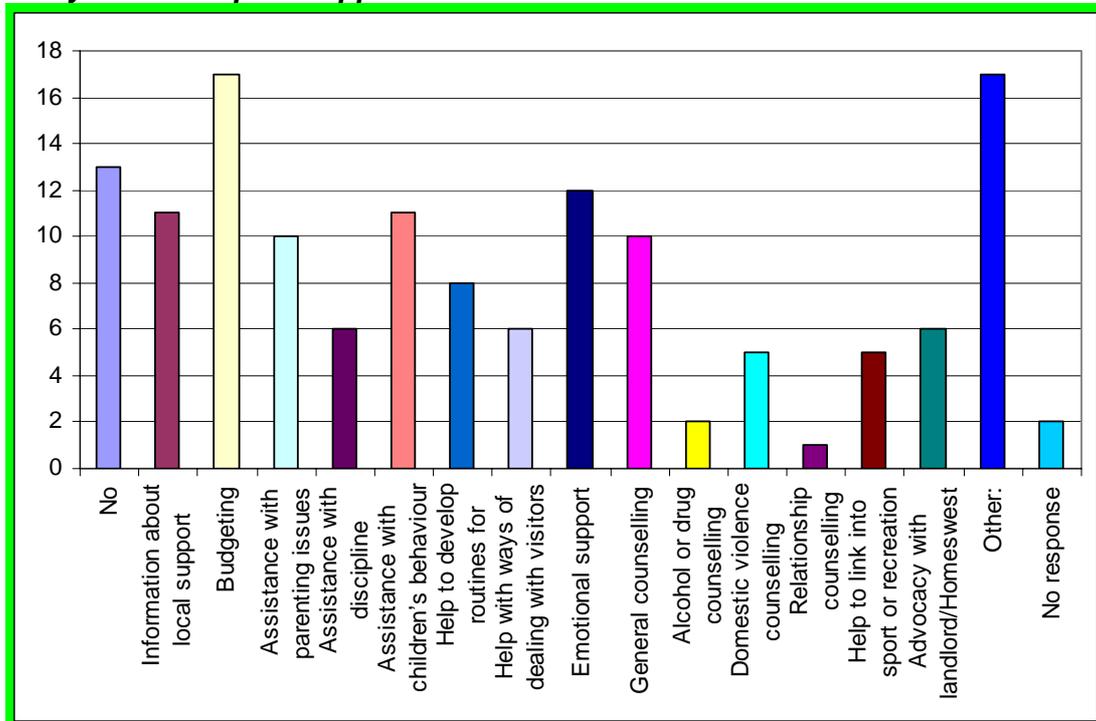
Three of the families who responded to this question were no longer accessing the support – one had vacated the SAAP property to stay with family until a Homeswest priority listing was allocated, one family was evicted from their Homeswest tenancy and could no longer access that support, and the third no longer required the support provided.

Most other participants found the support helpful, especially the emotional support provided within that type of program. Families stated that SAAP workers were understanding and supportive. Families also found it helpful to be provided with housing and furniture and the assistance with other issues, such as financial management, parenting assistance, liaison with government departments. It also helped them to settle and make plans. Responses stating that nothing about the support was helpful, or where the support had not been received as required are discussed in more detail under the heading **Barriers to the Maintenance of Accommodation**.

An analysis of the third participant questionnaire responses sought to determine whether those participants who indicated they required support at that time had experienced difficulties in their tenancies. It also sought to determine who they would contact for assistance and how confident they were of remaining in their current housing. This cross-analysis was to determine whether the assessments were realistically based if participants had experienced difficulties, and whether they would be likely to access support if necessary. This was in view of the first questionnaire findings that 63% of the participants did not know that housing support services were available.

Generally, participants' self-assessments were realistic, in relation to the difficulties they had experienced. In addition, those who were linked into some sort of support overwhelmingly stated they would contact a community agency if they experienced further difficulties, although not necessarily the agency with which they were linked. Graphs detailing these responses have been reproduced below.

**Graph 25**  
**Participant Response as to current status of support requirements**  
**“Do you now require support?”**



*Other includes:*

- Still waiting for SHAP
- To obtain house
- Assistance to get decent home now that I'm getting my two youngest children back into my care
- Don't know anyone around here
- Emergency relief
- Form signed to update payments
- Garden Maintenance
- Getting furniture
- Help to link into education for self and 15 yr old daughter
- Help with sorting out Mental health issue
- Lawn-mowing and property standards
- Look into further education
- More furniture
- Property maintenance
- Upgrade the payments on the electricity account

In response to the question raised as to whether participants required support at that time, only 50 participants responded to that question. The two participants who did not respond were the only two participant families interviewed who had not been housed up to that point during the study, and they were not required to respond to this question. Another 13 participants stated they did not require support at that time. Hence, 37 of the 50 participant families who responded to this question indicated they required some sort of support, as is illustrated in the graph above.

Three of these participants were not housed at the time, all having experienced serious difficulties which resulted in one eviction, one where eviction proceedings were under way before the participant left the property, and in the participant family abandoning the property. In relation to those participants, contact was not made to a support worker when the difficulties escalated. However, two made contact with the Project Worker once they became homeless again, for assistance to obtain alternative housing. These three participants had not scaled their likelihood of remaining housed during the third questionnaire interview; however during the second interview two of the participants had scaled themselves at 2 and 10 respectively.

Twenty-two participants stated they had experienced difficulties since being housed as detailed in the graph above. One participant family who had experienced difficulties was not housed at the time the third questionnaire interview was conducted and therefore was not able to scale their ability to remain housed.

In relation to the other 34 participants who stated in the third questionnaire that they would require support, three had not been in their current housing long enough to reflect whether difficulties would be experienced. Two of these three participants had scaled their confidence of remaining housed as very high, and the third scaled it at 5. This particular participant had scaled their confidence at 9 during the previous questionnaire interview, before a transfer took place as a result of threats of violence from extended family members. The 5 scaled at the third questionnaire interview reflected this participant's uncertainty about the likelihood of the extended family locating the new whereabouts, which would need to result in a move to another property.

Of the remaining 31 participants who stated they required support during the third questionnaire interviews, 14 had not experienced difficulties with their tenancies since being housed during the project. Eight of these participants stated they would contact a community agency or worker, three stated they would contact an Aboriginal agency or worker, one would obtain support from family, one would liaise with Homeswest and one family said they would access support from the local church group. All these participant families were very confident of remaining housed.

The other 17 participants who stated they required support had all experienced difficulties in relation to the tenancies. Five of these participants were not very confident of remaining housed, having scaled their likelihood of becoming homeless between 1 and 5. Two of these participants stated they would contact DCD for support, another two would contact a community agency or worker and one stated they would contact an Aboriginal community worker. The other 12 participants who had experienced difficulties were all fairly confident of remaining housed and three stated they would contact an Aboriginal community agency or worker. Four would contact a community agency or worker, two would contact Homeswest and one would contact either Police or family. Four of the participants responded that the difficulties they experienced related to their dissatisfaction with the allocated property in which they were housed.

All rated their likelihood of remaining housed as high, and two nominated that they would require assistance to obtain a transfer to another property. Although they rated their risk of homelessness as very low, two of these participant families were no longer residing in their allocated properties because of the difficulties, and were in effect still homeless. In one case, court action was pending to evict the family as a result of a lack of response to correspondence sent by Homeswest.

A third participant family was dissatisfied with the condition of their Homeswest tenancy and the housing body's reluctance to carry out maintenance because of future redevelopment to be undertaken in the area. During the third questionnaire interview, this family stated they would wait until the redevelopment, when they would likely be offered a transfer. The fourth had not yet applied for a transfer, but still considered there was no risk of homelessness. All but one of these participant families nominated Aboriginal community agencies as the service providers they would contact if they required support. The fourth family stated they would contact other family members or Police, as they had experienced difficulties in relation to family violence.

From information known by the Project Officer through documentation of participants' circumstances, the results of these findings are generally consistent with the reality of the participants' situations. Whether participants who were not very confident of remaining housed actually make contact with the persons they stated they would contact for support to address difficulties remains to be seen, and this will in fact determine whether or not they remain housed.

This point is illustrated by the situation of one of these participant families who had experienced difficulties and scaled their chances of remaining housed at 70%. This family actually abandoned the SAAP property in which they were residing, following the issuing of a termination notice. This family nominated substance abuse counselling and relationship counselling as the types of supports required, and stated they would contact their caseworker if difficulties were experienced. In reality, this family's risk of homelessness was far greater than they stated. They did not access the support offered and therefore were unable to address the issues. Their response, that they would contact their support worker, would appear inconsistent, considering the outcome of their situation. However, other factors need to be taken into account, such as domestic violence issues, substance misuse etc, in assessing the validity of the response in relation to the real situation.

As previously mentioned, 13 participant families stated they did not require support. Six of the participants who stated they did not require support had experienced difficulties, including one family who was already accessing support through SAAP and another who had been referred to SHAP, although the support had not yet commenced at the time of the interview. The family linked into SAAP support considered they were very likely to become homeless again, although they had previously considered they had a very high chance of remaining housed during the second questionnaire interview. The reason for this change was that eviction proceedings were under way at the time of the third questionnaire interview. Although the proceedings did not result in eviction by the end of the project, the tenancy continued to remain at high risk, but the support was still being provided to the tenancy.

Another family who stated they did not require support had some of their children removed from their care by DCD for reasons unknown to the Project Officer. This participant has experienced some difficulties in relation to the property standards and damage by the children, but indicated that no difficulties had been experienced. Similarly, one participant family who stated they did not require support was not residing in the allocated Homeswest property due to racist behaviour by neighbours. This participant had accessed support from the Project Officer to assist with obtaining a transfer to another property, however did not perceive the situation as either experiencing difficulties or requiring support.

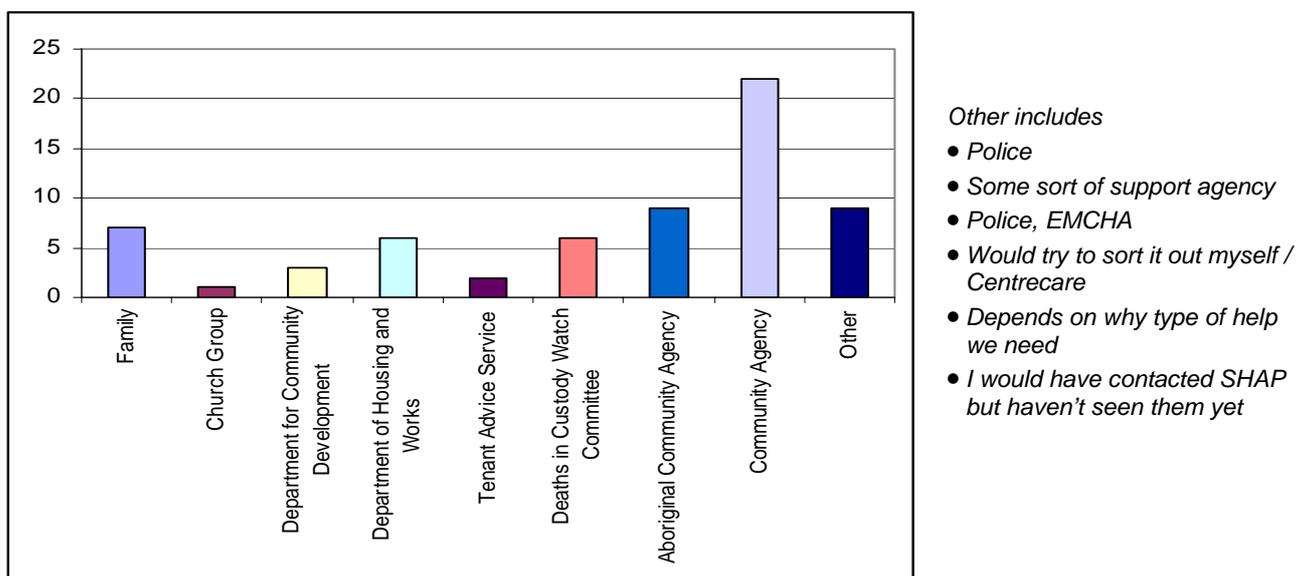
Documentation of information throughout the study and results of questionnaire responses revealed that participants approached those agencies with which they had had dealings in the past. The Project Officer also noted that if participants required support, they would be more likely to contact following a recent visit from the Project Officer. This would indicate that if families have accessed support in the past and found it helpful, they would be more likely to present at that agency for assistance if difficulties were experienced. However, they would be just as receptive to engaging with a new support provider if regular contact was initiated by that provider on an outreach and regular basis.

This is important in addressing Aboriginal homelessness, in that if families are approached by service providers offering support when families sign a tenancy, they are more likely to access the support, and in turn are more likely to contact the support provider if difficulties arise.

### Factors that have Assisted Participants to Access Certain Organisations over Others

In attempting to determine whether participants would access certain organisations over others, a cross-analysis was made of participant responses in the first participant questionnaire and the third participant questionnaire relating to who they would contact if they required support to maintain their tenancies. Only the 47 participants who were housed responded to the question in Questionnaire 3, therefore only these could be cross-referenced. Twenty-two participants stated they would contact a community worker or support agency during third questionnaire interviews, as well as another nine participants who stated they would contact an Aboriginal community agency and a further six participants who nominated Deaths in Custody Watch Committee (four of these participants also said they would contact a community agency in addition to Deaths in Custody Watch Committee). This compares to 20 participants who stated they would contact a non-government support agency or previous support worker during first questionnaire interviews. These results would indicate that the majority of participants had become more aware of community supports by the end of the project than they were when the project commenced.

**Graph 26**  
**Participants Responses regarding who they would contact for support**  
**“Who will you contact if you need support to manage your tenancy if problems arise?”**



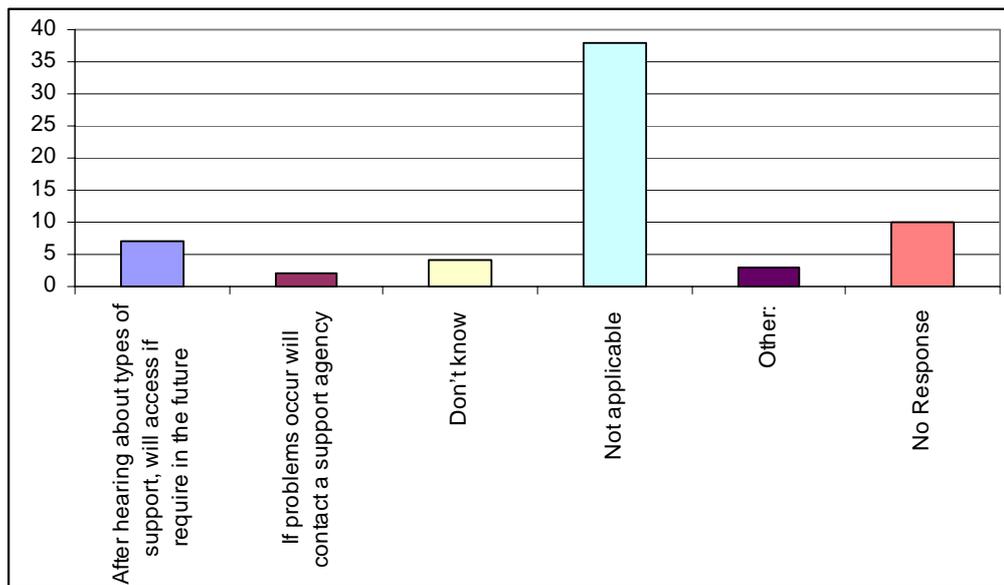
### Factors that Lead Families to Seek Assistance

The study sought to highlight the factors which may lead homeless families to seek assistance to access and/or maintain accommodation. However, when this question was asked of participants, it failed to elicit appropriate responses, as Graph 27 below shows.

**Graph 27**

**Participant Responses relating to requirements to seek support if they have not had contact or have had unsatisfactory contact in the past.**

***“If you have been able to ask these agencies for assistance in the past or you have had a bad experience with these agencies, what would need to happen for you to seek the type of support you need...?”***



*Other includes:*

- Got negative response
- Made to feel bad with approached DCD
- Only as a last resort

Control group families were also asked what would need to happen for them to seek assistance, if they required support. Some responded that the support would need to be outreach support; others stated that more information was required about support services, and how to access them. One family stated they would seek support if things became desperate. A full transcript of control group responses appears in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Control Group Responses as to what would prompt families to seek future support**

<i><b>“If you have not been able to ask these agencies for assistance in the past or you have had a bad experience with these agencies, what would need to happen for you to seek the type of support...?”</b></i>	<b>Total</b>
Access to services - family member works in welfare	1
Changes need to be made and I need some help to do this	1
Don't require support at the moment	1
For a counsellor of the agencies to provide info and a little bit of help in any area	1
I know now that I need support	1
I would like support to be by visits at home. The support person would help out HW and work out with me what I needed	1
If we were desperate  we would ask again for assistance	1
Info about what services available	1
More info about services	1
More support and caring (really love their jobs). More transport  counselling  help when parents and children aren't here	1
No bad experiences - would use again	1
No bad experiences were found	1
Not familiar with agencies in Perth	1
Not sure	1
Now that I know about them I would contact them if I needed support	1
Information on how to access these services	1
People need to be informed of the services. Waiting systems need reviewing to allow people to be seen	1
SHAP support  HW to listen to what I really wanted. Needed safety so I left HW. HW never assisted me to find alternative housing when I was experiencing DV from my ex-partner.	1
Someone to advocate for me	1
The agencies need to show more support and let people know what they can or can't do	1
To do their job properly - don't stereotype people	1
To get to know them and have info	1
N/A	2
Blank	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

The control group responses indicate that changes need to occur within the supported housing sector if homeless families are to access the support. The major response here was that more information needs to be provided so people are aware of the types of services available if they do require assistance. It also indicated that support services would need to be operating more efficiently if homeless Aboriginal families are to access them.

One family suggested that workers need to do their job properly and not stereotype people, another stated that agencies should be more supportive, while another suggested that waiting lists should be reviewed so homeless families can actually be assisted.

Documentation of participant circumstances during the life of the study also revealed that Aboriginal families tend to access support when the situation reaches crisis point, and then only from agencies they have used in the past.

During all interviews with participants, information was provided on available services and support agencies which could assist with various requirements. Information leaflets were printed and handed out to participants with names of agencies and services and contact numbers. The Project Officer also handed out pamphlets, forms and other necessary paraphernalia as deemed necessary to assist participants to maintain their housing or access either accommodation and/or supports when they were homeless.

Even with all that information provided, it is interesting to note that links were made, or forms completed, with almost every participant at each interview. That would indicate that the issues impacting on Aboriginal families in relation to homelessness cannot necessarily be addressed by the provision of information. At the very beginning of the project, and then again at each meeting thereafter, links were made for participants to access services and supports, and the same information was provided several times to assist participants to address certain issues and difficulties. Some were as straightforward as helping families to complete Centrepay forms so their gas or electricity would not be disconnected, and negotiating payments with those companies to avoid immediate disconnection. However, the impact of not doing this could have been detrimental to participants' continued housing.

The participants in this study were almost all undergoing some sort of housing crisis when they were initially referred. Crisis intervention included assisting clients with practical issues, which they were not able to carry out on their own due to the overwhelming nature of their situations. Participants themselves have identified this as one of the solutions to preventing further homelessness once housing has been accessed.

During the third questionnaire interviews, which asked - *What would make it easier for Aboriginal families who have experienced homelessness to cope with a new tenancy?*, 19 participants responded that assistance with Centrepay forms to address utility bills when signing the tenancy agreement would make it easier. Fifteen participants suggested that support would help families to cope with a new tenancy. Others suggested financial counselling (3), counselling (2), information about local services (2) and financial assistance (2).

Overwhelmingly, participants believed that support to address bills, and general support would be effective in helping families to maintain tenancies. Service providers agree that this is what is needed to assist this particular client group to remain housed, and some have suggested outreach support. Outreach support as provided by the Project Officer during this study, although it was limited due to the requirements of the funding agreement and the volume of families assisted, has been shown to be extremely beneficial in helping most of the participant families to remain housed. What has been most useful has been the ability, through the participant alerts set up to monitor support needs, to visit the participant families when difficulties have been experienced, so that issues could be addressed by the families in ways they found helpful.

## **Barriers to the Maintenance of Accommodation**

During the course of the study, questions were asked of participants and the control group of families to determine the factors that have inhibited them in the maintenance of their accommodation. The responses also allowed for links and referrals for support to be made, and to allow an analysis of those factors.

In addition, information documented throughout the study, in response to participant interviews and information received from the alerts set up on the computer systems of the Memorandum Partners, allowed for factors that inhibit families from maintaining their accommodation to come to light.

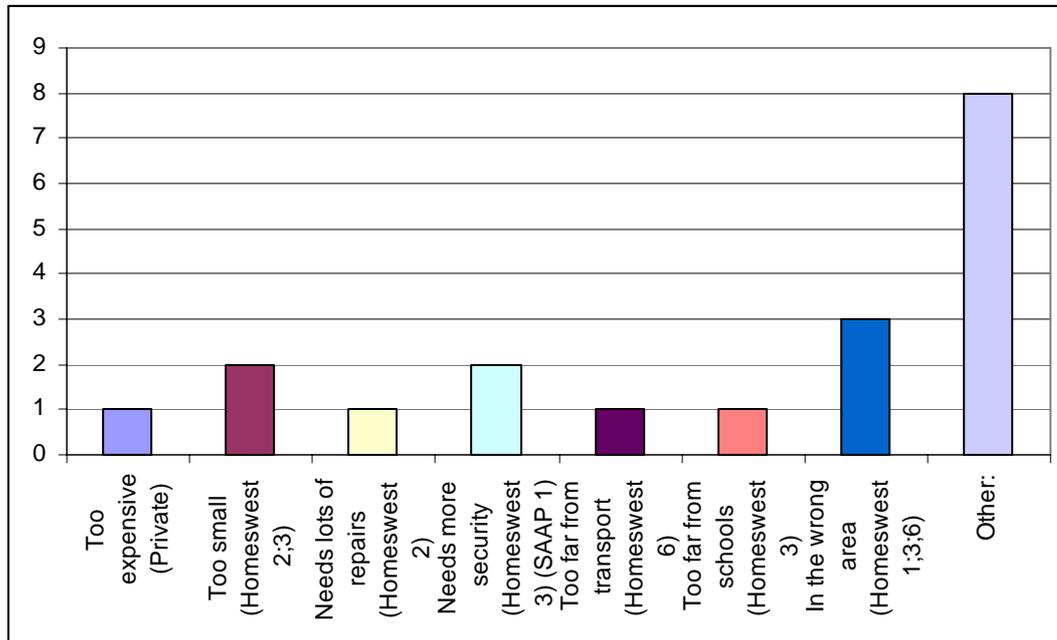
Findings from the first round of questionnaires would suggest that a number of participants were unaware of the existence of support services in the community prior to participating in this research. Where participants had been aware of them, previous experience of the high demand and relative shortage of those services had prevented them from accessing them. This limited knowledge of available supports is the major factor inhibiting Aboriginal families in the ongoing maintenance of their housing.

Notwithstanding this particular finding, all participants in this project were made aware of existing supports and services and provided with resource sheets with relevant numbers and information when interviewed for the initial questionnaires. Throughout the project, all participants were also encouraged to contact the Project Officer if they required assistance or were experiencing any difficulties. However, it was found that in many instances participants did not access supports or contact the Project Officer when they required assistance with a particular issue. At times, participants were able to be linked to supports following interviews, but they had experienced difficulties without addressing the issue until this actually became evident during an interview. This would suggest that another major factor inhibiting families from maintaining their housing relates to the occurrence of outreach supports and the relationships which can be developed with outreach support workers.

Another factor which became evident as a result of the alerts on the computer system of DCD relates to financial management and the impacts of such due to unforeseen events, particularly attendance at funerals. When participants were required to attend a funeral, which is a cultural requirement within the Aboriginal community, they were often away from their properties for extended periods of time. This was in part due to their inability to access funds to return home after expending their income on travel, appropriate clothing and financial contributions to the internment. Some participants were able to access limited assistance through the Department, however decisions whether to provide assistance to these families appeared arbitrary and often depended on the officer's interpretation of the policy or situation.

When families were away from their properties for extended periods, whether due to attendance at funerals, their inability to maintain utilities accounts or due to family or domestic violence, houses were at risk of being broken into and damaged. This issue impacted on the family's continued tenancy, as it then became difficult for them to state when the property was damaged and by whom, which resulted in charges of tenant liability.

**Graph 28**  
**Participant Responses as to dissatisfaction with housing allocation**  
**Reason why participants were not happy with allocation**



*Other includes*

- *I live in a duplex at the rear and feel closed in - also people are in my yard inside the gates to come to the front door. (Homeswest 7)*
- *Too close to main hwy and lots of cars speed in this street. (SAAP 2)*
- *Too closed in, people too close in these units. (Homeswest 5)*
- *Too far from family support (Homeswest 6)*
- *Too large (SAAP 1)*
- *Too noisy with factories across the road. There's a spirit at the property preventing us from settling. (Homeswest 4)*
- *Yard too small & and only sand, no garden. Lots of racism in the area & and we have to move. (Homeswest 1)*
- *Frightened of getting evicted (Private)*

During the course of the study, requests for transfers by participants who had been housed during the project became problematic for project staff. In keeping with the action research principles of the study, questions were devised in the second and third questionnaires to determine whether participants were satisfied with the properties in which they had been housed, in order that research staff could determine the extent to which this factor impacted on participants' abilities to maintain their accommodation.

During the second questionnaire interviews, participants were asked whether they considered their housing appropriate for their needs. Twelve of the 45 participants housed at the time of the interviews answered "no". These 12 families included eight of the 26 families housed in Homeswest tenancies, three of the 16 families in transitional accommodation and one of the three families in private accommodation.

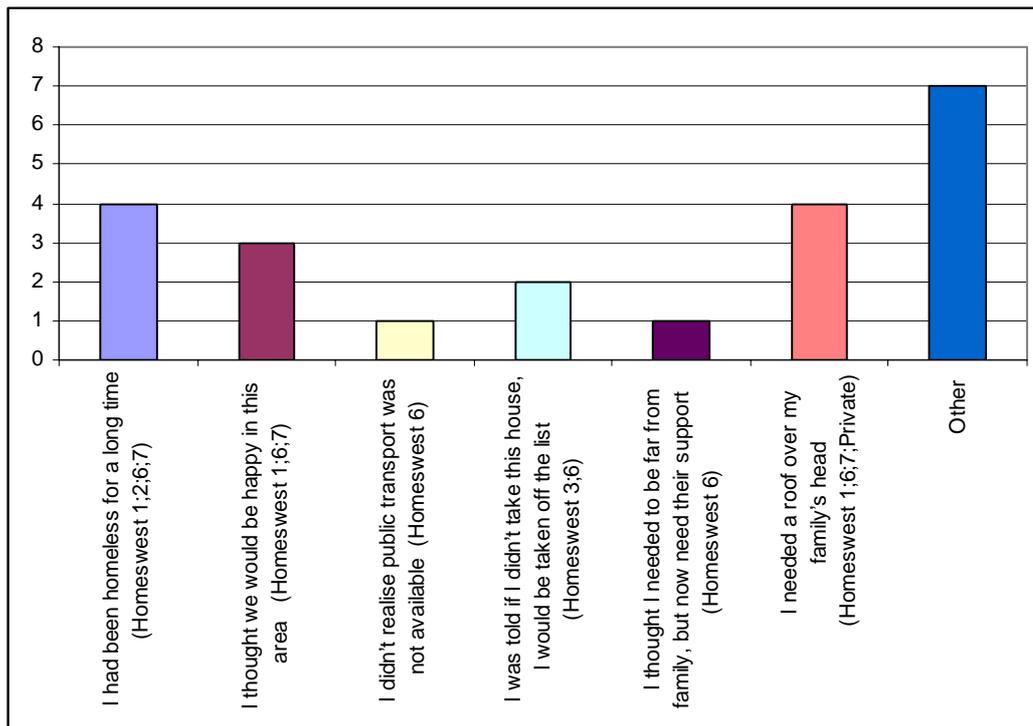
In addition, an analysis of third questionnaire responses sought to investigate the reasons for dissatisfaction with allocated housing. Participants were asked whether they were happy with their housing and, for those who were not, the type of accommodation they were in and why they had accepted the allocation.

Results from this analysis revealed that of the 52 participants interviewed, 10 or 5.2% were not happy with their housing. Of those 10, seven were in Homeswest properties, two were in SAAP tenancies and one was in private rental accommodation. The reasons given for participants' dissatisfaction with their properties are outlined in Graph 29 below. Please note that multiple responses may be selected by each participant.

When asked why they accepted the property, four participants stated they had been homeless a long time, another four said they needed a roof over their heads, while three other families stated that they thought they would be happy with the area stipulated. A complete correlation of participants' responses to this question appears in Graph 29. Please note that multiple reasons may be selected by each participant.

A discrepancy of the questionnaire also became evident, in that if participants responded to a previous question that they were happy with the area in which they lived, they were not required to respond to this question. Hence, there are two additional comments not related to the participants who stated they were not happy with their current property, as they indicated they were not comfortable living in that neighbourhood. As these two responses are also relevant to this question, they have been included as comments from 'Other' in the specified graph.

**Graph 29**  
**Participant Responses on reasons for accepting current property**  
**"Why did you accept your current property?"**



Other Includes:

- Had no other choice until Homeswest housed me (Private)
- I had no valid reason to decline (Homeswest 7)
- I was told if I wanted a transfer I would need to stay in the property for 12 months at least (Homeswest 6)
- I was moved here 3 years ago to this Emergency House due to family violence (Homeswest 3)
- Took what we could get
- I had no choice and knew that I wouldn't be offered another property if I didn't take it (Homeswest 1)
- We wanted this area so my ex-partner could be close to his work but we've since separated
- I didn't know people were so racist here

It must be pointed out that six of these 10 participants were initially happy with their tenancies when this question was raised during the second questionnaire interviews. It was not until certain events took place, or they became more familiar with the negative aspects of the property or the area that their dissatisfaction emerged.

Two of the participants housed in Homeswest tenancies who were dissatisfied with their tenancies failed to reside in their properties and applied for transfers to other areas. Although these two families had been allocated properties, they effectively remained homeless, residing with other family in overcrowded conditions, which undoubtedly impacted on those tenancies.

The two families in transitional accommodation who were unhappy with their housing both remained in their tenancies. Both these families were aware transitional accommodation was only a temporary measure and therefore were willing to wait until they could move into permanent accommodation allocated by the public housing body.

The participant who was dissatisfied with the private rental accommodation abandoned the property due to an inability to manage the issues. However, advocacy by the Project Officer resulted in a Homeswest property offer being made within two weeks of the participant once again becoming homeless.

This data would indicate that the location of properties for Aboriginal families is a crucial factor in assisting them to maintain their housing. On several occasions, participants have preferred to return to their previous homeless status than abide undesirable conditions in relation to their housing. These undesirable conditions could include inappropriate location, lack of available resources in the area, size of the property, or the existence of enemies within close proximity. It is therefore important, in attempting to address Aboriginal homelessness, that sensitivity is exercised in allocation of properties for Aboriginal families.

Forty participant families were linked into *housing* supports during, or immediately prior to the commencement of the project. Of those 40 families, two had opted to discontinue support and were able to maintain positive tenancies. Two other families were linked into supports but were later evicted and remained homeless and unsupported for a time.

Participants linked to SHAP or SAAP programs were also asked what had been difficult about that type of support. Seven participants stated that nothing had been difficult about the support. Some participants found it difficult to keep appointments, while other have communicated their dissatisfaction with the support, the condition of the property (SAAP), and the lack of support. One family responded that nothing had been helpful, and another five families stated they had not been visited by a caseworker since they moved to their current tenancies or had been referred to a support service. These responses are dealt with under a separate heading, **Other Findings**. Table 2 below, provides a correlation of what participants found helpful about housing support services.

**Table 2**  
**Participant Responses as to difficulties experienced in SAAP/SHAP**

<b>“What has been difficult about being on that type of program?”</b>	<b>Total</b>
▪ <i>All the people that come into the house and all the rules. Sometimes people stay overnight but there’s no-one else living here</i>	1
▪ <i>As above (haven’t commenced yet, referred today)</i>	1
▪ <i>At one stage I felt I had to justify all my actions, but now I have a different caseworker and all is fine. I felt I wasn’t being believed and was always questioned</i>	1
▪ <i>At that time I was staying with my brother while I was homeless and I found it difficult to meet because there were always visitors around</i>	1
▪ <i>Forget about the appointment times and miss the caseworker</i>	1
▪ <i>I asked the caseworker to help me get some counselling, but she still hasn’t</i>	1
▪ <i>I have at times felt the program is intrusive but I’ve realised they are here to help and I now let my caseworker know of any problems so she can help</i>	1
▪ <i>I’m nervous that I will talk about something I don’t want to have to deal with. It’s difficult to trust someone enough to tell them things that have bothered me in the past</i>	1
▪ <i>In the last SAAP house I was in we got no support whatsoever. With this SAAP house it’s been good to have the support. Before we had no-one to talk to and there was a lot of problems, which made us feel even more isolated</i>	1
▪ <i>It was difficult to keep meetings with the caseworker</i>	1
▪ <i>It’s sometimes difficult to keep the appointments because certain things come up in the meantime</i>	1
▪ <i>Nothing</i>	4
▪ <i>Nothing except that I haven’t really had any support</i>	1
▪ <i>Nothing it’s helpful as long...</i>	1
▪ <i>Nothing really</i>	1
▪ <i>One time the caseworker did not keep to an arrangement made to pay a gas bill</i>	1
▪ <i>The caseworker from SHAP wants to involve DCD in every meeting</i>	1
▪ <i>The interior of the SAAP property was unpainted and the floor tiles were in very poor condition</i>	1
▪ <i>They are sometimes too busy to help and they have told us if we need anything to ask but when we ask they can’t help</i>	1
▪ <i>Trying to keep the family away before SHAP visits</i>	1
▪ <i>N/A. (support had not commenced)</i>	1

In relation to the family who responded that nothing was helpful, it must be pointed out that the family was involved in eviction proceedings from their SAAP tenancy at the time, which may have affected the way in which the question was answered. The eviction did not proceed, and support continued to be provided to the tenancy in question. In fact, this particular family received extremely intensive support, both before and after being housed by the SAAP provider, and there have, at times, been up to five agency staff involved with the family because of the complex nature of the issues impacting on the tenancy.

One of the limitations of a social research study of this type is the subjectivity of responses by participants, which may at times be dependent on what is happening in the family's life at the time the interviews take place, as this particular response illustrates. In this case, several support agencies were involved in assisting the family to remain housed, and the SAAP agency continued to assist the family to address issues impacting on the tenancy. However, the response provided, only focused on the negative aspects of occurrences at the time, such as the eviction proceedings and the agency's refusal to accept a continuation of the anti-social behaviour emanating from the tenancy.

Hence, one important factor which can negatively impact on the ability of some Aboriginal families to maintain their housing, is the disinclination to accept responsibility for actions, whether their own or those of visitors, which can impact on their tenancies.

Another factor which has been highlighted during this study is the differentials in levels of support provided between support agencies, and the varying response times taken by agencies in assessing and meeting client needs. However, if a DHW referral is made to the SHAP provider, the onus is on DHW to inform the tenant that the program is full and there may be a delay in the assessment being undertaken.

One SAAP client indicated no caseworker had visited the tenancy since the client had taken up occupancy a month previously. The participant indicated she was unaware of who her allocated caseworker was and in fact stated that a tenancy agreement had not even been signed, nor had she been asked to complete an ongoing property condition report.

Four other responses relating to this question referred to SHAP support. The first related to a participant referred to SHAP immediately preceding the third questionnaire interview, which had understandably not yet been processed. That particular family had indicated they did not require support at the previous questionnaire interview, and an urgent visit was made to the property by the Project Officer in response to a Homeswest notification that difficulties were being experienced with the tenancy. In this instance, a request for SHAP was made but no time had elapsed since the referral was submitted. However support did take place as required.

The other three responses related to SHAP referrals which had not been processed by the Homeswest accommodation managers. In one of these cases, internal staff transfers within Homeswest resulted in the referral being misplaced in the system, despite several enquiries by the Project Officer regarding the referral and the request that it be processed as soon as possible.

In nine instances where SHAP support was linked to participants' tenancies, eight had been referrals requested by the Project Officer to DHW. However, in all cases the support was not provided to the extent required by the families as they had indicated during interviews and it was not until follow ups were made by research staff that the processes improved in some cases.

In four cases, families were recommended for SHAP but the Accommodation Manager did not process the referrals. This resulted in difficulties being experienced by all families, including one who vacated their tenancy following severe family violence. In this latter case, a referral was made following the first participant questionnaire interview and not followed up, by the Project Officer, until a later date as it was presumed the referral would be processed as required. As there was no contact from the housing body in response to alerts set up at the commencement of the project, difficulties did not become known to the Project Officer until attempts were made to undertake the second participant questionnaire interview. At that time, it was discovered the tenant had abandoned the property following a period of domestic violence there. Subsequent enquiries revealed that the SHAP referral had not been processed.

In relation to a second participant family, a referral to SHAP was made, and the referral was processed as required. However the SHAP provider did not contact the family for over four months and have since had severe difficulties contacting the family to complete the assessment. In this particular case, the participant family was on the verge of eviction following numerous anti-social complaints received in relation to the children at the tenancy. This family had been transferred from another Homeswest property where a SHAP referral had also been made. The family was housed in the property for two months before they requested a transfer; however the SHAP agency had the referral on hold due to the full capacity of the program, and failed to meet the family to commence the assessment. DHW also failed to inform the tenant or the NFHP Project Officer that the SHAP service provider was unable to commence the assessment at that time. By the time the agency was able to assess the family, the transfer application had been made and the agency deemed the assessment unnecessary.

This is not to say that the onus is on the part of the service provider to ensure the assessment is completed. In fact, in most cases, appointments were made by the service provider and not kept by the family, although the tenancy has been at risk since the participant occupied this and a previous property. However, there is a possibility that if contact had been made immediately after the referral was received, the issues may not have escalated to the point of imminent eviction. Several follow up actions by the Project Officer with both DHW and the SHAP provider revealed that the referral had been put on hold as the service was full at the time. The service provider would not discuss the issue with the Project Officer, despite a signed consent form from the participant. Once it was decided the assessment would proceed, difficulties were then experienced by the SHAP provider in setting up appointments with the tenant.

In the third instance, the SHAP referral was not processed by the accommodation manager, due to the full capacity of the SHAP service. The initial SHAP referral had been made some five months previously when the participant was transferred to the current location. A SHAP referral had been made at the last address, however because the service in that area was also full, the assessment had not commenced by the time the participant was transferred. The second referral was only processed following requests by the Project Officer when it was discovered at the third questionnaire interview that SHAP had not commenced working with the participant.

The referral was then put on hold by the service provider because the service was operating at full capacity at that time. Follow-up contact by the Project Officer eventually resulted in the assessment being carried out some five weeks after the enquiries commenced, and seven months after the initial request was made when the tenant was transferred to that location.

In the fourth instance, a SHAP referral was made following the second questionnaire interview. It was discovered following the third questionnaire interview that the referral had not been processed by the Homeswest accommodation manager, who stated that a referral had not been received and that the issues had been resolved. The referral had been faxed by the Project Officer to the previous accommodation manager, who had failed to notify the new accommodation manager. This was later carried out following a further request to process the referral.

In two other cases, families living in medium term transitional accommodation did not receive the support they identified as needed. One family had been in their SAAP property for about a month and reported that no caseworker had visited the property at all. In fact, this family was not even aware who the allocated caseworker was to be.

The second family had been in the SAAP property for over a year when referred to the project. At the time of the initial questionnaire interview, the Project Officer enquired whether the participant had a priority listing with the public housing body, to which the participant responded they had. However, when the interview took place for the second round, the Project Officer discovered that an application had not been made by the SAAP provider for a priority listing. Several requests were made to the SAAP provider to undertake this, and advice was provided in relation to protocols set up between SAAP and Homeswest. The application had still not been completed when the final round of interviews took place. Liaison with the public housing body elicited advice to direct the participant family to apply directly to Homeswest, rather than through the SAAP provider. By the end of the project, the family had been housed through a head lease arrangement with another support provider.

In the last two cases where support was not provided as requested, families were referred to non-government Aboriginal agencies for assistance. However, according to the participants, support ceased after the initial assistance was provided. In both cases, the families had indicated they required ongoing support. In these two instances, the support given was for garden maintenance to elderly couples on disability pensions.

### **Tenancies That Failed During the Study**

Twenty-three participants accessed transitional accommodation support and/or accommodation, and another five participants were already residing in that type of accommodation throughout the life of the project. Twelve other participants were supported in SHAP after they were housed in their own Homeswest tenancies, including one case where SHAP support commenced in a private rental property whilst the participant awaited a Homeswest priority allocation.

In all, forty participant families accessed some type of housing support during the project. Even with support, however, eight of these tenancies failed and the participants once again became homeless, although in two cases, the support was not in place or was extremely limited. Of the eight supported tenancies which failed, four of the participant families were able to be linked to other housing during the study following a period of homelessness.

One family was later re-housed in a second SAAP property with a different SAAP provider, and has been able to maintain the tenancy successfully and engage support well. During the initial participant questionnaire, this participant had stated that they only required emotional support. However, the first SAAP tenancy was located in a semi-rural location and the isolation, lack of public transport and violent behaviour of other Aboriginal families in the community eventually led to the participant family choosing to return to homelessness rather than endure the conditions they were experiencing. Furthermore, the participant considered the support attached to the tenancy to be minimal and had difficulties negotiating additional support.

The second participant family was able to be assisted to access private rental accommodation, although support was unable to be linked to the tenancy due to the lack of such support services up until the project end. This participant became homeless after being evicted from their Homeswest tenancy, staying with other family members and generally moving around for several months, occasionally contacting the Project Officer for assistance. An unsuccessful application was made to a private real estate agency, followed by the participant's (justifiable) refusal of another private property. The participant was later able to be housed in another property through the same real estate agency with the assistance of the DHW Homeless Helpline. However, due to the project conclusion, it is now unknown whether this participant is successfully maintaining the tenancy.

The third participant was housed under the SAAP protocols set up between DHW and the SAAP sector in a Homeswest tenancy, after leaving their SAAP property voluntarily to be closer to family. This participant remained supported externally by the SAAP provider during that period. The participant family remained homeless for nine months before being offered and accepting a Homeswest property in an area of choice.

The fourth participant family was assisted by a service provider to access a unit in the private rental market. This participant family had been housed in a SAAP property following eviction from their Homeswest tenancy shortly after the commencement of the project. They remained in that SAAP tenancy for six months until leaving the property following serious difficulties relating to visitors, property damage and anti-social behaviour, which resulted in several breaches, an eviction notice and court proceedings (the participant left the property to stay with relatives in the country and did not attend court). The participant then stayed in refuge accommodation and with extended family members during a seven month period of homelessness, before being supported to access housing through another refuge. The family has spent little time in the latest tenancy, being away in the country for extended periods. There is no support attached to their private rental tenancy, however the participant is able to access support whenever it is needed.

The other four tenancies which failed during the project, and where the participants were not re-housed, had all been linked to housing supports. As already stated, in one case the support had not yet commenced (five months after being referred). A SHAP referral was made by the Project Officer in response to the family's request for that type of support at the first questionnaire interview, however the referral did not proceed and the family abandoned the property following an incident of severe family violence.

In relation to the other three tenancies, all three participant families were housed in SAAP accommodation. All had also stated during the first participant questionnaires that they would require support, although one had only stated they would require help to minimise complaints, and another had only required help to access appropriate housing. The third family stated they would require financial counselling, help with parenting issues and help with maintaining the property. In all three cases, the participants began to experience difficulties with visitors impacting on the tenancy. In all three cases, the difficulties were induced either by illicit drug use (in two of the tenancies), or alcohol, which greatly minimised the participants' abilities to engage support to address the issues. Although support was linked to these tenancies, the participants did not seem willing to access that support and therefore the tenancies failed. All three participants left the tenancies and returned to homelessness rather than address the issues.

The Project Officer also provided support to 12 participant families who were not linked to any type of housing supports<sup>3</sup>, as a result of interviews which revealed that support was required. The support included links to access furniture, emergency relief, assistance to complete and process Centrepay forms for utility accounts or other debts, referrals to support agencies and liaison to Homeswest or private rental agencies. Two of these tenancies failed and although they had *not* been linked to housing supports, because they were within the private sector, support was attempted through referrals to other agencies.

In one instance, the participant family was housed in transitional accommodation through a DHW head leasing arrangement. Head leasing comes about when DHW provides an additional property for a specific family to a non-government housing provider, which manages both the tenancy and the property.

At the initial participant questionnaire interview, this family indicated that they would not require support to manage their tenancy once housed, but would require financial assistance and counselling. The family was able to access a private rental property with the assistance of the Project Worker and other non-government support agencies. At that time, the support agencies indicated they would continue to support the family once housed, although this only appeared to occur when the participant family instigated the contact.

The participant family had remained in the property four months before leaving following instances of feuding with other families in the area. Also at that time, the real estate agency commenced eviction proceedings due to non-payment of rent (which had been left unpaid almost since the family occupied the tenancy).

During the second questionnaire interview the family indicated that they would require support to maintain their tenancy. One of the support agencies had then again become involved when the family approached them for assistance to lodge an enquiry to Homeswest when they were asked to vacate the private rental property. The support agency was not aware of the termination notice, as the family had stated they left the property due to its unsuitable location.

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<sup>3</sup> Outreach housing support services did not exist at the time the study was conducted. However, outreach programs to provide support to private rental tenancies were funded by the Western Australian Department for Community Development in October 2003, to be delivered by three non-government agencies within the metropolitan area of Perth, as well as other services for regional areas. At the time of writing this report in December 2003, none of the metropolitan services had commenced supporting clients

This agency had provided written support when the family was attempting to access public housing, and did so again when the family left the property and became homeless once more. No other support was provided while the family was housed, despite informing the Project Officer that support would be provided.

During the subsequent five month period of homelessness, the participant family stayed with extended family members (in a Homeswest tenancy) in a rural location while the Project Officer liaised with DHW to access alternative housing. This eventually occurred near the end of the project, when a housing support agency agreed to head lease a property for this family, and provide support to assist them to maintain the tenancy. However, two months later the family had still not occupied the tenancy, or signed the lease agreement, and continued to live in overcrowded conditions with other family while the house remained vacant.

In the second case, the participant family had accessed a private rental indirectly (the participant's ex-partner paid the bond and took out the lease, but only remained at the tenancy for a very short period) and was housed there for four months before experiencing difficulties in dealing with inappropriate behaviour from the landlord. Consequently, the participant spent extended periods away from the property and then experienced difficulties paying the rent.

Other issues impacted on this family's ability to maintain the tenancy, including difficulties with parenting and discipline issues, domestic violence incidences, substance misuse, and financial management. The family was linked to some support through DCD and Juvenile Justice; however the support was office-based and therefore limited, given the needs of this family.

The family eventually left the property to avoid further intrusion by the landlord, who took possession of all the participant's furniture and belongings, possibly because of the rent owing on the property. When the difficulties were initially experienced, the Project Officer encouraged the participant to apply for a Homeswest priority listing, which eventually occurred after several weeks. Two weeks after leaving the private rental and becoming homeless again, the participant was offered, and accepted, a Homeswest tenancy.

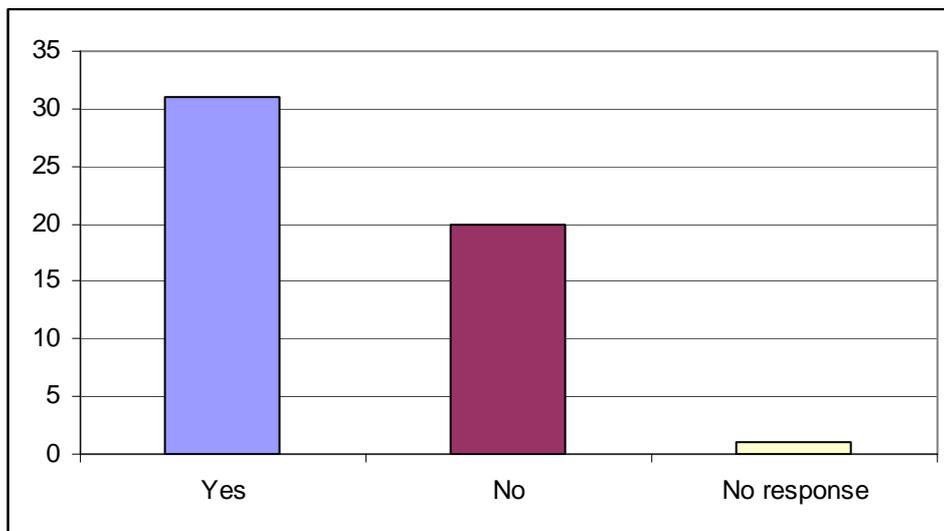
## Gaps in Support for Participant Families

### Emergency Housing

The study highlighted the need for additional and appropriate emergency accommodation. Twenty of the 52 participant families interviewed for the final round of interviews were not able to access emergency accommodation at all while they were homeless, as the graph below shows:

**Graph 30**

**Participant Responses relating to ability to access emergency accommodation**  
*“Were you able to access emergency accommodation while you were homeless?”*

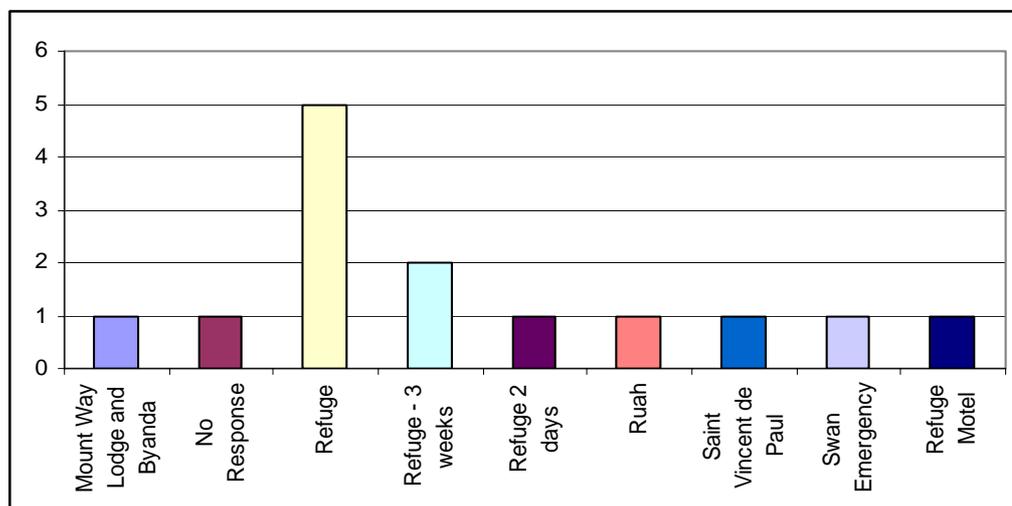


Similarly, half the control group families interviewed were unable to access emergency accommodation while they were homeless, as the graph below indicates.

**Graph 31**

**Control Group Responses relating to ability to access emergency accommodation**

*“Have you been able to access emergency accommodation while you were homeless (Yes 15, No 15), and if so, where?”*



Factors influencing whether participants were able to access emergency accommodation in refuges included whether the family was a victim of domestic or family violence, or whether there were any beds available. Alternatively, if the access was a result of contact to DCD, whether the officer in question was willing to make attempts to place the family in a motel, or caravan park, for a period of time.

In relation to the availability of beds in refuges, interviews with some participants who have stayed in refuge accommodation have revealed that their refuges were often almost empty while they were there, but families were still turned away. Two participants stated that they had overheard a refuge worker give a zero bed count to Crisis Care, however there were at least two units available.

During control group questionnaire interviews, the Project Officer was able to telephone a refuge directly to obtain emergency accommodation for the family, after a call to Crisis Care had revealed that there were no beds available at all.

Some participants stated that they weren't able to access refuge accommodation because they had not experienced DV. They believed that if they had lied they may have been able to get assistance. Some participants suggested that other families lie about their circumstances in order to get a break from their partners by staying in a refuge.

An interesting observation emerged during the course of the study in relation to household types which could be linked to the scarcity of emergency accommodation for homeless Aboriginal families. Twelve participants who had initially identified as 'person with children', as opposed to 'person with a partner and children', were found to be partnered at later interviews after they had accessed housing. The reasons for this were not sought from the families during the study, however in 10 cases, it was recorded that the participant family was either at a refuge when initially interviewed, or trying to access refuge accommodation.

It could be strongly argued that the absence of emergency accommodation for families in Perth is leading some Aboriginal families to access crisis accommodation designated for women escaping domestic or family violence by presenting to housing bodies as such. If this is the case, the issue needs to be addressed and appropriate emergency places made available for homeless families, including partnered families, as the support needs of this group are very distinct from those of women escaping family or domestic violence.

### **Emergency Relief**

It would also appear that decisions about assistance to homeless families are at times arbitrary and the outcome of requests for assistance depends on the officer's interpretation of the policy.

Some participants have been able to access removal assistance when they have been housed, while at other times DCD has informed that families do not fit the criteria for such assistance. One DCD officer telephoned the Project Officer in response to the participant alerts, after a participant presented for assistance to move furniture to their new property. The DCD officer stated that the participant would not be able to access this, as they had been in a share situation. The particular participant had been evicted from their Homeswest tenancy several months earlier and had been staying with friends and relatives while they were homeless. It was explained that the participant had been homeless, not in a share situation, and the funds were then made available.

This would indicate that even when trying to access emergency relief, participants are more likely to be successful if a community agency is supporting them to do this.

### **Housing Support Processes**

Some problems with SHAP processes were highlighted during this study. At times, referrals are made when difficulties have already escalated. In addition, when five of the twelve participants asked to be referred to the program by the Project Officer, the referral did not initially take place and follow up contacts were necessary in order for this to occur. On two occasions, the referral did not proceed for over four months and in another instance six months, as no record could be found of the referral form signed by the client. In the latter case, the delay may have actually contributed to the participant family's eventual return to homelessness. At other times, Homeswest Accommodation Managers were reluctant to refer to the program, for reasons unknown.

SHAP providers interviewed during the study agree that some families, especially those housed through the DHW Homeless Helpline, require immediate intensive support, which the program is not set up to provide. On the other hand, where referrals were made, some SHAP providers did not commence the assessment process for up to four months because the services were operating at full capacity and the urgency was not made apparent when the referral was made.

These findings point to a need for service providers to review their policies, and for funding bodies to provide resources for more appropriate services. Housing service providers agree that changes need to be made to existing emergency accommodation services. Suggestions have included:

- the establishment of refuges for larger families
- widening the entry requirements so adolescent boys can accompany their parent in a refuge
- men with children need to have access
- more refuges for Aboriginal women escaping DV
- more flexibility and adequate resourcing to allow for extended outreach and support when families leave these services.

Additionally, when DHW make a SHAP referral and the program is full, DHW need to advise the tenant and make alternative suggestions for support options until an assessment is able to be made.

Some service providers have suggested that refuges for Aboriginal women should be culturally specific and run by Aboriginal people. However, participants do not necessarily agree with this stance.

## Other Findings

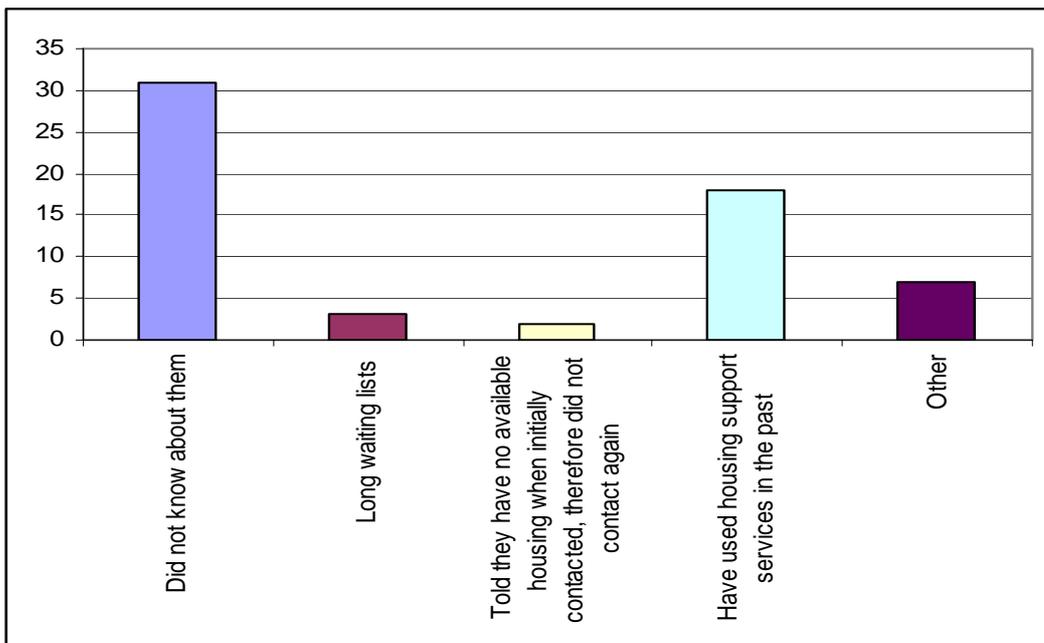
### Awareness of Community Services

In order to gauge whether Aboriginal families were aware of housing support services within the community, a question was asked of them in the first participant questionnaire, enquiring why they had not used these services, if they had not. Thirty-one participants out of the total families interviewed, or 63.27%, answered they did not know about such services. Only eighteen of the sixty-one participant households responded that they have used housing and support services before. Graph 32 shows the responses from the participant group.

**Graph 32**

### Participant Responses as to what deterred them from approaching housing support services in the past

*“If you have not used any housing support services in the past, what stopped you from approaching these types of services?”*

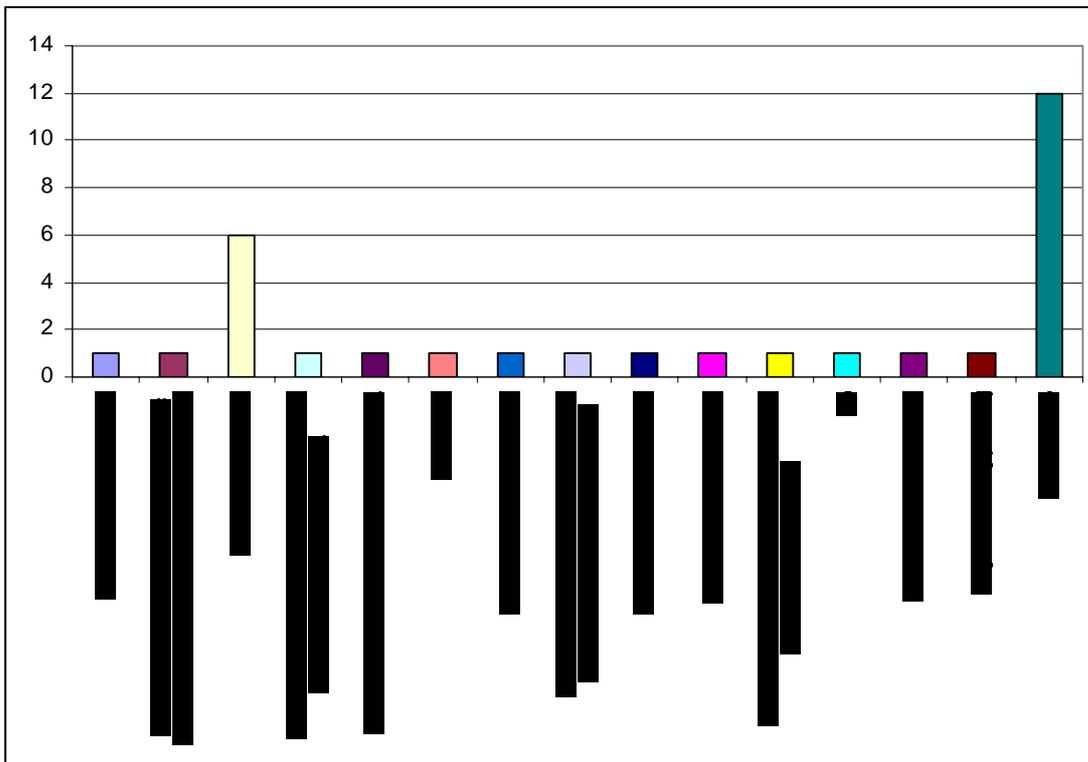


*Other Includes:*

- *Did not require help before*
- *Have not used them except Centrecare and YES housing*
- *Gave up*
- *Limited knowledge of support services*
- *Limited knowledge of resources*
- *Not available in country areas*
- *Not had opportunity*

Control group families were also asked the same question. The findings from these responses were quite different from those of the participant group. As can be seen from Graph 33, ten of the thirty-one control group families interviewed, or 32%, also stated they were unaware of housing support services. Sixteen of these families, or 52%, had used housing services before, or knew of them, but four of these families did not believe they would be helpful because of past experiences.

**Graph 33**  
**Control Group Responses as to what deterred them from approaching housing support services in the past**  
*“If you have not used any housing support services in the past, what stopped you from approaching these types of services?”*



These findings are almost a reversal of those of the participant group, which may be due to several factors. It may be that the differences stem from the distinct sources of referrals for both groups of families – a higher number of the control group referrals were received from refuges and SAAP providers, whereas many more participant referrals came from Homeswest officers, the Homeless Helpline and DCD. Any conclusions that are drawn from this finding would only be conjecture.

Thirteen housing support providers interviewed in relation to this issue were divided on whether homeless Aboriginal families knew how to access housing support services. Eleven of the service providers stated that some families may know how to access services; however some suggested the knowledge comes from word of mouth, rather than from knowledge gained through community information dissemination. One provider stated that while Aboriginal families may know about such services, they face barriers to their access. Another service provider believed homeless families do know how to access supported accommodation, however the examples given by this service provider for places to access this type of service included DCD, Crisis Care and the Homeless Helpline.

It has been found during this study that these outlets may not necessarily provide information to homeless families regarding supported accommodation and are more likely to make attempts to link people into refuge accommodation, or other types of emergency housing, such as a motel or a caravan park.

The aggregated data from both groups of families could be construed as meaning that 44% of homeless families are unaware of housing support services in the community. However, it has been found during this study, that responses from families are at times quite subjective and may not actually reflect the reality of the situation in question. Despite the findings in relation to the participant group of families, it was later discovered that many who had stated they had not accessed housing support services had in fact stayed in refuges at some time in the past. This has not been investigated further within this study. It may be that there is confusion within the homeless community with regard to what constitutes housing support services.

In view of the foregoing, caution would need to be exercised in drawing such a conclusion from the data. Notwithstanding this, it became clear during the study that while some homeless Aboriginal families were aware of housing support services, they were not always fully informed about the full extent of support services in the community and what is required of such services.

It would also seem that some of the families who seek supported accommodation only do so due to the shortage of other available avenues of housing, such as emergency accommodation, or affordable private rentals, and because they have been denied access to public housing due to a poor tenancy history.

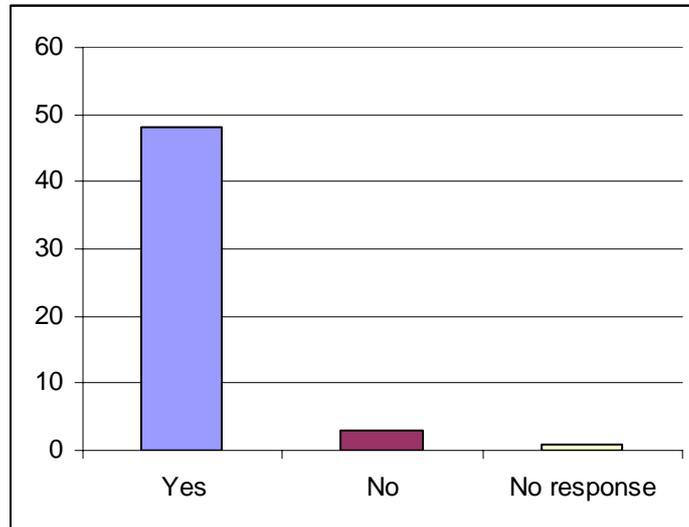
When participant families who had been linked to, or had accessed, transitional accommodation were asked what had been helpful about the support received, seven families, out of the twenty-seven who responded to this question, stated they had found the housing helpful. It may be that they see supported accommodation as their only option, which in many instances is the reality. Two of the service providers interviewed also agreed that this is sometimes the case.

### **Housing and/or Support Service Processes**

The study also found that many of the homeless families interviewed were discontented with the processes required to access housing support services. When asked whether they thought changes should be made to existing housing services, 48 participants stated they should.

**Graph 34**

**Participant Responses as to whether changes are required to housing services**  
***“Do you think changes need to be made to existing housing services to make it easier for homeless Aboriginal families to be housed?”***



The types of changes participants suggested have been illustrated below. Responses included the need for refuges to widen their criteria, and make changes with regard to residents being locked in. Another suggestion was that refuges should also consider the resident’s situation and not add to their stress by requiring them to undertake certain actions. Recommendations were also made about changes in attitudes, especially within Homeswest where staff need to be more supportive of tenants. Further requests included Homeswest providing emergency housing while people are wait-listed or priority-listed and disregarding housing histories after a certain time. Participants also stated that rules in some SAAP accommodation options are too rigid or ‘over the top’, and allocations should be made more fairly.

## **Participant Responses as to the type of changes required to housing services include:**

*"A certain amount of places needs to be set aside for each category of homelessness eg if DV not taken by certain time it can be allocated to other categories"*

*"All types of families should have access to emergency housing. Homeswest needs to get more houses"*

*"Changes to resemble retirement villages where there is support but also where extended family can stay. Need to house women who have had their children removed until she is housed. People on priority still need to be able to choose a suburb/ zones should...?"*

*"A bond shouldn't be charged especially when the houses aren't fit to live in. The manager there should be moved also to someone who cares about Aboriginal people"*

*"Give Aboriginal people the chance to spot purchase their own homes"*

*"Guidelines need to be more flexible - not so rigid within refuges, Homeswest and DCD"*

*"H/west need to look at their policies and their workers to make sure their attitude is right. Sometimes when people vacate their tenancies they are charged cleaning whether or not the property needs it. The PCR should be done with the accommodation manager and the tenant"*

*"H/west waiting list is very long and needs to be looked at. Also they should build more new houses and get rid of some of the old ones to give people a chance to start off good"*

*"Having housing for only Aboriginal people is a form of racism. H/west need to take notice of people. Getting support letters and other things people have to go through just to get housing. People should be able to knock back offers without losing their turn"*

*"Homeswest needs emergency housing"*

*"Homeswest needs more Aboriginal decision makers. Refuges need to review their children entry rules and there needs to be emergency places for men, especially those with children. Policies have to change so homeless people can get housed"*

*"Homeswest needs to offer help with PCR. Need to make it easy and simple to get SAAP or emergency housing| instead of having to jump hurdles"*

*"Homeswest should look at a person's history and if involved in DV, women shouldn't always foot the bill| especially where there was never damage before and H/west knew there had been a DV incident"*

*"Houses should be available from Homeswest for emergency until they're housed on priority."*

*"The SAAP agencies need to be fairer in the way they allocate houses. Refuges are too hard to get into unless someone talks on your behalf"*

*"Housing services should not look at people's history"*

*"If a women can get out of being bashed and get into a refuge before it happens then she should be put up. There should be different refuges for Noongar, Wongi and Yamaji"*

*"Make more places available. Homeswest needs to house people even if they have debts as long as they sign an agreement to repay their debts"*

*"More housing for young people and make it easier for young people to get housing. Funding for more staff in refuges which turn away women when they have beds available"*

*"More places in refuges & SAAP. H/west policies need to be more widely exposed especially the debt discount scheme and bond assistance etc which if people don't know about may be preventing them from applying for housing. H/west to house families only if they agree"*

*"More realistic situations, especially in refuges where everything is locked up and it feels like being in jail. The rules are over the top not just in refuges but in supported housing. It's really hard to get into H/west housing and the lists need to change"*

*"More refuge places for homeless families including male partners. H/west should listen and be more supportive of their own tenants and other support when depressed or other mental health issues are affecting the tenancy"*

*"More SAAP places| refuges should allow homeless people| H/west shouldn't have houses where only Aboriginals can be housed. Especially in the country where all Aboriginal houses are run down"*

*"More services for people without children including couples"*

*"People need to have goals. People who are homeless should be offered support and counselling when they are housed"*

*"Refuges need more Aboriginal workers. More info about SAAP to be available so people know about them. Make refuges bigger & have family units with security| but not prison type security. H/west needs to change its policies about Aboriginal people who are...?"*

*"Refuges need more places for homeless people. The Homeswest wait-list needs to be looked at as it's almost impossible to get housed on that list. Homeswest needs to assist single people more quickly"*

*"Refuges need to accept homeless not just those from violent relationships. Homeswest need to look at their waiting lists to make them quicker"*

*"Refuges need to have more homeless places; H/west should give people a trial run if they've had problems in the past"*

*"Refuges need to have some places set aside for men with children. Homeswest should have social workers working alongside the accommodation managers so they know the people's needs"*

*"Refuges should allow boys to stay with their family. Homeswest staff should not stay in their positions over certain time because they always bring up the past in a negative way"*

*"Refuges should allow boys to stay. Homeswest needs to have emergency housing"*

*"Refuges should be able to house large families. Homeswest should give every Aboriginal a go. Homeswest should have emergency housing for people on the priority list"*

*"Refuges should change their requirements so homeless people can access them. After a certain time H/west should disregard housing history and give people another chance if they've had problems"*

*"Refuges need to help homeless as well as DV, Homeswest staff should be more aware of their own policies - need to look at them. Staff not clear about process required to get priority and proof needed"*

*"SAAP process should not be so personal. Homeswest waiting times are too long. In refuges they sometimes try and make you do things. You're going through a hard time anyway and that just adds to the stress"*

*"SAAP processes are full on and made me feel uncomfortable. Homeswest should offer support to homeless people or those not housed before and include that as part of the tenancy agreement"*

*"SAAP providers don't need to ask about the whole family. Refuges should have more places for homeless families. Homeswest waiting lists should be shorter| you shouldn't have to wait so long"*

*"SAAP should have more say about families getting housed in H/west"*

*"Shorter waiting times for priority"*

*"Should allow homeless families access to refuges not just those who have experienced DV. When people pay off all their Homeswest debts they should be housed straight away"*

*"Should be refuges for families (couples and children)| Homeswest should prosecute family members who cause damages to tenants' properties if they're away instead of charging the tenant"*

*"Some people only go to a refuge to make it easier for them to get a house. Sometimes if they don't like their house they go to a refuge so they can get a different house"*

*"The whole system in H/west needs to be updated"*

*"There needs to be more support to young people, families and couples. Refuges need to allow homeless people entry because people are lying to get access to a refuge. Homeswest needs to be more aware of cultural differences and other support before breaching"*

*"There should be more family refuges for couples with children"*

*"Try to house people more quicker"*

## **Emergency Housing**

Through responses to questions within participant questionnaires and through information gathered during interviews and from monitoring tools, a major gap in emergency housing services was identified. Those participant families who were able to access emergency accommodation also identified particular difficulties with that type of accommodation.

Lengths of stays in emergency accommodation ranged from one night to 11 months. Four participants were able to access stays of one month, depending on the type of service. When refuges were full, some participants were able to access motel accommodation, usually overnight stays, but some stated they stayed up to three weeks in motel accommodation.

This raises questions about the way emergency funds are expended by DCD, and whether the money would be better spent in acquiring or leasing properties to house these families for short-term stays.

The types of difficulties described by participants with emergency accommodation depended on the type of accommodation they were able to access. For instance, when participants had been accommodated in motels, the accommodation was usually only arranged on a daily basis, and participants had to leave every morning with all their belongings and apply for further assistance. Some motels also did not have cooking facilities, which placed additional pressure on participants' finances in obtaining take away food. Furthermore, participants related that the children had to be kept quiet in that sort of setting, which meant taking them out every day and only returning at night.

In refuge accommodation, participants stated they felt restricted, there were clashes with other residents, there was no privacy, they didn't like the feeling of being locked in and some participants stated they were unhappy about the treatment they received. Others were not happy about having to be separated from their sons, stated they had to share everything with other residents, there was conflict between the children, and they could not tolerate the amount of noise. It is likely these difficulties would have contributed to feelings of instability already experienced by participants and their children brought about by their homelessness.

It would seem that some of the difficulties participants experienced when staying in refuge or motel emergency accommodation were not dissimilar from those experienced while they were homeless and staying with family. Overwhelmingly participants stated they experienced no privacy (44 participants), overcrowding (44 participants), conflict (33 participants) and belongings going missing (30 participants) when staying with family. These same difficulties were experienced in emergency accommodation. However, for those who were able to access emergency accommodation, or other transitional accommodation, this allowed an opportunity for assistance from a support worker, for instance to complete a Homeswest priority application and to be housed in a public housing property.

The assistance was of particular benefit if the service provider utilised the SAAP protocols developed between Homeswest and the SAAP sector in WA to enable access to exit points. Twenty-six of the thirty-one participants who stated during the third questionnaire interviews that they had accessed emergency accommodation service were assisted to obtain a Homeswest priority listing as a result of support from that service, or as a result of their ability to access longer term SAAP accommodation.

In addition, 14 of the participants who were not able to access emergency accommodation were assisted to obtain a Homeswest priority listing either through the assistance of the Project Officer, or as a result of accessing support through a community agency or housing support provider. This strongly indicates that homeless Aboriginal families are more likely to be successful in obtaining a Homeswest priority listing through the support of a community agency or worker.

### **Public Housing**

Two families housed in Homeswest tenancies during the course of the study applied to be transferred to other areas shortly after being housed. One of the families who was awaiting a transfer had the transfer application withdrawn by DHW. The participant had failed to respond to a survey sent to the tenancy, even though the Department had been informed that the family was not residing there. By the end of the project, the Department was also in the process of instigating court proceedings to take possession of the property, because the participant was not residing there.

There had been issues in relation to this participant's allocation for most of the life of the project, and negotiations were ongoing between the Project Officer and Homeswest to transfer this family to a more appropriate zone for some time. The property was in one of the outer Perth suburbs where there is limited public transport. The participant changed the application from another zone to be away from certain families following some conflict. However the conflict was resolved before the participant was able to change the zone again and a property was allocated.

The participant family stated during interviews that they thought they would be happy there, however they had since felt extremely isolated because of the distance from other family members, in particular the participant's parents, and the lack of transport. In addition, the children refused to stay at the property, as they also felt isolated, stating there were few Aboriginal children in the area. The children also refused to attend a new school and continued to attend their previous education facility, staying with extended family to enable this. This put pressure on the extended family who housed this large family group for a prolonged period.

Hence, although this participant was technically "housed", the homeless status remained constant throughout their involvement in the project. Negotiations continued between the Project Officer and DHW to reverse the situation, and a new allocation was made to, and accepted by, the participant family during the report writing stages of the study.

The other family had indicated dissatisfaction with the area in which they had been housed during the second questionnaire interview. At that time, the participant had obtained information about the transfer process from the Project Officer, and indicated they would not require assistance to proceed with a transfer application.

However, contact was received by research staff from the participant, who stated difficulties were being experienced in communications with DHW in relation to the transfer application. In effect, confusion was experienced in relation to this participant's wish to transfer – the Project Officer had been informed by the Department that the request for transfer had been noted and it was only a matter of locating an appropriate property. However, some six months later the participant was asked to complete a formal transfer application and informed that the transfer could not proceed until this was carried out. The transfer had still not occurred by the end of the study, as the participant had not yet completed the required form.

The foregoing examples have highlighted a specific need for Aboriginal families to have an advocate to assist with these types of issues. In both cases, when the participant families attempted to negotiate with DHW they failed to elicit the required results.

While the need for an advocate to deal with issues relating to Aboriginal tenancies may be construed as disempowering, the inability of this group to achieve required outcomes due to issues of communication is even more so, and in fact results in greater feelings of resentment towards the public housing body.

These two examples would also indicate that, where Aboriginal families have chosen to be housed in areas not highly populated by Aboriginal people, there is a need to assist the families to access local services, ascertain what resources are available, inform the families about local transport services, schools, counselling and support services which may help to make the transition to the new area more efficient. As one service provider stated in a questionnaire interview, Aboriginal families need "...time to put down roots in a community." Service providers interviewed during the study concur that Aboriginal families need to connect with the local community, and need to be near essential services, especially if they do not have transport.

Some housing support service providers have suggested that Aboriginal families' social and housing history needs to be assessed, and carefully considered in relation to where families are housed, and the types of houses allocated. Recognition of other families in the area needs to take place to prevent feuding. The study findings would also imply that consideration needs to be made in relation to isolation from other Aboriginal people.

Housing providers interviewed during the study have also suggested that when Aboriginal families are housed they need to be provided with a list of services, including Aboriginal workers and services in the area. Service providers have noted that outreach support for people who have experienced long-term or recurrent homelessness would be beneficial before the families are housed in long-term housing options. Had this occurred in the case of the two transfer applications referred to above, it would have become evident before the allocations were made that the families did not wish to be housed so far from their current support networks.

A suggestion by an Aboriginal housing provider indicated a need for outreach support to identify the issues which initially led to homelessness, as well as education in tenancy maintenance and mediation with neighbours if necessary. There was recognition that the tenant would need to acknowledge the issues and make a commitment to address them. This is very much what the SHAP program aims to achieve, and what these programs are funded to do, in assisting Homeswest tenants to maintain positive tenancies.

Thirteen service providers were asked to provide feedback on the types of changes they believed would be needed for homeless Aboriginal families to access housing. These thirteen service providers included SAAP housing providers, SHAP support providers, co-ordinators of women's refuges, emergency housing providers, Aboriginal advocates and tenant advocates.

### **Housing Waiting Periods**

Participants were asked what has been different for them in relation to their attempts to access housing while they've been on the project, compared to their situation before. Thirty-four participants stated they had tried to obtain housing through Homeswest or SAAP but were unsuccessful until they participated in the project. The majority stated that the project had allowed them to have someone speak on their behalf, bring them to housing providers' attention and they felt their situation was taken more seriously and they were listened to. The other eighteen participants who were interviewed for the third round of questionnaires did not believe this to be the case. A full transcript of the thirty-four participants' responses appears below.

**Table 3**  
**Participant Responses indicating differences experienced during project**

<b><i>“What has been different for you while on the project?”</i></b>	<b>Total</b>
Advocacy and support networks now in place	1
Because no-one was advocating on my behalf until I had moved into a SAAP house	1
Because the Project Officer spoke to Homeswest.	1
Before finding a house through SAAP, Homeswest could not house me through priority. It has helped that the Project Officer called H/west and was on them about housing us	1
Can't say	1
Don't know	2
Feel more confident that people are willing to help you and that they care	1
Got a lot of support through the project and from other people	1
Got offered a property and support for my kids' problems and my problems	1
Got some understanding and Homeswest listened to the Project Officer, whereas they weren't listening to me	1
Having someone working on my behalf gave me hope	1
Help I got through the refuge and the Project Officer.	1
I had more people speaking up for me to get housed, including Centrecare and DCD	1
I think because my housing was talked about with Homeswest	1
It helped me get a house quicker	1
It was a lot harder when I was doing it myself. The support from two people helped more and made it easier esp. after being referred to the project	1
It was probably what pushed it	1
It's nice to have a mediator	1
I've been housed in SAAP and able to pay my bills	1
I've had some support	1
More support	1
More support, SAAP has been really good	1
Project Officer advocated for me to get housed and I'm more motivated now.	1
There is light at the end of the tunnel	1
Project Officer spoke to people to get me housed	1
Project worker advocated to get us on priority but the SAAP provider said they would but didn't	1
Someone to talk up for us	1
The project has helped me get into SAAP and I really needed the support with managing my debts and other issues	1
The project has put pressure on H/west	1
The Project Officer bought up my name with Homeswest.	1
The Project Officer spoke to Homeswest about housing me	1
The Project Officer spoke to the manager at Homeswest and saw the situation we were living in	1
The support might have made a difference	1
There was someone looking out for my application	1
There's someone from an agency speaking on my behalf	1
Was housed in SAAP	1
We've been given a home now and it's our life till we get a new house.	1

## **Lessons that can be learnt from the process of this Study**

This study has highlighted the importance of collaboration between government and non-government agencies if Aboriginal homelessness is to be successfully addressed. This was one of the recommendations made by the Western Australian State Homelessness Taskforce as one of the requirements of addressing homelessness in WA (WA State Homelessness Taskforce Final Report, 2002).

Through working collaboratively with other agencies, including DHW and DCD, project staff were able to link 59 of the 61 participant families into housing during the course of the study. At the end of the project, 55 families remained housed.

However, difficulties were experienced throughout the study in efforts to work collaboratively. Strong relationships need to exist or be developed between agencies for collaborative practices to be effective. Formal agreements are required, to ensure each party is aware of its responsibilities. Aboriginal families also need to be in agreement with the exchange of information associated with working collaboratively, and appropriate consent forms need to be sought to observe issues of confidentiality.

There also needs to be a lead agency to ensure issues are addressed and resolved, and that appropriate follow-up action is undertaken. The latter involves vigilance, tenacity and a willingness to expend additional time ensuring the other agencies involved are collaborating as required. Funding bodies need to acknowledge the additional expenses to non-government agencies associated with setting up and maintaining collaborative working relationships. It is highly likely that, without additional funding to finance such an exercise, most small non-government housing and/or support agencies would not be in a position to service their clients utilising collaborative working practices.

This study has found that once Aboriginal families have been housed and are able to access housing support, the extent of SAAP accommodation services and SHAP support varies greatly between services. Some participants stated during interviews that caseworkers did not visit often, and when they did, it was only to ask whether everything was ok. One participant reported that there had been no contact from the SAAP agency since being housed a month previously. Another participant who had been housed by two different SAAP providers during the project stated that the previous provider had given no support whatsoever, in comparison with the current one. Others have indicated that when they asked for specific support, it was not provided. This is a major concern, as unsuitable or insufficient support may have a detrimental effect on Aboriginal families' ability to maintain their housing.

This study has revealed that even when information is made available, it is not necessarily accessed when needed. The outreach support provided during the project has enabled participants to access the services they require to address issues impacting on their housing. This is an important finding in attempting to address the cycle of homelessness which many Aboriginal families experience. Service providers agree that intensive support is essential if Aboriginal people's tenancies are to be successful.

Participants in this study have overwhelmingly acknowledged their need for counselling, support and financial counselling to assist them to address issues. Some service providers have suggested that some of these supports are already available through community legal services and other community organisations.

While this may be the case, these funded services are not available on an outreach basis.

It has emerged that Aboriginal people do not necessarily pursue supports in mainstream office-based services, although, as the study has highlighted, if provided on an outreach basis, families will access these mainstream supports. Participants were able to seek emergency relief in a crisis situation, for instance, as documentation of the number of times they have presented to DCD for financial assistance shows. However, if asked to attend financial counselling to address the issue, most do not follow through. Conversely, when offered financial counselling during visits by the Project Officer, participants did accept this intervention.

The tendency to ignore office-based services in favour of outreach support could be due to feelings of shame, or just the fact that families are not ready to address this while they are in a constant state of crisis. It may also be that these families constantly have to deal with other issues on an ongoing basis and accessing support in an office-based setting is not seen as a priority in relation to the other issues and crises in their lives.

## Case Studies<sup>4</sup>

### **Anna and Ian**

Anna and Ian are in their 50s and have adult children, some of whom occasionally reside with them. Anna has the full-time care of four and at times up to nine of her grandchildren. Anna only receives family payments for four of those grandchildren, even when she cares for the others for extended periods of time. The grandchildren are not linked into any education facility, and Anna has stated that her homelessness has prevented her from enrolling the children in school, because of the constant moves from one area to another.

Anna and her family had seven tenancies with DHW over a period of eight years, as well as having at least three other properties provided by DHW and head-leased to community agencies. All have resulted in eviction, termination or the property being abandoned, with large vacated debts in the vicinity of \$5000 associated with each tenancy. There have also been numerous private rentals, which have resulted in considerable debts. There is limited supervision of the children by the adults in the household, and the property damage to tenancies is extensive.

There is also alcohol and substance misuse in the family, and ongoing involvement with the justice system. Anna and her grandchildren were referred by a child health worker, who had concerns about the welfare of the children because of the family's extended homelessness. At the time, Anna and nine of her grandchildren were staying at a daughter's tenancy in extremely overcrowded conditions, as Anna was unable to access public housing due to the family's poor housing history with the Department.

At the time of the initial interview, Anna was provided with contact numbers and information about housing providers, support agencies and private real estate companies. With the assistance of a local Aboriginal support agency, Anna was able to access a private rental with a six-month lease. The property was very old and in need of repairs and because of its condition and location, the rent was relatively low and affordable for this family.

Anna signed appropriate consent forms to allow liaison between the Project Officer and the real estate agency, and three of the support agencies. Contact to these agencies was initiated by the Project Officer to ask that communication be made should any problems arise with the tenancy or the support. No such communication was ever received from any of those agencies; however several visits to the property by the Project Officer, four or five months after occupancy, failed to find anyone home. In fact, it appeared as though the property had been abandoned, most of the windows were broken and there were clothes and rubbish strewn all over the property.

A call to the real estate agent revealed that the family had been issued with a termination notice for non-payment of rent. Apart from the ingoing fees, no rent had been paid by the family since they had moved in and they were currently in excess of \$3000 in arrears. The Project Officer was eventually able to make contact with Anna via her son, and an appointment was made for an interview.

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<sup>4</sup> In order to protect the identity of all participants and maintain confidentiality, the names which appear in this paper are fictitious.

During the interview Anna informed that they had had to flee the property following threats made by another family with whom there had been a long-standing feud after the death of a member of the other family. Anna explained that as a result of all these problems, she had been unable to pay the rent, however she was willing to make additional payments to address the arrears and return to the property. When the family was housed in the private rental, the grandchildren were not enrolled in school. Even though Anna made assurances that they were attending the local school near where she was currently staying, none of them was at school during any visits to the family by the Project Officer.

Negotiations were undertaken with the real estate agent, who needed to obtain permission to allow the family to move back to the property, because of the amount of arrears involved. Two weeks later, after contact was again initiated by the Project Officer, the agent agreed that the family could return to the property, however rent and arrears payments had still not been received. This was despite a Centrelink direct debit having been signed by the family at the last interview with the Project Officer two weeks previously. Another meeting was arranged with the family, where it was revealed that the direct debit had been stopped because other things had come up, and the family no longer wished to return to the property because of the risk to the grandchildren from previous threats.

Several attempts to contact the support workers involved with the family failed to even gain a return call from most of these people. The only person who was still involved with the family was the child health worker, who had continuing concerns about the children's health issues, as well as their safety due to the location of the property on a busy main highway. The children, some as young as five, were crossing the highway by themselves to go to the shop.

## **Sue**

Sue is a 40 year old woman who had two of her children, aged 15 and 20, with her when she commenced as a participant in the project. She had been housed in a SAAP property for almost two months at that time and had been homeless for 14 years before being housed in the property. Sue had been staying with extended family for some time, with intermittent stays in refuges. More recently, she was unable to access emergency accommodation, was living in the park, and at times staying on the verandah of a local city based church residence.

Sue's last tenancy, 14 years prior, lasted about twelve months. She moved out following numerous anti-social complaints relating to extended family who were staying with her. Sue and her two children all had issues relating to substance misuse, including sniffing (chroming) and alcohol and amphetamine misuse.

Shortly after being housed in SAAP, Sue's long-time partner was released from prison and moved into the property with her and her children. Sue engaged support well while in her SAAP property, and addressed a lot of the issues that had led to her homelessness in the past. The children did not engage support. The younger one did not attend any education facility, despite numerous attempts to assist with links into an alternative education program, and eventually went back to the streets to be with friends. The older offspring (adult) moved out of the property in the early stages of the tenancy.

Sue maintained the tenancy relatively well for twelve months, and was offered a DHW tenancy, under the terms of the SAAP protocols, in her area of choice. Outreach support to the DHW tenancy has continued to be provided to Sue and any other family members present who may require support.

Some of the previous issues in relation to anti-social behaviour by visitors have been experienced to a slight degree; however Sue has been prepared to address these issues to ensure she continues to maintain a positive tenancy.

Sue's story has been one of the many successes that have evolved during this project. Because of Sue's housing history, and her aggressive and violent outbursts to DHW and housing service providers, finding her a property seemed almost impossible. Sue was well known in the housing sector and had virtually "burned her bridges". She was unable to stay in refuges, but felt vulnerable to attack, on herself and her children, while living on the streets. There have been sporadic issues with Sue's DHW tenancy, however she has been able to deal with them in an appropriate manner and move the perpetrators on most of the time.

### **Candy**

Candy is a 40 year old single parent with four teenage children, who was referred to the NFHP by DHW. She was housed in a DHW tenancy but had been waiting for a transfer to a larger property for over two years. Candy had already been transferred from the country to her DHW tenancy following instances of family violence. She had accepted the property sight unseen from the country and had expended a large amount of money in moving her furniture. Candy reported that the property was extremely dirty and poorly maintained when she moved in, however she was told the move was only temporary until a more suitable property could be located. Candy had taken photographs of the property before she moved her furniture in and stated that she almost got back in the truck to return to the country, because of the disappointment of being offered a property in such poor condition.

As a result of the family violence, Candy's new allocation needed to be sensitive and away from extended family members living in Perth. Candy reported that she and the children were overcrowded in her property. All the children attend school every day. However, their living conditions impacted upon their education. One of her children had to sleep in the lounge room, and had nowhere to study, which was affecting the child's schooling. Two other children had to share a small room and also had nowhere to study.

Candy's property standards were extremely high; however Candy stated that she was loath to expend any energy in the garden because of the imminent relocation, even though the move had been imminent for over two years. During the course of Candy's participation in the project, a suitable large SAAP property became available in an appropriate area and was offered to Candy, with the intention of rolling it back to DHW when a replacement property was supplied to the housing provider. As Candy did not require any support, the property was designated as a Community Housing Property. There have been no issues in relation to this property from the housing provider's perspective, although it may be some time before the tenancy is rolled back to DHW, depending on when a replacement is provided by the Department.

### **Mandy and Simon**

Mandy and Simon were referred by both DHW and DCD separately and at different times although there were no contact details, as the young couple was living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squats or alley ways. It therefore took some time to locate the couple for an interview. A large number of both Mandy and Simon's families are also homeless and live on the streets, and most, including Mandy and Simon, have chronic substance misuse issues.

Mandy and Simon have been exposed to substance misuse all their lives and have both been sniffing (chroming) since they were about 7 or 8 years old. They also misuse alcohol and amphetamines.

Most of the service providers involved with this couple believe that both Mandy and Simon have suffered brain damage as a result of the substance misuse, and both have limited cognitive abilities. In fact, it was considered by the Project Officer of this study that they would probably not have the cognitive ability to answer many of the questions in the second and third participant questionnaires, and therefore attempts were not made to undertake these interviews. Mandy and Simon are in their late twenties to early thirties now, and have had one child, who was removed from their care at birth by DCD and placed with an extended member of the family. There were grave concerns for the welfare of the child once it became known that Mandy was pregnant and steps were taken by the Department to find a suitable placement.

It is generally believed that Mandy is again pregnant, which, if the pregnancy goes to full term, will once more result in the removal of the child after the birth. Service providers involved with this couple have indicated that the placement is less than ideal, because of the constant exposure to violence and substance misuse to any children in that household, as well as sniffing by various members of the family, including children.

Mandy and Simon's substance and alcohol misuse have lead the young couple into violent clashes with each other and others, as well as ongoing involvement with Police and the Justice system.

The couple has been housed in the past by DHW and there were attempts to link support to their tenancies. However, the level of intervention they require has meant all agencies who have been involved in the past have eventually given up on them.

Mandy and Simon were able to engage support to some extent for a few months when a pilot project was in place. For them to engage that support, however, intensive involvement had to take place. The support worker provided transport to medical and counselling appointments, searched for the couple if they were not home, and virtually had to become a minder, ensuring they showered, ate adequately, and constantly reminding them about appointments they had to attend. At the time they were referred for this study, they had just returned to the streets following a short, two-month period of housing. Although an attempt was made to link support into their tenancy, the support agency did not or could not provide the level of support this couple requires, and the agency withdrew because the couple was under the influence of substances most of the time, and were not prepared to address their many issues.

Within two months of Mandy and Simon taking up their tenancy, another Aboriginal family was housed in the near vicinity. There had been a long history of feuding between Mandy and Simon's family and that of the new neighbours, and problems were experienced in both tenancies as a result of the close proximity of the two families. The family housed next door has also been a participant of this project since it commenced. Mandy informed DHW that she and Simon did not want to continue paying the rent, as they could no longer live there, and that extended family of the neighbours had taken over the property. DHW reported that Mandy was terrified of returning to the property.

The level of violence between the couple, and their self-harm is so extreme that service providers in the area have grave concerns about the couple's continued survival. Over the years, their violence has led to intermittent bans being put on them from accessing particular services. More recently, the couple has been banned from ever accessing one particular service, which provides essential services to homeless people such as meals, showers, recreational facilities, and counselling and support. In addition, a restraining order had to be taken by a staff member against Simon, after he became violent when told he could no longer access the service.

A local health worker, who has known the couple through her work for some time, has suggested Mandy and Simon should be committed to an institution for their own protection. But this is unlikely to happen, as the couple don't remain in the health facility long enough when they attend for treatment, to undergo a psychiatric assessment.

This couple is at extreme risk, but extensive enquiries failed to find appropriate support for them because it is highly likely they have a dual diagnosis. There has been no provision until now for service providers to support people with a dual diagnosis in Western Australia. Drug service agencies refused to become involved because there was the possibility of a mental health issue, and mental health service providers would not become involved because there had not been a definite diagnosis and because of the substance misuse.

Many of the service providers approached by the Project Officer refused to even consider supporting the couple because the funding they receive required the client to have clear-cut and diagnosed issues. The health worker involved with Mandy and Simon, who had originally come from another state, reported that people seem to be more judgemental about substance misuse in the system in WA, without even a drug worker present at the hospital. New protocols, however, have recently been drawn up between the Health Department of WA and the Drug Office to support people who have been categorised as having a dual diagnosis and hopefully this will assist both Mandy and Simon. Unfortunately it is questionable whether the protocols will elicit support for this family, in view of the recent cuts by the Health Department.

### **Pippa and Steve**

Pippa and Steve were referred to the research project by DHW. They had applied for public housing but were unable to obtain a listing due to their housing history with the Department, which included anti-social behaviour by the family and their visitors, extensive property damage and poor property standards. As a consequence of their housing history, the family also had a large debt with the Department, which they were addressing at the time they were referred. The family had been homeless for the last three years, except for a short stint in private accommodation.

At the time of the referral, they had received an eviction notice from their private rental, after they had occupied it for only two months or so. Prior to that they were living in their vehicle, or staying with extended family whenever that option was available. When the family was referred to the research project, negotiations had already commenced for a SAAP provider to obtain a head lease property from DHW, which appeared to be the only way the family would be able to access housing. Pippa and Steve were housed in a SAAP property, with their eight children, about a month after being referred. Although they were advised against allowing extended family to stay with them as it could impact on their tenancy and their ability to remain housed, they appeared to have little control over this.

Pippa and Steve's oldest adult child and her two children were constantly at the property and Pippa and Steve were having difficulties in trying to move her along so neighbours would not complain about the loud arguments and offensive language. Apart from this, the tenancy was adequately maintained for at least the first five months.

One neighbour of the family, who was a private property owner, appeared intolerant of the number of children in the household, and made several unjustified complaints which appeared to be racially based. The neighbour also spoke inappropriately to the children on some occasions, and had unrealistic expectations of his own property boundary line. In response to these complaints, the SAAP provider informed this neighbour in writing that the family also had rights as tenants and were also within their rights to go to the Equal Opportunity Commission to lodge a complaint for racial vilification. It would seem that due to the neighbour's persistence with minor, inappropriate complaints, the family began to communicate with this person in a negative manner.

It was clear from the beginning of the tenancy that this neighbour did not wish to have a public housing tenant living next door to him, and more specifically, a large Aboriginal family. The tenancy then began to deteriorate, and there appeared to be a total lack of control over the children's behaviour around the neighbourhood. The children were alleged to be responsible for various criminal activities in the area but Police were unable to lay charges because of their ages. Most of the children were not attending school, despite intensive support by the SAAP worker to facilitate this. Some of the children were also misusing substances, and there were frequent family violence issues when Steve had been misusing alcohol.

The SAAP provider made numerous attempts to involve various government agencies for support to address some of the complex issues within this household, after several failed attempts to address some of them directly with the family through counselling or referrals. Initially, DCD informed the SAAP provider that the family's file had been closed several months prior and therefore no assistance could be provided unless the Department had serious concerns about the children. The concerns about the children were outlined to the Department, however they still declined to reopen the file, until the matter became serious enough that Police approached the Department and requested their support.

A termination notice was finally issued, after continual breaches were served on the family and the issues were not rectified. The family did not engage the support offered by the SAAP provider. Although termination was imminent in that tenancy, the SAAP provider made an offer of a property in another area to the family, which they declined. Once the termination notice was issued, seven or so government departments and non-government agencies became involved to lobby the SAAP provider to keep the family housed in that particular area.

However, even with several government departments involved with the family, it appeared to the SAAP provider that insufficient action was being taken by those agencies, with only limited resources being put into addressing the issues, and the anti-social behaviour continued. The SAAP provider finally negotiated for the family to remain in the property, on the condition that the government departments and non-government agencies that had lobbied, would provide support to the family to address the issues impacting on their tenancy. The family remains housed, however it remains to be seen whether the departments and agencies will maintain their presence for as long as is necessary for the family to maintain a positive tenancy.

## Lucy

Lucy and her two children were referred to the research project by the SAAP provider supporting her parents' household. Lucy agreed to participate as she had made several unsuccessful attempts to obtain a priority listing from DHW. The Project Officer took steps to assist Lucy to access accommodation, to alleviate the pressure her presence was putting on her parents' tenancy. The Project Officer supported Lucy to appeal to DHW and she was listed with that department for priority housing soon after.

Lucy had only had one previous DHW tenancy and had repaid the debt she acquired when she abandoned that property. Lucy was housed by DHW a month later and a strong recommendation was made by the Project Officer to the Department that SHAP be referred to the tenancy. The referral was deemed necessary as Lucy had substance misuse issues, including taking amphetamines and sniffing, and her parenting skills appeared to be limited. As a consequence of the substance misuse, Lucy was often extremely aggressive and at times even violent.

Within two months of her tenancy, complaints were received by DHW in relation to the children's behaviour, visitors to the property impacting on the neighbourhood and related incidences. Enquiries by the Project Officer revealed that the SHAP agency had not received a referral to support the tenancy, and the referral did not in fact proceed until three months after Lucy was housed. By that time, a known enemy of the family was housed in close proximity and Lucy left the property as she stated she feared for her life, and wanted to avoid feuding. She stayed at her parents' property for an extended period and then went to the country to alleviate the pressure on that tenancy. By the time she returned to Perth, the other family had also left their property, however Lucy wanted a transfer, firstly as there had been break-ins at her property while it was unattended, and secondly to be closer to her mother for support. The older child was not enrolled in school, and both children, when they were home, were left to wander around the neighbourhood unsupervised. Both children are under eight years old. Because of Lucy's involvement in the project, and the DHW rental manager's knowledge of the family issues, Lucy was able to obtain a transfer to a property nearer her mother's tenancy. As a result of the imminent transfer, the SHAP agency did not continue in their attempts to initiate contact.

Six months after the original allocation, and one month after the transfer application was lodged, Lucy was transferred to her current tenancy. Before the transfer occurred, it was stressed to DHW that SHAP support was imperative if the tenancy was to be successful. DHW agreed to get a referral signed at the time of sign-up. However, the referral was not signed and the form was left with the tenant for her to complete. This was despite all parties involved being informed that Lucy cannot read and therefore was unable to understand any correspondence.

As a result, the Project Officer met with Lucy and assisted her to complete the SHAP referral and the in-going Property Condition Report. An appointment had been arranged for the DHW Accommodation Manager to pick up both sets of documentation, however Lucy failed to keep that appointment and it was almost two months before the completed documentation was returned to DHW and the SHAP referral processed. This was mainly due to Lucy's absence from the property whenever meetings were arranged by DHW.

Within three months, the property standards were starting to deteriorate and verbal complaints were received by DHW about Lucy's tenancy. Contact with the SHAP agency revealed that the referral had been put on a waiting list and would not be assessed for some time.

The DHW Accommodation Manager was contacted to request that the referral be treated as urgent by the SHAP agency. The SHAP assessment was due to commence when Lucy had been in the property almost four months. The SHAP agency informed the Project Officer that two separate appointment letters had been sent to Lucy, but she was not home for either of the appointments. The SHAP agency also informed that if Lucy did not attend the next appointment, they would no longer make attempts to commence the assessment.

The Project Officer advised the SHAP agency that Lucy could not read and would be unable to understand the letters, which had already been outlined in a fax sent to that agency with Lucy's authority allowing the Project Officer to liaise on her behalf. The SHAP agency was given Lucy's telephone number so they could arrange an appointment in person with her. However, due to the lapse between Lucy signing the SHAP referral form and the agency actually contacting her, the issues became so serious that Lucy was staying away from the property to alleviate the problems. The tenancy was breached for non-payment of rent and complaints mainly about the children's behaviour, and it appeared that a termination of the tenancy was imminent, as Lucy had not responded.

Complaints were made to government departments by neighbours and shop keepers in relation to concerns about the children. One department contacted the Project Officer so a meeting could be convened with Lucy at her property. At the same time, the SHAP agency was wishing to close the file due to Lucy's non-attendance at arranged interviews, and because Lucy had threatened the SHAP worker physically when they finally managed to meet. However DHW urged the agency to persist with its attempts to engage the tenant. A meeting was then arranged with Lucy by the Project Officer to discuss the likelihood of her continued housing. Lucy conceded that she would have limited housing options if she was evicted from this tenancy and agreed to meet with DHW, SHAP, and the government department which had raised the concerns about the children.

DHW agreed to withhold any termination proceedings until SHAP and the government department had a support plan under way and Lucy had an opportunity to address the issues. Ten months after Lucy was transferred to her current tenancy, all appropriate agencies and government departments were involved in supporting her to address her tenancy issues, as well as other personal issues that have impacted on her tenancy. Lucy is not really engaging support fully at this stage, especially as the crisis has now subsided.

The tenancy is currently stable, although there is a lot of internal property damage. The tenant liability bill is already close to \$1000 and due to rise considerably once a property inspection takes place. Lucy and her children require intensive ongoing support; however she has an aversion to outside intervention. Only time will tell whether Lucy is prepared to access the support offered to her for an extended period of time, and not throw in the towel, abandon the property and go into hiding until she burns all her bridges again with extended family.

### **Sharon and Peter**

Sharon and Peter and their six children, one of whom has a young baby with her, were referred by a legal service when their private rental tenancy lease was terminated because of non-payment of rent. Sharon and Peter both have substance misuse issues, as do some of their children, at least one of whom has suffered cerebral impairment as a result. Peter was one of the 'stolen generation', having been removed from his family and placed in missions as a young child.

He still suffers from alienation as a result and his anger at non-Indigenous Australians because of the treatment he received during his childhood is evident during conversations with him. Because of his removal from his family at a young age, Peter lacks adequate parenting skills.

Sharon and Peter had been living in their current tenancy for just over a year, and owed quite a considerable amount on unpaid rent. Prior to that, they had been homeless for 14 years, occasionally able to access private rental properties, but mostly staying with extended family members.

Sharon and Peter, as well as most of their older children, have had ongoing involvement with the justice system and have been incarcerated many times. They both have alcohol misuse issues which have contributed to their periodic incarceration. There are also severe family violence issues and both partners have fairly serious injuries as a result. Following their referral, Sharon and Peter moved out of their private rental property and were homeless for two months before being offered a property by DHW. They had been on a waiting list for two years and had almost paid back a \$5000 debt to that department. The debt only represented Sharon's share of the vacated debt from their previous tenancy. Peter's share of \$5000 remains unpaid.

At sign-up, the family agreed to participate in SHAP, to assist them to maintain their tenancy as required. The SHAP agency assessed the family and they were accepted into the program. However, within three months, the SHAP agency withdrew their support due to the family's lack of commitment to the program. Numerous attempts had been made by the SHAP agency to meet with the family to address some of the issues which were beginning to impact on the tenancy.

Most appointments were not kept by the family, and when they did keep appointments they failed to maintain the arrangements made to address the issues. During that time, Peter was incarcerated and Sharon's alcohol misuse was extreme, although most of the time this alcohol misuse took place away from the property. While this minimised the incidence of complaints against the tenancy to some extent, it also resulted in rental arrears, as Peter's rental payments stopped when his Centrelink payments ceased. At the same time, repeated requests by DHW for Sharon to provide an income statement so the rent could be adjusted were ignored. When DHW contacted the Project Officer after a breach was issued for rental arrears, DHW also informed that numerous unsubstantiated complaints had been received against the tenancy.

After several attempts, the Project Officer finally arranged for a meeting with Sharon to discuss the tenancy difficulties. During the interview, Sharon provided an income statement and agreed to adjust her payments to the housing body to address both the arrears and the mounting tenant liability debt. The tenant liability resulted from a number of broken windows repaired since the family occupied the property. When the rent required to be paid was adjusted and backdated, the rental arrears were found to be minimal. During the interview with Sharon, she also denied all charges of anti-social behaviour which had been alleged by neighbours. DHW confirmed with the Police that they had not received any calls about that property. Complainants had alleged that the family was responsible for stolen vehicles and other crime around the area, although these allegations could not be confirmed by Police.

Since there is a low Aboriginal presence in the area, it is possible that locals assumed any crime had been committed by the family. The family felt they were implicated because of their Aboriginality, and Sharon confirmed that her children were attending school and had not committed any of the alleged crimes. When Peter went back to the property, the rental account again fell in arrears, as the rental payments made to the housing body became sporadic. Communication to DHW revealed that legal action would be commenced in relation to the rental arrears, which were now in the vicinity of \$600. The Project Officer again contacted the family and arranged an interview to discuss the rent.

During the interview Peter was greatly critical of white Australia, using abusive language. The Project Officer felt unsafe although the language did not appear directed at the Project Officer. The interview was cut short, however further telephone contact was made with the family regarding their housing. The situation continued, however attempts to contact the family by the Project Officer failed to obtain a response.

### **Angie and Paul**

Angie and her four children were referred to the project by DCD. Angie and her children had been homeless for two years but had been unable to access refuge accommodation. Angie had been staying with her partner at his extended family's tenancies, however Angie left with the children following a domestic violence incident. Angie became estranged from her own family following her disclosure of certain events during her childhood and early adolescence. She has suffered great loss and trauma, as well as abuse during her life and had, in the past, misused substances and alcohol to a large extent. When she was referred, DCD had been paying motel accommodation for her and the children, but this was to cease in the very near future. Angie and the children then returned to her partner's extended family to stay until she could find alternative accommodation.

Angie was housed in a SAAP property about a month after the initial project interview. Although she had stated that she and Paul were no longer together, he also moved into the property. Paul is at times verbally and physically abusive, however it is unlikely Angie will leave him because of her lack of support outside his family. Angie was evicted from her last DHW tenancy but has been on a housing waiting list for the past two years. Angie considered the eviction unfair and felt persecuted by both DHW and neighbours, as her version of the events were not considered before the eviction. Angie states she has a lot of enemies which limits her choice of areas in which she is able to reside.

According to the supported housing provider, Angie and Paul have managed their SAAP tenancy relatively well in the twelve months they have lived in the property, considering both their previous housing histories had been fraught with difficulties. There have been no anti-social complaints whatsoever, although there have been instances of domestic violence and family violence on a couple of occasions which have not impacted on the tenancy.

Angie engaged support well and contacted her caseworker whenever difficulties arose. Their rental account is good, and the property standards are also acceptable. The property is due to be rolled back to the public housing body, at which time Angie and Paul and their children will become public housing tenants.

The SAAP provider believes Angie and Paul are able to maintain their tenancy, with support when necessary. The SAAP provider also believes support will be required from time to time, due to the family's negative outlook of DHW.

## **Martin and Cathy**

Martin and Cathy were referred to the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) for support when they were at imminent risk of eviction from their DHW tenancy. Martin and Cathy had been housed in DHW through the Homeless Hotline, and were 'parkies' - living on the streets and staying in the park – for well over a decade prior to that. Their DHW property was in a relatively upper class suburb, and private owners who were doctors and lawyers surrounded them. Because of the behaviour of one of the tenants and their visitors (who were mostly still 'parkies') when they were intoxicated, neighbours had become highly intolerant of any behaviour which could even loosely be termed anti-social. The complaints received revolved around unacceptable language, fighting and generally causing a disturbance to the neighbours.

The couple was evicted from that property; however DHW agreed to provide another property to an agency for head leasing. Martin and Cathy were subsequently housed in a head-lease arrangement and supported through SAAP outreach, with fairly intensive support. It is intended that the property will be rolled back to DHW and revert to a DHW tenancy when the service providers and tenants agree that support is no longer needed.

Although Martin and Cathy have maintained their tenancy well for the most part, there have been a couple of complaints regarding anti-social behaviour in relation to this tenancy. There have also been at least four requests by DHW to the service provider for unregistered vehicles to be removed from the front of the premises. The support provided to Martin and Cathy has revolved around ways to deal with visitors (as most of their friends were still homeless and living on the streets), without their behaviour impacting on the tenancy.

The supported housing provider stated that through discussions between the caseworker and the tenants, ways of insisting on respect from visitors for the tenants and their property were discovered. The support has also included imparting knowledge of available support services to deal with property standards and to ensure all bills are addressed so the tenancy remains viable.

## **Rita**

Rita and her two children were referred to the NFHP through a SAAP provider where she had registered for housing. She had applied for priority housing but the application had been declined. Rita became homeless two years prior, following the death of a close relative. There had been complaints received against her tenancy of the time and another close relative required support during their grieving. Rita agreed to leave her property and move in with that person to support them.

The arrangement did not work out and Rita was subsequently left homeless. Rita was informed about SAAP during the initial NFHP participant interview and was housed in a SAAP property a month later. Although she was already registered for housing with a SAAP provider, Rita stated she had no prior knowledge of supported accommodation and had only stayed in one refuge (most refuges were unable to accommodate her because of her male children). She stated she was not willing to become separated from either of her children which posed limitations about where she could stay. She did stay in one refuge for a week, but did not like that experience. Rita likened her stay in a refuge to feeling like she was in a refugee camp, having to sign in and out and let people know where she was going, and being locked in all the time. She stated that she felt alone and it didn't feel like home.

Rita has managed an extremely successful tenancy within SAAP, while addressing the issues that contributed to her homelessness. The supported housing provider stated that the support has revolved around financial counselling, general counselling, family and relationship counselling, ways to deal with children's behaviour, and advocacy and liaison in relation to issues affecting the extended family.

The support has also linked Rita into appropriate counselling to deal with substance abuse and grief and loss issues. Rita has reported that being housed in SAAP has enabled her and her children to be more settled, the children attend school every day and she has been able to continue her tertiary studies and graduate. Rita has also stated that while in SAAP she has been able to address debts and develop a budget, link into the local community and make friends in this new area. Rita has been listed for priority with DHW through the SAAP protocols.

### **Sally**

Sally was referred by a refuge where she was staying following an incident of domestic violence. During the entire interview process Sally was adamant that she was not going to return to her partner and had taken steps to prevent him from contacting her. While in the refuge, she was forced to have her two dogs placed in a boarding kennel, at great cost to herself. Refuge workers made several attempts to persuade her to get rid of the dogs. They suggested she was not in a financial position to continue paying for boarding fees as well as addressing her other financial debts, some of which resulted from the ongoing domestic violence perpetrated by her ex-partner.

Sally stated that she had experienced homelessness for most of her adult life as a result of DV. Sally reported some racial discrimination against Aboriginal refuge residents by staff, and little understanding of the financial situation of women escaping DV. However, she said that she had stayed in numerous refuges throughout her life, felt safe there and was able to obtain assistance with major issues impacting on her life during those times.

Although Sally had stayed in numerous refuges, she stated she had no knowledge of other housing services, including SAAP, before being told about them by the Project Officer of the NFHP. Sally also stated that without the support of this project, she does not believe she would have been housed so soon. This woman believed that Aboriginal people need assistance from agencies to advocate on their behalf and that without this advocacy they have no voice and their needs are pushed down the list.

Sally stated during later interviews that keeping her dogs with her after she was able to access permanent housing increased her sense of security and allowed her to resume a normal life much more quickly, with the much needed companionship and unconditional loyalty the dogs provided her. Sally was listed with DHW for priority housing assistance through the protocols set up between DHW and SAAP. She was offered a property by DHW in her area of choice, and accepted the property but was disappointed with the fact that the garden was non-existent, with only sand and mostly weeds and a lot of work ahead of her to establish it. Sally stated that she was told that if she did not accept this property she would not remain on the priority list. Sally waited 3 months on priority before receiving an offer of housing.

Sally's property standards are extremely high and it is obvious she has made a home out of the house provided to her. Sally was supported by refuge staff externally for a short while and linked into financial counselling services through DCD, who also assisted her to address some of her debts. Sally obtained some part-time work when she left the refuge for a short period, but is actively looking for further work. Sally is maintaining her DHW tenancy very well, there have been no complaints against the tenancy, the rent is paid as required and the property standards are high. Sally is aware of agencies which could support her in future if she requires it.

## **Project Recommendations**

### **1 Marketing Strategies**

Findings from the National Family Homelessness Project have revealed that a high percentage of Aboriginal families are unaware of the existence and processes of housing support services in the community. It is therefore highly recommended that appropriate marketing strategies are undertaken by the sector to increase community awareness of services such as emergency accommodation, transitional accommodation and the various housing support services available.

The first strategy would entail the Department of Family and Community Services, in partnership with State Government departments, undertaking a comprehensive media marketing campaign to increase community awareness of the existence of services which assist Aboriginal people to access and maintain housing. Such a campaign would need to take into account the high rates of illiteracy within the Aboriginal community and would need to utilise culturally appropriate language and relevant media personalities to deliver the message.

Secondly, information about specific services within the housing sector needs to be publicised in order that Aboriginal people become aware of them, how to access them and the requirements of utilising such services. Marketing strategies should include culturally appropriate posters in strategic locations, as well as verbal dissemination of information by specific groups.

When Aboriginal people make enquiries in relation to emergency housing, they should be provided with information about alternative forms of housing available and ways to access them. When Aboriginal people have been placed in emergency accommodation, they should be informed about housing support services, the requirements of such programs and the processes for accessing them. This information should also be provided when applications for housing are made to the public housing body.

In order that these marketing strategies are effective, however, changes need to take place to address the inadequacies of the housing sector as it currently exists. These changes are discussed under the next heading.

### **2 Actions that Government and Non-Government Agencies can take to minimise the Likelihood of Homelessness**

Recommendations for action deduced as a result of the National Family Homelessness Project have been developed partly in response to questions asked of participants in the three questionnaires. In addition, the participant responses led to questions being asked of a control group of thirty-one Aboriginal families and seventeen housing service providers. The questions were used to elicit views of the wider community and thereby adapt the suggestions for change made by participants into recommendations developed from resources already available in the community.

Some recommendations will require newly created funded positions. However there are funds which have been set aside for Aboriginal homelessness which may be utilised for this purpose. Other recommendations will necessitate that government bodies facilitate innovative ways of working collaboratively between government departments and the non-government sector to maximise the resources already available in the community, but which at times go begging.

Some of these recommendations are in line with those made in the WA Homeless Taskforce Report in relation to collaborative practices (WA State Homelessness Taskforce Final Report, 2002).

### **2.1 Establishment of Family Housing Co-ordinator Program**

The family housing co-ordinator differs from tenancy housing workers in that, if required, support is provided on an outreach basis to assist persons to link into appropriate housing and support services. Direct advocacy to the housing body at a senior level is also facilitated by the development of collaborative relationships as is required for this sort of position to be successful. The availability of an outreach service and well-developed relationships are both major requirements in addressing Aboriginal homelessness proactively. They are also vital for crisis response, and could be run through a housing and support co-ordination program. For the position to be successful, it must be supported at a government level, through provision of resources in the form of funding and departmental co-operation at least by the four departments most impacted by Aboriginal homelessness – Health, Housing, Justice and Community Development. For the program to be beneficial there would need to be a family housing coordinator for each of the four Perth metropolitan regions, as well as a limited number for regional areas of WA.

During the third questionnaire interviews, 96% of the participants interviewed, and 90% of the control group, indicated that if there was an advocate, who could assist them to access and/or maintain their housing, they would contact such a person if they required help with their housing. The vast majority of service providers interviewed during the study have indicated their agreement that a housing coordinator would benefit the sector and help to address family homelessness in general, not specifically Aboriginal homelessness. It has been suggested both by participants and by service providers that this advocate would need to have developed strong collaborative relationships with housing and/or support providers so advocacy can take place and links made between these providers and families requiring assistance.

Participant responses to why they thought they were housed more quickly after participating in this study also support the notion that having an advocate speak on their behalf helps greatly in accessing housing. With strong links developed between the housing and support co-ordinator and the central register, it could be ensured that appropriate housing is provided, in accordance with what families want, whether supported, crisis, emergency, or independent.

The advocate role would be created to provide crisis support and also impart appropriate information. The advocate could refer for any needs which people may have with respect to accessing and/or maintaining housing, including referrals for outreach support, financial counselling, general counselling, furniture, loans, and information about available services, support options etc.

For this position to be beneficial in addressing Aboriginal homelessness, a large part of the position would need to be proactive, as one service provider suggested, by preventing homelessness wherever possible. The success of this position will hinge on the collaborative relationships developed to enable referrals of families to the advocate if difficulties are experienced by families housed within the public or private (to a smaller extent) sector.

There would also need to be a certain amount of outreach work to visit people who are experiencing difficulties with their tenancies, whether Homeswest or private<sup>5</sup>. During those visits, information about outreach support services, and other office-based services would be provided to assist people to choose whether they require support, the type of support they may require and also to allow for referrals to be made immediately to local support services. One service provider has also indicated that the advocate could assist by providing tenancy education to tenants and mediation with neighbours. The advocate could assist further by supporting people to complete their Property Condition Reports, in response to requests by the central register, as has been proposed under a separate heading.

## 2.2 Central Social Housing Register

During the course of the study, a large number of participants suggested they were not happy with the current processes for registering interest in accessing short, medium or long term supported accommodation. In effect, the study has revealed that 63% of the participants did not know about supported accommodation when the project first commenced. Those who did know about SAAP were well aware of the long waiting lists, inaccessibility of service and the need to continue contacting several providers in order to maximize the chances of being housed. Not all available options about SAAP were known to any of the participants, which is not surprising considering there are many supported housing providers in the community, funded for varied purposes.

It emerged that participants lacked information about available support service options and they found current processes for accessing SAAP unsatisfactory because of the lack of co-ordination of available services. A question was therefore devised for the third participant questionnaire, asking whether participants would access a central register if it was available and how they thought one might be more efficient than current processes. Most of the participants stated they would access such a register and that it would more efficiently assist them to access SAAP by putting them in touch with all the options available to them.

Some families suggested that it would be a lot cheaper to contact one central register, rather than telephone the different service providers. This could also indicate that if there are insufficient finances at various times, the options have become more limited for some people.

It was also suggested that current processes for accessing SAAP necessitate having to repeat the same details, including personal stories, each time contact is made, which would not occur if only one contact were possible. Most participants responded that it would save time, money and the need to remember various telephone numbers for the agencies contacted initially. Most said it would increase their chances of being housed.

It also emerged during the study that a number of people may be utilising SAAP services, when all they really want is a house to live in. Not all require support. Some do, but are not yet ready to confront certain issues that would need to be addressed when entering into a SAAP agreement, which inevitably leads to tenancy failure. Therefore, due to a lack of alternatives, many who only require housing opt for supported accommodation.

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<sup>5</sup> Relationships would need to be developed with private real estate agents, along the lines of those which have resulted from the introduction of the SAAP Protocols. Support services to the private rental sector were only just commencing at the time this study was completed.

It became evident during interviews with participants that the concept of SAAP is not clear to a lot of people who use its services. Some were unaware that certain services they had accessed were in fact SAAP services. Others were uncertain of what SAAP actually entails. Most of the service providers interviewed concurred with this, suggesting that if people knew about SAAP, it was by word of mouth, others didn't know about SAAP, and yet others wanted the accommodation without the support or did not know what to expect of the program.

Most service providers, like participants, also agreed that a central housing register would be effective. It would also allow for people to be referred to the appropriate housing and/or service providers.

A central register would be a one-stop point where information could be obtained about various types of support options, to access and maintain accommodation. A central register would also act as a co-ordinating point for SAAP availability and referrals, and to assist with accessing other types of support, such as SHAP, support to engage with the private sector (which is just beginning to be set up around WA), HAAC and Disability Services support.

A thorough assessment process would be required to distinguish between people who need supported accommodation, crisis housing, community housing, refuge accommodation or only housing, so the appropriate information can be given and referrals made. The assessment would also be needed to ensure certain steps are taken to maintain the safety of individuals escaping family or domestic violence. It would therefore be expedient if the central register did not include DV accommodation places or refuges specializing in domestic violence. To ensure confidentiality principles are adhered to, potential clients would need to sign consent forms to enable liaison with SAAP and other housing and/or support providers.

In addition, a central register would ensure that supported accommodation places are allocated as fairly as possible. A small number of participants have indicated that supported accommodation may not be as fairly allocated as it could be. In fact, there are families who are unable to access any type of supported accommodation because of past experiences with mainstream providers, even though that type of accommodation is the only option that will allow them to begin addressing issues that have impacted on past tenancies. By ensuring fair allocation of SAAP places, those families would be given second, third, fourth or even fifth chances to make changes.

At times during this study, some participants have just needed a chance to demonstrate their ability to maintain a positive tenancy. The chance they were given during the study may have been their third, or sixth, but without it they would not have been able to demonstrate they could remain housed without major incidents.

Service providers need to be enduring if SAAP is to seriously address Aboriginal family homelessness. Aboriginal people are the largest consumers of SAAP services. It is an area where change could easily occur within this population group, however, that means all families should have equal access to that type of accommodation.

One way of allowing fairness of allocation could be to provide clients with available supported accommodation places so they can contact the provider concerned directly, rather than the other way around. This would only be successful if service providers advised the central register of vacancies promptly and then allocated their vacancies fairly and interviewed all applicants.

Furthermore, success would only be ensured if services are operating smoothly and exiting their clients at the optimal time, with appropriate places being found for those families exiting services. A central register could foster collaborative working relationships in this sector by co-ordinating the exit points from emergency to medium term to public or private rental with or without support, as is required, and also providing the information to appropriate providers so arrangements can be made for smooth client transition.

This central register could also operate closely with a non-government independent Family Housing coordinator program.

### **2.3 Addressing the Inadequacies of the Private Rental Sector**

Addressing the inadequacies of the private real estate market in relation to Aboriginal families will require ways of working which use collaborative principles and resource sharing. In its report, the State Homelessness Taskforce (WA State Homelessness Taskforce Final Report, 2002) recommended government departments work together to address homelessness.

In WA, DCD have a mandate to assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and should therefore be the lead agency in co-ordinating an all-of-government approach to the issue. Other departments such as DHW, Health, Education and Justice would all need to contribute (with DCD providing in kind contribution), with an injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government.

Funding for this proposal, including maintenance and distribution of real estate and directories of support organisations, co-ordinating meetings between agencies, drawing up, printing and distributing minutes, mailing lists, distribution lists etc, would need to be sought from those government departments impacted by Aboriginal homelessness (Health, Education, DHW, Aboriginal Affairs etc). It is important that funding be provided so non-government agency representatives are able to attend regular meetings and develop the required community links without affecting their service and funding levels. Without such funding, small non-government agencies may not be able to participate due to the additional pressure the development of this service area would have on their usual service provision.

DCD, as the recommended lead agency, would need to enlist the participation of other government and non-government Aboriginal housing providers and develop reciprocal arrangements in relation to support and housing.

As a starting point, negotiations should be undertaken with the private rental sector in relation to housing Aboriginal people, and the types of supports which would assist it to maintain positive tenancies. Once a number of private rental agencies agree to become involved, a directory of real estate companies willing to participate in this type of venture should be developed and distributed to participating agencies. Relationships can then be developed between agencies dealing with Aboriginal homelessness and those real estate companies within their local areas.

Exchange of information also needs to take place between agencies representing different geographical regions to address the itinerant nature of Aboriginal homelessness. Another directory of real estate companies willing to participate in this type of undertaking, should be developed and distributed to participating agencies.

In order to assist clients to maintain their tenancies once housed, and thereby promote the continuing goodwill of participating real estate companies, relationships also need to be developed with services able to provide various forms of support to those tenants, and a listing of those support organisations distributed to participating agencies to allow for appropriate referral of clients.

Support services would include emergency relief, furniture, general and specialist counselling, financial counselling, health services, tenancy advice and information, assistance with parenting issues, and support to maintain acceptable property standards.

A government department, such as DCD which has a mandate to assist homeless families to access accommodation, should be the lead agency in a proposal of this kind, funding the development, maintenance and distribution of real estate and support organisation directories, and co-ordinating meetings between agencies.

## **2.4 Hostels**

Some participants have suggested hostel accommodation as a response to recurring homelessness, for families who have no other housing options due to their rental history and/or housing debts. Participants suggested that hostel applicants could sign a contract to work on certain issues and reside for a specific time in the hostel before being able to be housed by DHW or moving into private rental or even externally supported accommodation. DHW and DCD could jointly fund the building of several hostels in Perth and surrounding metropolitan areas, with DHW providing the infrastructure and DCD funding the support staff. Other government departments would contribute to this scheme by providing visiting staff to the hostels, such as education officers, recreation officers, health workers etc.

Due to issues of feuding and family conflict within the Aboriginal community, prospective residents would need to be interviewed to determine whether their introduction would create difficulties with existing residents. Several hostels need to be available for different needs, including families with children, couples and single people without children, women with accompanying children and men with accompanying children. Some hostels would need to be only for Aboriginal families, although both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal management staff would need to be employed, in accordance with results from NFHP research.

The hostels would be cluster units which have a 24-hour worker on the premises. They would include an indoor, supervised play area for children, as well as an outdoor play area. Another area to allow for family group gatherings could also be included. Support would include substance misuse counselling, grief and loss counselling, DV and child counselling, as well as living skills development, transport to appointments, property viewings, child-care, parenting skills development, communication and conflict resolution. Residents would also be referred to health specialists, and specialist counselling, or domestic/family violence groups if required. The hostels would also incorporate recreational activities for family groups, children and residents as a whole. Children would be required to attend school or other educational facilities and undergo specialist counselling if necessary.

Furniture, linen and kitchen equipment would be provided, and residents could make fortnightly contributions so they could take these items when leaving the facility. Links would need to be developed with second-hand furniture providers to enable this.

The hostels would operate along similar lines as refuges, with stays of up to six months, and exit points to public or private rental. Some meals could be provided, and residents may be required to assist in their preparation on a rostered basis.

## **2.5 Emergency Housing**

Development of protocols between crisis, and short/medium term supported accommodation providers and DHW would be necessary. This would enable DHW to provide emergency housing for up to six months from older housing stock earmarked for redevelopment or demolition. Families unable to access alternative emergency accommodation because of poor rental history could make use of this accommodation. This would allow an exit point for those in crisis and supported accommodation clients, and enable a reasonable turnover within that sector.

Outreach support would be provided to those tenancies by the crisis and short/medium term service providers. Such support would assist tenants to develop the necessary skills to maintain a successful tenancy. It would also help them address issues that have impacted on previous tenancies, or which have been identified by the service provider during the family's crisis or short-medium accommodation stay.

Referrals to other agencies may be required where specialist counselling is deemed necessary. Service providers would also provide support to an agreed number of additional families in emergency housing who have not been housed under the protocols. The service providers would understand that the housing stock may be old and that only emergency maintenance will be carried out by DHW. Emergency tenants with a poor rental history would be required to sign a lease with a clause relating to participation in support, allowing the tenancy to be terminated if support is not accessed. Tenants would be transferred to permanent accommodation after they have demonstrated a willingness to address the issues which led to their homelessness. If it is considered by the service provider that the family still requires support, this could then be transferred to a SHAP provider.

Housing in emergency accommodation would be similar to that provided by SAAP, in that prospective tenants are given a limited choice of tenancies. They would be able to choose the zone in which they want to be housed, but unable to view the property before signing the lease. However, due to issues of feuding and family conflict within the Aboriginal community, it is important that allocations are made sensitively, and information is sought from the prospective tenants about any areas where they cannot be housed, or families near whom they do not wish to be located. In addition, consultation with the service provider should take place to ensure that families are housed in areas where they would be able to access required community support.

If tenancies are terminated and the families once again become homeless, they would need to attempt to access alternative emergency accommodation. Families should not be prevented from accessing emergency housing if a previous similar tenancy has failed in the past, as it is sometimes necessary for some people to experience difficulties several times before they are ready to make the necessary changes to their lives to enable them to manage a successful tenancy.

## 2.6 Department of Housing and Works Policies and Processes

To assist Aboriginal families with a poor rental history and/or recurring homelessness to maintain positive tenancies:

- Aboriginal families who have been homeless for an extended period of time, or experienced recurring homelessness, should be linked to supports through SHAP for the first six months of a new tenancy. The tenancy agreement could include a clause which enables termination of the tenancy if the family does not engage the support. This would include any issues that have been identified by DHW as impacting on previous tenancies, including substance misuse by adults and children, parenting issues, and non-participation by children in education. This is similar to some SAAP tenancy agreements. However, DHW would need to liaise with relevant government bodies to ensure it is legal to make SHAP involvement mandatory in the situations of people experiencing ongoing homelessness.

For this type of program to succeed, collaborative relationships need to be developed and, to enable this to occur, prospective tenants would be required to sign consent forms enabling the support agency to liaise with DHW, DCD, Department of Education, Police and/or Department of Justice depending on the issues identified.

The SHAP worker would also need to be available to assist with completion of the Property Condition Report (PCR) when the families are housed. The project has revealed that a large proportion of the Aboriginal families participating have proposed that assistance to complete the PCR would be beneficial in reducing debts for items which should have been included on the PCR. A vast number of the participants in the study did not complete their PCR when they occupied their current tenancies.

- Homeswest is immediately made aware of a family's history with the Department when that family makes an application for housing. When the application is made, it may assist to ask for permission to refer to SHAP for a one-off visit to provide an explanation of the program.

Referrals could also be obtained to have Centrepay forms completed<sup>6</sup> so that any outstanding utilities debts can be addressed before the family is housed. SHAP would need to encourage the family to maintain these direct debts before and after being housed, to minimise difficulties in having the utilities connected to the new tenancy, and ensuring connection is maintained throughout the tenancy. Quite often, after six months or so, tenants who are having financial difficulties have their utilities cut off due to non-payment of the account. They then incur reconnection fees and find it difficult to manage their finances in order for the next account to be addressed in time.

- DHW could also consider completing the in-going property condition reports with the tenants, as it would seem a large majority of Aboriginal public housing tenants fail to complete the PCRs. As an alternative, additional funding to SHAP could be provided so one full-time SHAP worker could be employed for this purpose. The central register could co-ordinate the provision of such support to DHW tenants, between the housing coordinator and SHAP workers.

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<sup>6</sup> See above under separate heading - Recommendations on marketing strategies.

- DHW would need to update PCRs on all properties systematically. In many cases, PCRs provided to in-going tenants have not been updated to reflect the current property condition, and if tenants do not complete them when taking occupancy they are then charged for damages which may have already been charged to other vacated tenants.
- DHW needs to consider providing facilities for tenants to install curtains if they wish (i.e. curtain hooks or rods). People who have experienced homelessness are unable to fit curtains and hooks to windows without damaging the property, as they lack the necessary tools to carry out the task. These people often lack life's necessities, such as clothing, furniture and appliances, much less luxuries such as power or hand tools needed for property maintenance.
- DHW to review their priority policy, which requires applicants to demonstrate they are unable to access private rental accommodation, especially in the case of single parent Aboriginal families. There is widespread evidence that Aboriginal families encounter discrimination when enquiring about property vacancies with private real estate agencies. Single parent Aboriginal families find it extremely challenging to afford the key deposit if allowed to view vacant properties. They cannot necessarily afford child care costs or access child care (and must therefore take their children with them when attending the real estate agency, further adding to their vulnerability to remaining homeless). They also find it extremely challenging getting around to view properties using public transport with children.
- DHW and used furniture providers could also work collaboratively so that tenants who require furniture can access this more readily. Used furniture providers could attend Homeswest offices on a set day per week to interview new tenants about their furniture requirements on the day they sign up. Applicants who require furniture could then be signed up on that day only, so furniture can be delivered to the property on the day they decide to occupy the tenancy. To facilitate this, prospective tenants could be asked whether they require furniture when they view the property, so sign-up can be arranged for the appropriate day.
- DHW may need to review policy relating to property inspections so more frequent inspections take place to enable issues to be picked up before they become problematic. In the case of families with a history of homelessness, property inspections should be undertaken every six weeks for the first nine months, or until it is obvious no difficulties will occur with the tenancy. This would ensure maintenance issues are addressed regularly. It would also minimise tenant liability and vacated debts resulting from property damage and would alert the accommodation manager to any concerns more quickly.

## **2.7 Department for Community Development Policies and Processes**

- DCD need to review all policies relating to financial assistance to Aboriginal families and individuals regarding travel to and from funerals. One possibility may be to provide travel vouchers for land transport, or fuel vouchers for specific petrol outlets. Attendance to funerals is a cultural issue and an unforeseen emergency and should be seen as such by the Department. Aboriginal people have a cultural responsibility to attend funerals of family members, and are often shunned by other family members if they do not participate in this responsibility.
- Professional development for all DCD and Crisis Care workers who are likely to have involvement with Aboriginal people in relation to cultural requirements and responsibilities.

- DCD and Crisis Care workers to undertake an education program on housing and/or support options, including outreach supports, available for this particular group.
- DCD and Crisis Care staff to be provided with professional development opportunities that enhance their ability to work collaboratively with other government departments and non-government agencies.
- DCD and Crisis Care to review the manner in which emergency accommodation is allocated and the way availability of emergency accommodation places are determined. It has come to light during this study that Crisis Care is not always accurately informed of bed counts by refuge accommodation providers. Refuges sometimes set aside a certain amount of beds for women escaping domestic violence, in case someone presents to them for this reason. However, it would appear inefficient for all refuges to do this, and the practice should be co-ordinated in order that beds do not remain empty when homeless families require emergency accommodation.
- A review of the way emergency funds are expended is required by DCD, to alleviate the inefficient use of funds on motel accommodation for homeless families. It is suggested that funding unnecessarily spent on motel accommodation for this client group in the past could have been utilised to pay clients' housing debts to allow them access to housing. An alternative would be to pay the ongoing fees on a private rental property and refer the client for support. A further option could be for DHW to provide some untenanted properties for DCD to head lease so this client group could be housed with support to address issues that have led to their homelessness.

### **3 Provision of Housing Leases for Aboriginal Family Groups**

DHW could co-ordinate an all-of-government funded response to Aboriginal homelessness, by providing properties for the use of particular Aboriginal family groups, specifically those who have experienced long-term cyclical homelessness. These properties would need to be located at a reasonable distance from each other to prevent conflict between families. The properties could be leased to those family groups, with each family involved contributing to the lease costs. Agreements with an extended lease would need to be signed by each family intending to access the properties. All members accessing the housing would pay part of the lease payments which could go towards the maintenance of the properties, and all would pay any tenant liability repairs to be completed on the properties.

Support should be linked to the properties rather than the families, and the group would decide who is to live where. Due to the transient nature of Aboriginal families, each family could move from one to the other and make plans within the family about the living arrangements, and decide whether some properties should be left for emergency situations.

If the properties 'belong' to those families, they are more likely to look after them. If the whole family is responsible for lease payments and repairs, then when particular individuals cause damage, other family members would be responsible for communicating to those individuals their discontent with having to pay for damages they have caused. Most importantly, members of the family would always have access to housing. No member of the family is to be denied this access. This can be co-ordinated by DHW with resources also provided by other departments affected by Aboriginal family homelessness, such as Justice, DCD, Health, and Education.

## 4 Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

**Target Group** – predominantly young Aboriginal people, but also young people of families experiencing long term homelessness, through SAAP services, drug services, Education Department etc. This project would target youth from those families who have a long history of homelessness. The intention is to break the homelessness cycle through helping younger family members to develop an alternative view of themselves and their life situation.

**Funding Body** – joint funding can be sought from the Education Department, Department of Justice, Health Department, DCD, Alcohol and Drug Authority and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

**Proposal** – invite Aboriginal youth to participate in a six month art project, which incorporates all aspects of completing a piece of artwork. This could include paper-making, frame construction, art tuition, drug education, sex education, living skills (budgeting, shopping, bill-paying, communication, job hunting, etc), exhibiting and sale of artworks. All proceeds of sales go to the artist. Exhibitions can be arranged at the end of the project and invitations can be given to all agencies in the housing, youth, health, drug and alcohol sectors.

The project would need to employ a resident Aboriginal artist, as well as contract TAFE teachers to teach communications and carpentry. Guest speakers could be brought in from the Education Department, the Alcohol and Drug Authority, real estate agencies, housing providers and Health Department for specific health issues for young people.

Project staff would also be required to run the project in such a way as to enhance young people's self-esteem, self-determination and positive communications skills, with sessions on budgeting, anger management, conflict resolution, positive self-talk, recycled paper-making, and job search techniques.

The resident artist would be required to pass on traditional and non-traditional techniques in Aboriginal art to the young people participating in the project, including the use of traditional equipment rather than modern canvas and brush. They would also be required to yarn about traditional Aboriginal culture and beliefs, encourage respect for the culture through positive anecdotes, and recount stories from the dreaming, from historical events and family histories.

The project will include recreational activities which encourage positive risk-taking and demonstrate positive ways of having fun, such as ropes courses, parasailing, wilderness camps etc. Participants could be followed up for a further four months and encouraged to join the labour market or further education.

Young people residing in SAAP properties, or those involved in other community programs, or whose families have had a history of homelessness could be targeted to participate in the art project. The project would be a preventative exercise, targeting appropriate young people, to assist to break the homelessness and/or government dependency cycle.

Such a program could be undertaken as needed depending on the changing nature of the target group.

## Facilitating Collaborative Working Practices

### Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

Service providers to set up collaborative working practices including:

- SAAP funding bodies to investigate and take steps to address the support variances between SAAP services, so support between agencies is equalised. This may include the requirement of certain tertiary qualifications for SAAP support workers. It may also include requiring client feedback forms to be completed by SAAP clients at support end dates, or when exiting refuges and/or other SAAP provision. Ideally, feedback should be sought in such a way that clients do not feel pressured to only report in a positive manner but can provide honest comments and responses about the support provided, the condition of the accommodation, and the knowledge of homelessness issues by staff.
- Regular meetings to be held by SAAP service providers to discuss different ways of working with clients to maximise successful tenancies once clients are exited from SAAP tenancies.
- Developing collaborative working relationships to address the lack of exit points from emergency and short-term accommodation, to medium term accommodation, to long-term accommodation, to community, public and private housing options. Agreements could be drawn up between agencies providing different lengths of support, to provide exit points for short-term and medium term clients.
- Medium and long-term housing providers developing collaborative relationships with the private housing sector, and housing support agencies working with private sector tenants.
- SAAP funding bodies and refuges to investigate ways of maximising the number of emergency accommodation places available in refuges, so beds left empty as a result of requirement that they be held aside for victims of DV (as reported by some participants) can be utilised after a certain time of the day.

### Supported Housing Assistance Program

Service providers need to address the discrepancies of service provision between agencies, as well as the incidence, in recent years, of waiting lists for the program.

- Regular networking meetings to be held by management staff of service providers, to discuss best practice models in relation to support of clients, so that SHAP support provision is more uniform between the various agencies.
- During the networking meetings by management staff of SHAP providers, discussion of staffing issues needs to take place so that staff qualifications and/or experience in the particular service areas are also uniform.
- Waiting lists should be avoided, as referred clients often require immediate support to alleviate risk to their continued tenancy. If SHAP providers are unable to assess the referral when it is received, the referring DHW officer has to be informed, so alternative support can be provided or referred back to the tenant.
- As SHAP is not designed to provide indefinite support, clients who have to be supported for more than 12 months should be referred to alternative agencies, including government agencies, if it is expected that they will not succeed without ongoing support.

## Conclusion

Without the attentiveness to the relationships developed for the purpose of this study, it could not have succeeded. This study has shown that the development of collaborative relationships, between various parties and at different levels, enables Aboriginal homelessness to be challenged and overcome, if that is the aim of the Aboriginal family involved. Without those relationships in place, the path out of homelessness can be arduous and despairing for many Aboriginal families whose housing history has been poor, as well as frustrating and discouraging for housing service providers.

At the beginning of the project, collaborative relationships helped to identify the families who would be involved in the study, and assisted to obtain the housing and/or supports required to house those families. During the project's life, collaborative relationships facilitated the maintenance of, and at times salvaged, the tenancies which were at risk and also assisted to secure further tenancies where this became necessary. These relationships needed to be made on a personal level to enable effective negotiation, mediation and liaison.

Centrecare considers that the National Family Homelessness Project was extremely successful in facilitating participant families to identify what they saw as solutions to their homelessness. At the end of the project, 55 of the 61 participant families, or 90%, were housed. Six participant families were still homeless at the completion of the project, although only two of these families were unable to be housed at all during the life of the project. If only taking into account those families still participating in the project at the end of the study, 51 families of the 57 remaining on the project were housed at its conclusion. All four families who withdrew from the study were still housed in Homeswest tenancies (one was in a SAAP tenancy at the time of withdrawal) at the end of the project.

In achieving this outcome, 59 of the 61 participating families accessed 89 accommodation places during the project. Of the 55 families housed at the end of the project, 35 were in public accommodation (although two were not living in their allocated properties and are awaiting transfers to more appropriate locations), 16 were in medium/long term transitional accommodation (with nine of these ready to move on to public housing and awaiting imminent allocations), and four were in private rental accommodation (three of which were at high risk of failing due to the families' seeming reluctance to address certain issues).

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