



Government of Western Australia
Department for Child Protection
and Family Support

SUMMARY REPORT

*Review of the Family and Domestic Violence
Refuge Service System in Western Australia*

1, Introduction

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) is committed to addressing homelessness and responding to vulnerable women and children who become homeless due to family and domestic violence.

Currently the Department provides significant funding to a total of 37 accommodation and support services throughout the state for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

The Department has undertaken a review of the family and domestic violence service system in Western Australia to improve outcomes for women and children impacted by family and domestic violence. The Western Australian Domestic Violence Service System Project involved a review which was undertaken in partnership with the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA) (the Women's Council) the peak body for family and domestic violence services in the State.

The current Service Agreements for the Family and Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support Services funded through the joint Commonwealth/State National Affordable Housing Agreement on Homelessness have been extended until 2014. The review findings will inform the recontracting process of the Family and Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support Services during this period.

Another significant development which occurred during the review period was the findings emanating from the Andrea Pickett inquiry in 2013 by the State Coroner. One of the recommends was the Department *"review accommodation available to victims of domestic and family violence, to ensure that in the case of women with children who are the subject of threats of extreme violence secure accommodation can be provided for those women and for their children. In cases where it is likely that without such accommodation being provided, the women or children may be murdered, procedures should be in place to ensure that there can be immediate provision of a place of safety"*.

2. Phase 1:

The Family and Domestic Violence Service System Project has been progressed in two phases. Phase one involved consultations to map and scope the existing family and domestic violence refuge system in Western Australia.

Extensive consultations were undertaken with key stakeholders to identify service needs as well as the mix of service responses. This process has identified a number of service gaps in the women's family and domestic violence refuge system in metropolitan as well as in regional and remote Western Australia.

The review identified service gaps which included provision of services for:

- women with larger families;
- women with older boys;
- women with complex needs/dual diagnosis;
- women experiencing homelessness for reasons other than domestic violence as the primary cause;
- women with a disability;
- women from culturally and diverse backgrounds; and
- women without permanent residency and/or eligibility for Centrelink entitlements.

In addition, the review noted that each town and community in rural and remote Western Australia was different, the needs, the client base and the issues all vary and that city based models will often be less effective when applied in remote locations.

The need for a wide range of service models and responses within the family and domestic violence refuge service system, ranging from 24 hour accessible services and services working on-call at night was identified within the review.

In addition, the Department's Service Provider Progress Reports, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Collection and Service Reviews indicate there is no direct correlation between the funding level of individual refuges and the quality of service outcomes or service model delivered to clients. Women's refuges have been funded historically over a period of time and at different funding levels.

The Department's non-identifying unpublished Agency Statistical Summaries Record File Data and the crisis accommodation vacancy register for metropolitan family and domestic violence accommodation services indicates, that there are limited places available for women and children escaping violence on any given night. Further, it is not unusual for there to be no vacancies across the metropolitan area.

The Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Collection Data found some remote women's safe houses had a high bed count vacancy rate and very low number of clients assisted. Clients stayed for short periods of time and did not receive case management or outreach service after exiting the safe house, in keeping with current best practice. Providing an outreach services to women and children can enhance safety and resilience when they are back in their communities.

3. Phase 2:

3.1 Metropolitan System:

Phase 2 of the Domestic Violence Service System Project built on the interim report of Phase 1 and was undertaken by the Department in consultation with the Women's Council. The Review outlined recommendations for a formalised 24/7 emergency response in the metropolitan area for women and children requiring a crisis response, this model would guide an integrated and responsive system.

An important component of this approach is that four specialist 24/7 emergency response services will take a lead coordination and facilitation role across the Perth metropolitan area and will be the key referral points for the Western Australian Police Service, Crisis Care Unit and the new Homeless Referral Service and provide better access to services. (See attached metropolitan domestic violence service system response model)

These services currently provide a 24/7 crisis response and have been selected as the most appropriate services to provide this role in their region. These services will ensure referrals for Western Australian Police Service, Crisis Care and Homeless Referral Service are accepted if appropriate and will assist with referral pathways for women and children both within their region and across the metropolitan area.

The emergency response services will work as a specialist group with the whole women's refuge service group to support optimum and flexible responses for women and children. The services will ensure ease of referral across the system by assisting women to locate to the most appropriate service following a crisis admission.

Funding for these services will be increased to reflect the lead agency role in each metropolitan corridor.

3.2 Safe Houses/ Shelters:

In reviewing the family and domestic violence service system across the State, it was evident that different models are needed to ensure women and children in remote locations received a more appropriate service especially given the short period of stay in safe houses.

The need for an on-call staffing system in remote safe houses would allow the service delivery to focus on an outreach model, incorporating brokerage, and tailored to the specific nuances in each region.

The Outreach worker would be able to continue to engage in case management with women and children after they have left the safe house to strengthen safety and provide supports for women and children. The need for outreach services was identified in the consultation undertaken in Phase 1 of

The project and subsequently in discussions with key stakeholders in the regions.

The remote service review process identified services in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions were often under utilised and consistently have an occupancy rate of less than 30%. There will be no loss of Safe House crisis accommodation but rather a more comprehensive service delivery model.