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Evaluation of the Sturt Street Family Violence Partnership Program

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Sturt Street Supported Tenancy Accommodation Project (referred to hereafter as the Sturt Street Project) was set up to provide transitional accommodation (3-6 months) for Aboriginal women and children (up to 6 women/family groups at a time) experiencing family violence and/or homelessness, offering an intensive support service on-site, with an extended outreach service post-transition (up to 12 months). One of the conditions of funding was that the Project be evaluated within its funded lifespan, which has been extended to 30 June 2010.

The Aims of the Evaluation

- Examine client profile and service activity to determine numbers assisted and characteristics of the client group;
- Investigate service outcomes for women and families post-transition from the program;
- Explore perceptions of service from the clients' perspectives;
- Determine both facilitators and barriers to success of the project;
- Explore service effectiveness perceived by other stakeholders; and
- Recommend opportunities for improvement if needed.

Literature Review

The literature review for this evaluation was extensive because family violence has been established as a major cause of homelessness in Australia. The Commonwealth response to both these issues can be seen in the release of the National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2009-2021), *Time for Action*, and *The Road to Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (White Paper). These initiatives argue for development in responses that are tailored for different groups who experience homelessness, particularly women and children leaving domestic violence.

For these reasons, the literature review provided definitions of both domestic/family violence and homelessness as well as an overview of the nature and extent of domestic and family violence and related homelessness. Much of the literature review was devoted to examining responses to family violence and related homelessness, particularly exploring the strategies, models and practice approaches that exist in Australia. It also examined research that has been conducted in both Australia and internationally on women's experiences of using family violence services. Finally, the barriers to support culturally appropriate

responses to family violence and examples of good practice in cultural appropriateness were described as well as a description of literature that examined evaluations of family violence services.

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a predominantly qualitative focus. Face to face semi-structured interviews were held with 9 service providers who worked at or closely with the Project and 13 Aboriginal women who had used the Project (representing over 40% of the women who have used this project to date). Snowball and convenience sampling methods were used to recruit participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews.

The researchers followed the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) during all stages of the research process. In particular, the Statement guided the conduct of research during recruitment and sampling to avoid potential coercion to participant, ensuring fully-informed voluntary consent, reducing potential harm and risk as a result of participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

Findings

Client profile

The client profile shows that since its inception in June 2006, 31 women and 86 children/young people have accessed the Sturt Street Project. Analysis of the age and sex of the children/young people reveals 38 male and 48 female children/young people accompanied women to Sturt Street, with an age range from a month to over 17 years old. Eight boys aged 14 and above have lived at Sturt Street. The average family size is one woman and 3 children. Nine Aboriginal women came from rural/regional centres. Three came from interstate. The remaining women came from metropolitan Adelaide.

Service activity and outcomes

The average time spent in the service is approximately 10 months – an increase from the 3-6 months originally anticipated but an increase that is justified by the sustainable outcomes that are reported. Of the 31 families who have accessed the Sturt Street Project, 26 (including 76 children/young people) have left the service and 23 (88%) are in stable public housing, with just over a third of these sustaining their tenancies for over 2 years. The Sturt Street Project has consistently exit-housed an average of 5 families per financial year.

Perceptions of service providers

The findings from the interviews with service providers showed that the Sturt Street Project is successful and effective in making differences to women and children's lives.

Sturt Street works well for the following reasons:

- it provides careful and thorough preparation for every Aboriginal family that enters into the service;
- it provides transparency and honesty about the complexities of women's and children's lives that resulted from long-term family violence and homelessness at the point of entry;
- both women and children's individual needs are identified and plans are established to meet them (e.g. schooling, counselling, financial assistance and education, and long-term housing goals);
- the office space is unassuming, relaxed and therefore not intimidating;
- the workers engage with families in flexible and organic ways; and
- the workers are gentle, inviting and supportive, which enables the building of trust and rapport with both women and children long-term.

The suggestions for improvement included:

- maintaining clear communication pathways and protocol with other agencies; and
- negotiating the tensions between Sturt Street's flexible, gentle and organic working approach with the Department for Families and Communities/Housing SA mainstream approach.

It can be argued that the Sturt Street Project is effective because:

- the purpose and aims of the Project are clear;
- the workers employed at the service have extensive experience working with Aboriginal people informed by passion and social justice;
- the workers employed at the service have a strong understanding of Aboriginal people and culture and an awareness of white privilege;
- service is built on and emanates cultural sensitivity and awareness;
- sustainable outcomes are created for Aboriginal women and their children by working long-term with families to build strong foundations based on stability and independence;
- women are allowed time to prepare themselves for public housing and so are not pushed or rushed to make decisions about leaving the service;
- practical and material support are provided;

- emotional and educational support are provided (especially about keeping a home and coping skills to face crisis in their lives); and
- outreach support after exiting the service is provided.

Perceptions of Aboriginal Women

The findings from the interviews with Aboriginal women clients also showed that the Sturt Street Project is successful and effective in making differences to women and children's lives.

Sturt Street works well for the following reasons:

- assistance is gentle, flexible and compassionate;
- the office space is warm, informal and unthreatening;
- the workers have cultural awareness and understand racism;
- the workers have extensive connections, networks, and strong advocacy skills;
- the service is focused on the needs of both women and children;
- the practical support provides opportunity to focus on emotional wellbeing of families; and
- outreach support ensures that women do not feel 'cut off' from the supportive environment.

The women had very few suggestions for changes or additions to what is offered. The only suggestion for improvement included mention of a lack of outside play space for children and noise problems associated with high-density housing.

It can be argued that the Sturt Street Project is effective because:

- women received stable, safe housing;
- women increased their involvement in educational and employment opportunities;
- women reported feelings of strengthened confidence and self-efficacy; and
- women reported their children feeling safe and secure, especially in relation to school.

Overview of the Sturt Street Project

The collaboration between the Sturt Street Project and Housing SA is an example of an integrated service response which combines the features of a transitional housing model

which in turn facilitates the move to long-term, sustainable housing. The Project addresses the well-established theme in the literature about the desperate need for housing assistance for women and children following domestic and family violence. The integrated transition to suitable public housing is an outstanding feature of the Sturt Street project, and one that does not appear to be replicated in literature documenting responses to domestic and family-related homelessness.

The Sturt Street Project provides the two types of assistance that is crucial: individualised and open-ended holistic support as well as the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing. Having such outcomes stops women from needing to go back to violent relationships and prevents unwanted dependency on extended family members, and experiencing the human service 'merry-go-round'. In short, it stops transiency and needing to access a range of short term services over and over again.

The Sturt Street Project produced such positive outcomes for a number of reasons:

- it is extremely focused on the wellbeing of Aboriginal women and their children by preparing extensively before a family enters the service;
- it is upfront and transparent about the complexity experienced by families, and establishes clear intended aims, goals, and purposes when working with families;
- it emanates gentleness, flexibility and is non-judgemental which is considered to constitute culturally sensitive practice in responding to violence and homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people;
- the three workers employed at the service have high skill levels in building a relaxed and unintimidating environment, which increases rapport building and engagement with Aboriginal families;
- the three workers were able to sensitively challenge unhealthy lifestyles, behaviours, and difficulties displayed by Aboriginal women in ways that encouraged them to examine consequences of their actions and plan for their futures;
- all workers had extensive backgrounds and experience working with Aboriginal people in the local context and had been employed at the service since its commencement, which builds consistency, continuity and respect when working with Aboriginal women and their children; and
- it offers immediate practical and material support for Aboriginal families as well as intense, emotional, educative, long-term support.

Meeting the most fundamental material needs as well as emotional needs of women and their children are essential in building initial stability and safety for families. This assistance provides relief and a break from worrying about basic needs. Aboriginal women are therefore allowed time to focus on their children's wellbeing and their long-term goals of obtaining a house. Providing material/practical support also allows for opportunities to work with the Aboriginal women on building their skills, that is, it opens up space to provide

education and capacity building. The provision of additional help on site at Sturt Street reduced the need for external, impersonal referrals. However, the strong connections between Sturt Street and important organisations such as local schools and child care meant that where external institutions were required, reliable links to specific people could be made.

The evaluation of Sturt Street Project has shown the complexity of working with Aboriginal women and children who have experienced long-term family violence and homelessness and the importance of working in culturally sensitive ways. The following conclusions can be made from the findings:

- Long-term investment produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families.
- Practical/material support coupled together with emotional and educative support produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families.
- Services must be culturally sensitive and aware when working with Aboriginal families.
- Services must focus on both the woman's needs and children's needs when responding to long-term family violence.
- Working in organic, flexible, and gentle ways is effective when working with Aboriginal women and their children.
- Outreach support is important to help Aboriginal women keep and maintain their permanent public housing.

1. Background to the Research

In 2006, the Commonwealth Government (then Department of Family and Community Services), now FaHCSIA (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), approved approximately \$1.6 million in funding over 3 years for the Sturt Street Supported Tenancy Accommodation Project under the Family Violence Partnership Programme.

The Family Violence Partnership Programme is an Australian Government initiative in partnership with the South Australian Government giving Indigenous families, their children and communities the opportunity to build a better future. The Programme specifically aims to:

- Support and complement state and territory government initiatives addressing Indigenous family violence;
- Build on the Australian Government's commitment to tackling family violence in Indigenous communities;
- Develop local solutions to issues that contribute to violence, such as alcohol and drug use, and address causal factors to family violence, particularly socio-economic and participatory issues, to effect sustainable change;
- Empower local communities to develop and implement strategies to reduce and prevent family violence and child abuse within their communities;
- Strengthen organisational capacity to deliver services and achieve outcomes;
- Deliver sustainable outcomes for Indigenous communities, particularly in remote and rural areas;
- Clearly articulate strategies to tackle levels of indigenous family violence and child abuse;
- Be action rather than research oriented;
- Not duplicate current services and Programmes;
- Be fully costed in respect to the Commonwealth and Funding Recipient contributions to the Project; and
- Identify measures for performance and reporting.

The Sturt Street Supported Tenancy Accommodation Project (referred to hereafter as the Sturt Street Project) was set up to provide transitional accommodation (3-6 months) for Aboriginal women and children (up to 6 women/family groups at a time) experiencing family violence and/or homelessness, offering an intensive support service on-site, with an extended outreach service post-transition (up to 12 months). During June 2006 – February 2010, 31 women and 86 children have used the service.

One of the conditions of funding was that the Project be evaluated within its funded lifespan, which has been extended to 30 June 2010. The Sturt Street Project is regularly cited as an example of innovative good practice, although an objective appraisal of the service has not yet taken place. Indicative outcomes data and anecdotal evidence suggest that the service is having a significant impact for those accessing it.

The proposed evaluation aimed to focus on the effectiveness of the Sturt Street Project for clients, their families and other service providers and so was expected to incorporate a large qualitative component, whereby clients were asked to describe their experiences and the impact of the service.

2a. Summary Literature Review

Despite homelessness being a prevalent and increasing social problem in Australia, there is limited public awareness that domestic violence is the major cause of homelessness in Australia (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Gander 2009) and internationally (Correia and Rubin 2001; Hutchinson and Weeks 2004).

Defining and connecting domestic and family violence and homelessness

This literature review establishes the nature and scope of domestic and family violence and homelessness and their relationship to each other. It then outlines the particular disadvantages and discrimination that Aboriginal women (and their children) facing such circumstances might experience, including the obstacles to their help-seeking. Service responses to domestic and family violence-related homelessness are canvassed before a specific review of research which has explored women's experiences of using such services is presented. Finally, the issue of cultural appropriateness in services responding to violence and housing/homelessness is discussed.

Responding to domestic and family violence and related homelessness

A sequence of Australian reports into organisational responses to women and children experiencing violence have documented consistent findings and recommendations (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Weeks and Oberin 2004; Tually, Faulkner et al. 2008). Each of these reports notes that a diverse range of housing options (emergency shelters/refuge, transitional housing, 'Staying Home Leaving Violence' models and safe, secure, affordable long-term housing) need to be provided in order to maximize women's ability to re-establish their lives following separation from violence. They also document the need for increased resources and integration because current services are not able to respond to their demand, particularly for groups such as Indigenous women and women in rural and remote areas. The lack of affordable housing for women leaving domestic and family violence increases their likelihood of returning to violent partners and exposes them to expensive and unsuitable tenancies which are unsustainable.

The experience of using domestic and family violence programs

Research which has considered the perspective of women using services has documented the importance of the ability of shelters and transitional housing to meet basic physiological needs (Lyon, Lane et al. 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009) and to provide opportunities for mutual support and good quality of relationships with workers (Melbin, Sullivan et al 2003; Owens 2003; Parker and Fopp (2004); Laing 2005; Abrahams 2007). Due to the lack of integration between housing agencies and difficult administrative and bureaucratic processes, research respondents found refuges and domestic/family violence services to be important for their advocacy,

facilitation and co-ordination of other services' support (Owens 2003; Laing 2005; Kowanko, Stewart et al. 2009; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). Respondents also identified the importance of (non-compulsory) organised activities, shared space plus privacy and support which continues beyond residence at the shelter or transitional housing program. A common thread amongst studies of women's experiences in shelters is their acute need for housing (Correia 1999a; Correia 1999b; Bonica 2000; Melbin, Sullivan et al. 2003; Owens 2003; Parker and Fopp 2004; Laing 2005; Abrahams 2007; Lyon, Lane et al. 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009).

Culturally appropriate responses to domestic and family violence

There is a body of literature which documents good practice in cultural appropriateness of services and identifies key features including:

- the involvement of Aboriginal people (including Elders) in the development of services (Health Canada 1997);
- the use of Aboriginal language, pictures and symbols (Health Canada 1997);
- the incorporation of important cultural elements, including the use of traditional practices, connections to the community and community approaches to address family violence (Health Canada 1997; Memmott, Chambers et al. 2006);
- the employment of Aboriginal workers (Health Canada 1997; Snell and Small 2009) although the potential for compromised confidentiality in small communities is also noted (Lumby and Farrelly 2009);
- group and narrative or therapeutic storytelling approaches to healing (Health Canada 1997; Memmott, Chambers et al. 2006);
- flexible and individualised programs (Health Canada 1997; Snell and Small 2009); and
- staff-client relationships characterised by openness, informality and the use of simple, jargon-free language.

2b. Review of the Literature

In recent years, welfare agencies in Australia have reported that homelessness amongst families with children is increasing, a trend that has also been observed internationally. The best estimate is that 105,000 people were homeless in Australia on Census night in 2006; representing a 17 percent increase compared to Census night in 2001 and including 26,790 people in family groups with 16,182 children (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2008). Despite homelessness being a prevalent and increasing social problem in Australia, there is limited public awareness of the composition of the homeless population because of the enduring stereotype of a single, older man, publicly sleeping rough (Johnson, Gronda et al. 2008). In fact, domestic violence has been established as the major cause of homelessness in Australia (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Gander 2009) and internationally (Correia and Rubin 2001; Hutchinson and Weeks 2004). In Australia, women escaping violence are now a specified group in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) legislation (Bullen 2009). Australia's most recent response to both these issues can be seen in the release of the National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2009-2021), *Time for Action*, and *The Road to Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (White Paper). Both these policy initiatives point out that domestic and family violence continue to be the major driver of homelessness and escaping violence is the most common reasons provided by women and children who seek help from specialist homelessness services. Consequently, these initiatives argue for development in responses that are tailored for different groups who experience homelessness, particularly women and children leaving domestic violence.

This literature review begins by defining the issues of domestic violence, family violence and homelessness and by establishing their relationship to each other. Having determined their meaning and links, the nature and extent of these social problems is considered. The literature examining the service responses to domestic and family-related homelessness is then outlined, before a specific review of research which has explored women's experiences of using such services. Finally, the issue of cultural appropriateness in services responding to violence and housing/homelessness is discussed.

Defining and connecting domestic and family violence and homelessness

The scale of the problem of violence against women (and their children) and its physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, social and economic consequences has been gradually recognised. Knowledge about the nature and extent of violence against women – and the naming of 'domestic violence' – has largely emerged from the activism and scholarship of the feminist movement. Such understandings are underpinned by feminist analysis of the male-dominant socio-political context and conceptualise domestic violence as an expression of sexual inequality, underpinned by the use of power and control. The United Nations

defines violence against women and children as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1993).

In colonised countries, Indigenous people have argued for an understanding which locates family violence in Indigenous communities within the historical context of colonisation, which has seen Aboriginal peoples (as individuals, families and communities) subject to dispossession, disempowerment, poverty, and cultural, social and geographic dislocation (Cheers, Binell et al. 2006). As a result, the term ‘family violence’ has been adopted with the intention of capturing the complex and interacting features of violence experienced by (predominantly) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. In this report, both terms are used in order to acknowledge the continuing currency of ‘domestic violence’ as a descriptor for violence perpetrated by an intimate partner and ‘family violence’ as a preferred term for many Indigenous people.

Definitions of homelessness have sought to expand understandings of the types of circumstances that constitute being without a home. These include not only people who are roofless and sleeping rough (‘primary homelessness’), but those living in various forms of crisis and transitional housing or sharing with family and friends (‘secondary homelessness’), and living in housing which is below the community standard, such as medium to long-term occupancy of boarding houses (‘tertiary homelessness’)(Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1992). The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the national peak body Homelessness Australia define a homeless person as:

A person who does not have access to safe, secure, adequate housing. A person is considered not to have safe, secure adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access damages or is likely to damage their health; threatens their safety; marginalises them through failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities or the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security, affordability of that housing; or has no security of tenure.

A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.

Significantly, this definition explicitly acknowledges the role of safety in determining homelessness. It is concern for the safety of themselves and their children that leads most women into situations of homelessness. The decision to leave domestic or family violence and the timing of such a decision varies greatly and may follow one significant incident of violence, a change in the frequency or escalation of violence or a redirection of violence (or sexual abuse) towards children; a cycle of leaving and returning is also common (Johnson,

Gronda et al. 2008). Homelessness is not a single event but a cumulative experience. Other than threats to their physical safety, the impacts of domestic and family violence on women and children are wide-ranging and include psychological, emotional and spiritual harm as well as social disconnection and economic losses (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Weeks and Oberin 2004). Authors such as Cooper and Morris (2005) have argued that non-Indigenous definitions of home and homelessness do not capture the complexity of Indigenous understandings because many Indigenous people experience psychological and spiritual homelessness as a consequence of dispossession or forced removal from homelands.

Further to this, Cooper and Morris (2005) identify some of the features of homelessness for Indigenous women and children and locate these firmly in a context of colonisation. Among other disempowering and dislocating effects of colonisation, the removal of children from their families has led to enduring mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, intergenerational unemployment and low levels of education. These may all impact on Indigenous people's ability to afford and sustain safe, appropriate, affordable housing. Inadequate social housing stocks (and a particular lack of suitable, safe housing in remote areas) mean that overcrowding is a significant problem and exacerbates domestic and family violence, sexual abuse and property damage. Women (especially those with children) are likely to experience racial discrimination when trying to access housing, particularly in the private rental market. Thus, there are long waiting lists for public housing, creating a cycle of 'iterative homelessness', with women and children staying with friends and family, or spending short periods of time in temporary accommodation which is often in poor condition.

It can be argued that the experience of domestic and family violence and homelessness should be understood and responded to in a framework of human rights (Hulse and Kolar 2009). Freedom from violence (including violence in intimate and family relationships) and access to safe, secure housing, affordable and accessible housing are identified as universal rights in United Nations Conventions, to which Australia is a signatory.

The nature and extent of domestic and family violence and related homelessness

Three recent sources of Australian and international survey data indicate the ongoing high levels of violence experienced by women; the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos and Makkai 2004), ABS Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) and the World Health Organisation Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women (World Health Organisation 2005). The Australian component of the multi-country International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) found that as many as 1 in 3 women are affected by domestic and family violence and that one in ten women had experienced at least one incident of physical and/or sexual violence in the preceding 12 months. The disproportionately high incidence of violence for Indigenous women is well documented; 20% reported physical violence in the previous 12

months compared to 7% of non-indigenous women (Mouzos and Makkai 2004; see also Robertson 2000). Following the exposure of the prevalence and nature of the problem of violence against women, the impact of domestic and family violence on children has gained recognition. This has included understandings of children as direct victims of physical violence and other forms of abuse, as well as the indirect effects associated with witnessing violence and outcomes such as homelessness (Laing 2000; Mullender, Hague et al. 2002; Humphreys and Stanley 2006; Humphreys 2007).

Although there is no 'typical' woman who experiences domestic or family violence, such experience is correlated with low income or poverty (Weeks and Oberin 2004); being aged between 25 and 40 (Mouzos and Makkai 2004; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006); childhood abuse (Mouzos and Makkai 2004) and indigeneity (Cooper and Morris 2005; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010). Women who become homeless as a result of violence are also becoming recognised as a group who experience multiple, complex needs such as problematic drug and alcohol use and mental illness (Weeks and Oberin 2004) and may also face additional difficulties if they live in rural or remote locations (Weeks and Oberin 2004; Wendt 2009).

Domestic violence is the leading contributor to preventable death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 (VicHealth 2004). Recent research has also sought to quantify the economic costs of domestic and family violence. In 2004, Access Economics estimated that the total annual cost of domestic violence in 2002-03 was \$8.1 billion for Australia (Access Economics 2004). The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children has updated this figure and reports that violence against women and their children would cost the Australian economy an estimated \$13.6 billion¹ in 2009 (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009b).

The most extensive data about domestic and family violence related homelessness is collected by SAAP but is of course limited to those who present at a relevant service. Although it is difficult to estimate the numbers involved, SAAP data does establish the

¹ This figure comprises seven cost categories:

pain, suffering and premature mortality costs associated with the victims/survivors experience of violence

health costs include public and private health system costs associated with treating the effects of violence against women
production-related costs, including the cost of being absent from work, and employer administrative costs (for example, employee replacement)

consumption-related costs, including replacing damaged property, defaulting on bad debts, and the costs of moving

second generation costs are the costs of children witnessing and living with violence, including child protection services and increased juvenile and adult crime

administrative and other costs, including police, incarceration, court system costs, counselling, and violence prevention programs

transfer costs, which are the inefficiencies associated with the payment of government benefits (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009b, 5-6).

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relevance of domestic and family violence to homelessness. The most recent analysis of SAAP data from 2008-9 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010) shows that 1 in every 105 Australians, or 204,900 people (125,800 clients and 79,100 accompanying children) received support. Women, particularly young women and children were significant users of specialist homelessness services. In 2008–09, 1 in every 122 girls and women aged 10 years and over became a client of a specialist homelessness service, with young women aged 15–19 years the most likely group to become a client (1 in every 50 young women in this age bracket accessed support). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented when compared with the general population (18% of clients and 25% of accompanying children were Indigenous, compared with 2% of the general Australian population aged 10 years and over and 5% of children aged 0–17 years, respectively). Overall, the most common primary reasons that clients gave for seeking assistance were domestic or family violence. Women with children most often cited domestic or family violence (in 49% of their support periods). Unaccompanied women aged 25 years and older most commonly cited domestic or family violence (in 40% of their support periods).

The incidence of domestic and family violence and homelessness related to such violence is likely to be significantly higher than the statistics cited in this section suggest because not all affected identify as ‘victims’ or seek assistance. Many are hidden through their use of informal sources of support.

Responding to domestic and family violence and related homelessness

Since the first refuges opened for women and children escaping violent men in the early 1970s, there has been increasing public, policy and professional concern about the issue of domestic and family violence. The period since the 1970s has seen the development of services within the statutory and voluntary sectors geared to work with and support families and individuals where there is such violence. Organisational responses to domestic violence have developed in a number of directions:

- work with (primarily) women survivors of domestic and family violence;
- work with children living in circumstances of domestic and family violence;
- work with both women and children and
- work with (usually male) perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Early feminist campaigning about violence against women was not primarily focused on addressing the issue of homelessness, although the need for government-funded refuges for women escaping violence in their homes was certainly an area for direct action. “‘Leave the relationship and find a safe place’ was the solution for the seventies” (McFerran 2007, 1). Campaigning emphasised raising awareness of the nature and extent of gendered violence, which, it was hoped, would then negate the need for refuges. Work with women survivors of domestic and family violence has mainly taken place in refuges and other

specialist services which have built up a body of knowledge and expertise. In the last 15-20 years, this work has been built on and supplemented by policy and service development throughout the government, statutory and non-profit community sectors. In Australia, there are a complex and diverse range of domestic and family violence services which have developed historically, in response to local conditions and jurisdictions (Weeks and Oberin 2004).

A sequence of Australian reports into housing and support services for women and children experiencing violence have documented consistent findings and recommendations (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Weeks and Oberin 2004; Tually, Faulkner et al. 2008). They each make the point that in addition to providing accommodation programs to assist those experiencing domestic and family violence, emphasis must be placed on strategies to actually seek to prevent violence, including community education campaigns (an argument which is also supported by Amnesty International 2008; National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009a). In addition to primary prevention, early intervention services which reach women early (such as police, courts, emergency departments, GP and post and ante-natal services) must respond effectively and be adequately resourced (Tually, Faulkner et al. 2008).

Each of these reports notes that there is no single solution to domestic and family violence related homelessness; a diverse range of housing options need to be provided in order to maximize women's ability to re-establish their lives following separation from violence, including the continuation of already established and effective services. These researchers emphasise that an integrated approach to domestic and family violence related homelessness requires increased resources as well as an approach that is integrated across all levels of government, particularly as many of the key services that women and children need are state/territory responsibility. Tually, Faulkner et al. (2009) report significant concern in the domestic and family violence sector because of a lack of resources to assist women and a lack of exit points from crisis accommodation into longer term housing. They also note concern in the sector that particular groups of women have very limited access to services: These groups include women with disabilities, older and younger women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with large numbers of children and women in rural, regional and remote areas.

Strategies, models and practice approaches

The population affected by domestic and family violence-related homelessness is diverse and requires a range of supports. Thus, the types of assistance needed vary depending on the circumstances of the woman (and any children). Tually, Faulkner et al. (2008) identify the main housing models or strategies which comprise the most common approaches:

Emergency shelters/refuges

The established model of shelter accommodation for women and their children continues to provide the important option of (generally) short-term refuge and crisis care. Safe houses and cooling off spaces are regarded as culturally appropriate measures for indigenous communities.

Transitional Housing

In response to the housing needs of women and children experiencing violence, transitional supportive housing programs have developed in addition to emergency shelter/refuge services (Melbin, Sullivan et al. 2003). Transitional or 'halfway' housing is generally available for longer periods of time than refuge accommodation. This is a vital form of support for women and their children if they do not have access to stable housing in the short term (Tually, Faulkner et al. 2008).

'Staying Home Leaving Violence' models

Concern about the lack of housing options for women leaving violence has also led to a greater policy emphasis on the need to expand programs that allow women to remain at home through Staying Home Leaving Violence programs (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Edwards 2004; Commonwealth of Australia 2008). In her overview of integrated models responding to violence and related homelessness in Australia, McFerran (2007) notes that staying safe at home models must be situated in an integrated regional domestic and family violence strategy. The effectiveness and safety of such programs depends on joined up and efficient multi-system responses to back them up. Also noting that staying safe at home programs are not appropriate for all women and children, Tually, Faulkner et al. (2008) suggest these programs should be supported with rent or mortgage assistance.

Safe, secure, affordable long-term housing

Tually, Faulkner et al. (2008) recommend that a percentage of social and affordable housing stock be specifically allocated in order to transition women quickly out of refuges into safe secure long term housing. They also recommend that housing affordability policy responses include a national rental affordability scheme as well as measures to assist home ownership including mortgage assistance, low cost and low deposit loans and shared equity arrangements. For those with ongoing, complex and multiple needs (including but not limited to violence-related homelessness), the HousingFirst model (originating in North America) provides people with permanent housing with individualised supports 'wrapped around' them.

The literature considering service responses to violence and homelessness also canvases the models of practice which are most commonly underpin practice:

Case management

Case management is the preferred approach for much service provision. Some research explores the particular conditions which enable case management to facilitate beneficial outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. These include access to housing resources and specialist supports, individually determined support durations, staff with advanced assessment, communication and relationship skills and regular practice supervision (Flatau, Coleman et al. 2009; Gronda 2009). Flatau and Coleman also note that the use of named referrals linking clients to specific people in external agencies, together with direct transportation to external agencies, works best. The direct provision of comprehensive, practical support is preferable to brokerage or referral to other services. Good outcomes are associated with a relationship between the client and the case manager which has the qualities of persistence, reliability, respect and intimacy, and which provides comprehensive, practical support (Gronda 2009). Case management is a time and resource-intensive intervention. However, research demonstrates that it is cost-effective because it reduces other system expenditures such as hospitalisation, particularly for those requiring a complex service response (Flatau, Coleman et al. 2009).

Integrated responses

Literature about the operation of domestic and family violence services and homelessness services endorses the importance of collaborative or integrated responses and networks. Examining trends in interagency work, Mulrone (2003) and Wilcox (2008) explain that successful integrated service provision means coordinated, appropriate, consistent responses aimed at enhancing victim safety, reducing secondary victimization and holding abusers accountable for their violence. Effective coordination is based on a multi-disciplinary approach that engages the range of professionals involved in responding to the issues of violence and homelessness. Research shows that service coordination works best at a local level, and existing models are generally locality based.

Other research has also found that strong, external support linkages with agencies providing a range of support services is critical to fully address the needs of service-users (Correia 1999a; Whitaker, Baker et al. 2007; Marshall, Ziersch et al. 2008 ; Flatau, Coleman et al. 2009). A current South Australian example, the Family Safety Framework, involves an agreement across Departments and Agencies for a consistent understanding and approach to domestic and family violence that has a focus on women's and children's safety and the accountability of offenders (Marshall, Ziersch, et al 2008). Cooper and Morris (2005) advocate one-stop service centres incorporating all services (housing, finance, social security, legal, medical and education), and 'outreach' services to enable women and their families to access services, and to enable service providers to locate homeless women and children.

Community development

In Australia, some literature recommends a community development approach in order to holistically address the economic, social and structural issues relating to family violence at individual, family Aboriginal community and broader community levels (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000; Weena Mooga Gu Gudba 2002; Cheers, Binell et al. 2006). Such approaches are favoured for their potential to draw on and reinforce the strengths of the community and to facilitate community led and owned responses. Thus, they may be particularly appropriate for Indigenous communities because community knowledge about family violence, embedded in a context of colonisation and involving a broader range of relationships has been less influential than theory and empirical knowledge of domestic violence (Taylor, Cheers et al. 2003).

Despite the range of practice models and services, there are significant barriers to women and children accessing assistance for violence-related homelessness. Weeks and Oberin (2004) identify that services are responding to high demand and that the request for SAAP services exceeds their capacity. Indeed, families needing immediate accommodation are more likely to be turned away from SAAP services than a single person, because of a lack of suitable emergency accommodation (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008). Weeks and Oberin (2004) also note the increasing needs of Indigenous women, the large numbers of accompanying children, difficulties obtaining access to affordable long term housing and a lack of culturally relevant service models.

The issues of discrimination and cultural relevance are discussed in research about what supports sustainable tenancies for Indigenous people. Cooper and Morris (2005) identify a lack of formal support for women to accessing relevant information, finance, transport, urban living skills and skills to access services. This is worsened by a lack of education of staff in support agencies so that they are able to work sensitively and effectively with Indigenous people. 'Shame' prevents women from seeking help, reporting violence, accessing services and attending training programs; ongoing fear affects their physical and mental wellbeing, can exacerbate distrust and a tendency not to access available services. Flatau, Coleman et al's (2009) research into the operation of the Aboriginal Tenancy Support Program identifies some causes of tenancy problems particularly experienced by Indigenous households. These include discrimination by property owners and neighbours; the failure of property owners and housing agencies to appropriately address cultural behaviour including duties of hospitality, sharing and extended family responsibilities; lack of understanding of Indigenous patterns of occupation and use of housing; Indigenous belief systems and mourning customs; inability to meet unforeseen expenses such as funeral costs and patterns of mobility. Cooper and Morris (2005) have also pointed to the need for culturally appropriate housing that does not require tenants to forego traditions and provides for a large, fluctuating population under one roof. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed in both policy and support strategies, as Indigenous women's problems with violence, family obligations and housing cannot be treated in isolation because they are interconnected.

One of the implications of a lack of safe, affordable housing following separation from violence is that it perpetuates women and children's vulnerability. Several studies have found that women are more likely to return to their violent partners when they lose hope of securing suitable alternative accommodation (Hanmer, Gloor et al. 2006; Abrahams 2007; Banga and Gill 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). As Hanmer, Gloor et al put it, "If no suitable private or public housing is available, women and children may be driven back to the violent home they have left. This outcome negates all earlier helpful interventions" (2006, 18). The lack of affordable housing for women leaving domestic violence exposes them to high-risk and expensive tenancies which are difficult to maintain in the long term (Banga and Gill 2008). Women may also be forced to move into accommodation that is of poor quality, unsuitable for their family's needs or distant from schools and public transport (Abrahams 2007). Australian studies have also found that a lack of access to safe, affordable, appropriate housing could place women in precarious situations with statutory child protection services where their living conditions were seen to place children at risk (Flatau, Coleman et al. 2009; Hulse and Kolar 2009; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009).

The experience of using domestic and family violence programs

A number of Australian and international, largely qualitative studies have explored women's experiences of using domestic and family violence shelters and transitional housing services.

Basic physiological needs

Writing in the UK context, Abrahams (2007) documents a number of features that are important for women's well-being during their time at a shelter. At the most fundamental level, the basic physiological needs for food, water, clothing, shelter and safety are identified. Violence can result in post traumatic stress disorder, loss and grief. Thus, many women arrive at shelters in a state of chronic fear and distress. In addition to their own fear, women also report that the safety and wellbeing of their children is a paramount concern (Lyon, Lane et al. 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). In Owens' (2003) research with women who had used a homelessness shelter several times, their reflections on what assisted them included time to rest and recover in safe accommodation.

Mutual support and quality of relationships with workers

Supportive workers as well as the mutual support offered by other residents of the refuge are critical for women's improved well-being (Abrahams 2007). Studies of women's experiences of violence and homelessness services consistently report the importance of the quality of the worker-client relationship. Women are most satisfied when services were provided in a respectful and individualised manner (Melbin, Sullivan et al 2003; Owens 2003; Laing 2005). In South Australia, Parker and Fopp's (2004) research with homeless

women notes the need for supportive relationships with workers which assists them to move incrementally towards independent living. In the evaluation of a domestic violence service in New South Wales, Laing (2005) identifies that worker-client relationships are non-judgemental, calibrated to women's circumstances and involve validating and normalising (not pathologising) women's experience of violence. She also reports that women value assistance for their children. In a study of a tenancy support program for indigenous people, Flatau, Coleman et al (2009) found that support workers need to be culturally sensitive, able to understand and acknowledge cultural issues, including kinship obligations, and have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of local family relationships. The ability to offer such support to women and children using services requires critical and reflective cultural awareness and this issue is considered in more depth later in this literature review.

Housing

A common thread amongst studies of women's experiences in shelters is their acute need for housing (Correia 1999a; Correia 1999b; Bonica 2000; Melbin, Sullivan et al. 2003; Owens 2003; Parker and Fopp 2004; Laing 2005; Abrahams 2007; Lyon, Lane et al. 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009) and their desire for help to find more affordable, independent housing. Structural issues that affect women's ability to stay safe and rebuild their lives – such as whether they can find safe and affordable housing or whether the police will protect them – are noted (Melbin, Sullivan et al 2003). Postmus et al (2009) found that what women using services find most helpful is practical support such as food, housing and financial assistance rather than the emotional and psychological support that service providers prioritised.

The lengthy, fragmented process of trying to obtain safe, secure, affordable housing is identified in research by the New South Wales Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre (2009). The authors note that the critical determinants for women and children's homelessness as a result of violence are a lack of independent income and poverty. Respondents to this research also cite the importance of the physical condition of housing, its location in a safe and convenient, neighbourhood and the availability of maintenance. Those who had housing difficulties were either too scared to complain or didn't feel they had the right to ask for anything better. In Correia's (1999b) survey of domestic violence programs in Iowa, U.S., the common barriers that women identify in their search for permanent housing include a lack of affordable permanent housing, the lack of transportation among potential housing opportunities, jobs, services and a lack of resources for security deposits. Women from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds face additional barriers when attempting to secure housing, whether it was emergency accommodation, transitional or permanent housing. Additional barriers to securing appropriate housing are associated with the behaviours of abusive partner such as property damage and poor references and credit history (Correia and Rubin 2001).

Co-ordination with other agencies

Due to the lack of integration between housing agencies and difficult administrative and bureaucratic processes, research respondents find refuges and domestic/family violence services to be crucial for their advocacy, facilitation and co-ordination of other services' support (Owens 2003; Laing 2005; Kowanko, Stewart et al. 2009; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). Laing's evaluation of the Green Valley Domestic Violence Service in New South Wales notes that it had formalised service agreements with a range of government departments and NGOs, including the state Department of Housing, facilitating fewer cumbersome and repetitive processes for women applying for public housing (2005).

Organised activities

Organised activities such as art, craft, discussion groups and excursions are found by women to be useful in building up self-esteem and confidence (Abrahams 2007). However, some studies report women's preference for flexible, varied support programs that should be offered but not mandated (Melbin, Sullivan et al. 2003; Haj-Yahia and Cohen 2008).

Shared space and privacy

In Abrahams' (2007) study, the women favour shared kitchens and shared communal areas to encourage interaction among residents. However, they also value privacy (with privacy for older children being mentioned specifically), including quiet rooms for interview or counselling. In their multi-state study of domestic violence shelters in the United States, Lyon Lane et al (2009) report the problem of conflicts between women because of the need to share living space. In their exploration of women's experience of transitional housing, Hulse and Kolar (2009) note some respondents' concerns about the noise of high density housing.

Continuation of support

Research has noted that when women are satisfied with the support they receive at a shelter, they value the opportunity to seek this support after they leave and until they are able to live more independently (Owens 2003; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009).

The literature in this area points to the complex array of services that shelter and transitional housing programs provide to victims of abuse and their children. In general, studies suggest that needs are met for most residents. The most urgent of these needs are safety, information, help with children and help with emotional distress. The need for safe, affordable housing is also a very well-represented theme. Respondents to these studies report that if the shelter or transitional housing did not exist, the consequences for them would be dire: homelessness, the loss of children into state care, continued abuse, death, or harmful behaviours to themselves or others (Melbin, Sullivan et al. 2003). The literature

demonstrates that domestic violence shelters address compelling needs that are not met elsewhere and supports the assertion of Tually, Faulkner et al (2008) that two types of assistance are critical: the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing; and provision of a continuum of individualised, ongoing and open-ended support, including outreach services, that wraps around women and their children in a range of areas (such as counselling, health care, financial support) for as long as they need it. There is, however, evidence that points to additional obstacles that women from non-dominant racial and ethnic groups face in accessing safe, culturally responsive assistance and this issue is discussed in the following section.

Culturally appropriate responses to domestic and family violence

Barriers to support

International literature on domestic violence services has documented the barriers to appropriate support that may exist for women from minority ethnic and racial groups. In the U.K., Burman, Smailes et al. (2004) report that African, African-Caribbean, South Asian, Jewish and Irish women can be effectively excluded from using domestic violence refuges because racially and culturally informed beliefs about domestic violence mean that it can be overlooked or even excused for 'cultural reasons'. Alternatively, domestic violence can have a heightened visibility and be regarded as a pathologised presence in some racial/cultural groups. Banga and Gill (2008) argue that specialist refuges are required in order to counter difficulties women experience with such access and equity issues. In the United States, some respondents to a survey study of their experience of using domestic violence shelters report that their ethnic or religious customs are not respected (Lyon, Lane et al. 2008).

In the Australian context, Hovane (2007) has argued that concepts of safety for Aboriginal victims must also extend beyond physical safety and physical location, to incorporate concepts of cultural safety, threats to cultural identity, cultural appropriateness and cultural relevance. Research has explored the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women accessing services. Lumby and Farrelly (2009) have reported that Aboriginal help-seeking can be complicated and even impeded by issues relating to characteristics of the close-knit nature of Aboriginal communities. Help-seeking can be compromised by factors like shame associated with the violence, fear of retaliation, family and cultural pressures to retain the family unit, community tolerance of violence, gaps in service provision, poor responses to those seeking help, threats to confidentiality in small communities, as well as cultural and language barriers. Lumby and Farrelly recommend that service responses to these issues are underpinned by awareness that Aboriginal communities can be romanticised and the difficulties of seeking help downplayed.

Good practice in cultural appropriateness

The Health Canada (1997) review of Canadian Aboriginal family violence programs (which reviewed the files on 15 projects conceived, developed and implemented by Aboriginal people) identified project characteristics that reflect cultural appropriateness and associated good practices. The review emphasises the involvement of Aboriginal people (including Elders) in the development of services, the use of Aboriginal language, pictures and symbols. Both Health Canada (1997) and Memmott, Chambers et al. (2006) (assessing the constitution of a successful family violence prevention programs in the Australian context) report that the best approach to addressing family violence is considered to be a holistic one that incorporates important cultural elements, including the use of traditional practices, connections to the community and community approaches to address family violence. The need to develop effective holistic responses to family violence that include an Aboriginal cultural focus and take into account the complexities within Aboriginal families and communities is discussed by Hughes and Snell (2008) and Kowanko, Stewart et al. (2009).

The literature on culturally appropriate service responses to domestic and family violence related homelessness includes discussion about the best approaches to the staffing of such programs. Authors such as Hughes and Snell (2008) and Lumby and Farrelly (2009) argue that attempts to improve cross cultural understanding and the appropriateness of services must move beyond the tokenistic (such as short training sessions in cultural competence). A predominance of staff of Aboriginal ancestry is recommended by Health Canada (2007). The employment of Aboriginal workers is also endorsed by Snell and Small (2009) in their description of an Aboriginal specific women's and children's accommodation service in South Australia. They describe the service as an 'Aboriginal community place with Aboriginal community members' (2009, 46) and report that this means that having workers who are kin and community is more likely to encourage women to use the service. While there are clearly important political and practice reasons to encourage formal assistance from Aboriginal workers, authors such as Lumby and Farrelly (2009) note that this can also be problematic where it is perceived to compromise confidentiality in small communities.

Beyond issues of culturally-informed design and operation, Memmott, Chambers et al. (2006) list other effective practical components including sound administrative structures, secure funding effective communication, training and skills acquisition, project flexibility and adaptability. The knowledge base that supported successful programs was characterised by awareness about family violence and its related multidimensional issues. Other key elements to practice noted in the literature include group and narrative or therapeutic storytelling approaches to healing (Health Canada 1997; Memmott, Chambers et al. 2006), flexible and individualised programs (Health Canada 1997; Snell and Small 2009) and staff client relationships characterised by openness, informality and the use of simple, jargon-

free language. As in the literature on mainstream service responses, mediation and connections with other institutions and service (Snell and Small 2009) are recommended.

Evaluation of domestic and family violence services

A program evaluation is a systematic assessment of the operation and/or outcomes of a program (Sullivan and Gillum 2001). It is noted in the international (Abel 2000; Baker, Niolon et al. 2009) and Australian (Laing 2003; Weeks and Oberin 2004; 2006) contexts that there is a lack of rigorous, published evaluations of domestic and family violence programs. This means that the evidence of the effectiveness of such programs is limited. The lack of evaluation literature is partly because of the difficulties of researching the effectiveness of services for women and children who have experienced violence. The nature of such services means that women often arrive in crisis, stay for variable amounts of time and consideration of their vulnerability, the complexity of their situation and safety issues may preclude their involvement in evaluation processes. Such services are commonly open-ended, flexible and provide multiple services. Evaluations have also been limited because it is not ethical to withhold access to a service for a control group (Abel 2000; Laing 2003). Laing (2003) notes that the outcomes of domestic and family violence programs can be hard to measure; it is hard to evaluate programs designed to prevent a negative effect (domestic/family violence), because the woman is not responsible for violence recurring. Memmott, Chambers et al (2006) note that a funded evaluation component is often not included in programs for Indigenous communities.

However, while there are few contemporary robust evaluations of the work of domestic/family violence and sexual assault services, qualitative research studies over the past 35 years call attention to the helpful responses of NGO services on the experience of those who were victimised – especially in contrast to the lack of effective action by state services (Hanmer, Gloor et al. 2006) and some such studies have been referred to in this literature review. As Hanmer, Gloor et al. (2006) point out, given the increasing demand for services to assist those victimised by violence, knowledge of their appropriateness and effectiveness is needed. Writing in the North American context Riger, Bennett et al. (2002) note the increasing demand by funding bodies for service evaluations. In Australia, Laing (2003) and Memmott, Chambers et al. (2006) also identify the increased interest in evaluation by funding bodies and argue that a lack of such research may also result in poor policy and program development.

An important consideration for funders of welfare programs is what outcomes they produce and their cost-effectiveness. Although efforts have been made to quantify the costs of specific social problems (for example and as noted in this literature review, the estimated total annual cost of domestic violence in Australia), there is limited evidence about the cost effectiveness of programs. However, there is some recent data from evaluations of homelessness and domestic violence programs in Western Australia. Flatau, Zaretzky, et al

(2008) evaluated the cost-effectiveness of 3 programs in Western Australia and concluded that the programs did produce positive outcomes for clients: those previously without shelter or permanent accommodation generally remain housed some months later (including many transitions to permanent accommodation); improvements in employment and income outcomes; those at risk of losing their tenancy without support overwhelmingly maintain it with support and significantly improved safety for women escaping domestic and family violence. Following the identification of these positive outcomes, Flatau, Zaretsky et al (2008) make some important points about the cost-effectiveness of such services. They note that these improved client outcomes come as a result of the provision of services which are inexpensive relative to the direct cost of other supported accommodation options which might have been used in their absence (such as hospitals, residential care services or justice facilities). This, in turn, may result in decreased utilisation of homelessness services in the future. There would also likely be lower social housing and private rental management costs from reduced evictions, lower income support payments and higher revenue from increased income tax payments. If homelessness programs were able to reduce the use of such facilities down to population rates of utilisation, the savings achieved would pay for the homelessness programs a number of times over as well as reduce the costs in areas such as health, justice and child protection. Thus, the authors argue that there is potential for homelessness programs to be significantly cost-effective.

Please see *Appendix A* for a Copy of the Reference List.

3a. Summary of Research Methodology

The evaluation of the Sturt Street Project aimed to examine the client profile and service activity to investigate outcomes for Aboriginal women and children post-transition from the Project. Secondly, it aimed to explore perceptions of the Project from both Aboriginal women clients and service providers/stakeholders to determine both facilitators and barriers to success of the Project.

The evaluation adopted a predominantly qualitative focus. Face to face semi-structured interviews were held with 9 service providers who worked at or closely with the Project and 13 Aboriginal women who had used the Project (representing over 40% of the women who have used this project to date). Snowball and convenience sampling methods were used to recruitment participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews.

The evaluation included analysis of de-identified secondary quantitative data describing the client population, key demographic attributes, presenting needs and service inputs and outputs. A basic thematic analysis was also conducted on mission statements, funding agreements, reports and performance indicators.

Ethics applications were submitted to and approved by:

- The Human Research Ethics Committee – University of South Australia.
- The Human Research Ethics Committee – Flinders University.
- Department for Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee.

The researchers followed the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) during all stages of the research process. In particular, the Statement guided the conduct of research during recruitment and sampling to avoid potential coercion to participants, ensuring fully-informed, voluntary consent, reducing potential harm and risk as a result of participation, and maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

A Reference Group was established during the timeframe of the evaluation (December 2009 - June 2010). Members included the Department for Families and Communities Research Unit and Housing SA representatives and FaHCSIA. The evaluation was conducted by Dr Sarah Wendt (Senior Lecturer at the University of South Australia) and Dr Joanne Baker (Lecturer in Social Policy at Flinders University). Both have extensive experience working and researching in the field of violence against women.

3b. Research Methodology

Aims

The evaluation of the Sturt Street Project aimed to:

- Examine client profile and service activity to determine numbers assisted and characteristics of the client group;
- Investigate service outcomes for women and families post-transition from the program;
- Explore perceptions of service from the clients' perspectives;
- Determine both facilitators and barriers to the success of the project;
- Explore service effectiveness as perceived by other stakeholders; and
- Recommend opportunities for improvement if needed.

The main research question guiding the evaluation was:

How effective is the Sturt Street Family Violence Partnership Project for clients, their families, and other service providers?

Design

The evaluation adopted a predominantly qualitative focus, although some descriptive quantitative data was used in the evaluation. The methodology for the evaluation is described below.

Methods

There were 2 key sources of qualitative data – service providers and clients. Firstly, face to face semi-structured interviews were held with service providers including staff from the Sturt Street Project, as well as key service providers that worked closely with the Project such as teachers, counsellors, and other domestic violence services in Adelaide. They were asked about their level of understanding and perceptions of the Sturt Street Project. It was important to include the perceptions of a range of service providers so that the aims of *determining both facilitators and barriers to success of the project* and *exploring service effectiveness as perceived by stakeholders* could be met. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the interview schedule for service providers.

Secondly, face to face semi-structured interviews were held with Aboriginal women who had accessed and used the Sturt Street Project. They were asked about how they thought the Project impacted on their safety, family life, health and wellbeing as well as housing stability. It was vital to include the voices of Aboriginal women so that the aims of *exploring the perceptions of the service from the clients' perspective* and *determining the service outcomes for women and families post-transition* could be met. Please see Appendix C for a copy of the interview schedule for Aboriginal women.

Sampling and Recruitment

Service providers who worked directly for the Sturt Street Project or had close association with it in the context of their employment were invited to participate.

Snowball sampling methods were used to recruit service providers. The Reference Group, established for the purposes of the evaluation, identified potential service providers to be invited. Fourteen potential service providers were identified. The researchers contacted them via email inviting their participation. Information sheets (Appendix D), consent forms (Appendix E), and interview schedules (Appendix B) were attached to the email. If service providers were interested they emailed or telephoned the researchers directly and arranged an interview time at a place that was convenient for them.

This method of sampling resulted in 9 service providers being interviewed (64% response). Eight were non-Aboriginal and one identified as being Aboriginal. The fields of service provision reflected in the sample included education, psychology/counselling, case management, and domestic violence shelters. Six had been working at or with Sturt Street since its commencement in 2006. Two had been working with Sturt Street for 2 years and one service provider for 18 months. Please note no specific details are provided to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

The criterion for Aboriginal women was that they were considered a former or current client of the Sturt Street Project and were 18 years of age or older. At the time of recruitment (March 2010) 31 women and 86 children had used the service since its commencement in June 2006.

Many of the women/family groups had stayed in contact with the Sturt Street Project due to the relationships they have formed with their case worker and other women/family groups. Acknowledging this, convenient targeted sampling was used to recruit participants whereby workers at the Sturt Street Project were asked to invite all 31 Aboriginal women to potentially participate in the evaluation.

The researchers met with the workers employed the Sturt Street Project to explain the purpose, nature, and anticipated outcomes of the evaluation. Workers were given the opportunity to ask questions during this meeting and anytime after via email/telephone. The researchers provided Sturt Street with information sheets (Appendix F), consent forms (Appendix E), and copies of the interview schedule for Aboriginal women (Appendix C) and asked them to explain and give this material to the Aboriginal women they were currently working with or had worked with in the past.

If Aboriginal women were interested an interview was arranged at the accommodation site with the support of the workers. Aboriginal women were given the option to contact the researchers directly to arrange a time and safe place for the interview to take place if they preferred. No Aboriginal women selected this option; instead preferring to participate with the support of their worker.

This method of sampling resulted in 13 Aboriginal women (42% response rate) being interviewed in the timeframe of 1.5 months. Four of these 13 women were current residents (of varying duration) in the Sturt Street accommodation. All interviews were carried out in a private room at the back of the Sturt Street Project office. Between them, the 13 women had 41 children with an age range of less than a year to 25 years old. Two women were also guardians for children who were family members. Please note as with the service providers, no specific details about respondents are provided in order to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

Compared to other studies this response rate is very high for such a specific population that are likely to have difficulties in their lives. For example, Hulse and Kolar (2009) reported that it took 5 months to complete 20 interviews with women in an evaluation of a transitional housing service (and it took 3 months to recruit 12 of these women). Laing's (2005) evaluation of a domestic violence service included interviews with 14 women. In both studies, the difficulties involved in recruiting a vulnerable population with complex life circumstances to research were noted.

Analysis of qualitative data

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from interviews with both service providers and Aboriginal women. Firstly, open coding was used while each interview transcript was read whereby large chunks of data were assigned to initial themes. Secondly, axial coding was conducted so that initial themes could be checked, clarified, and compared for the purposes of naming the dominant themes. The large chunks of data assigned to the dominant themes were edited, de-identified, and confirmed. Lastly, selective coding was used to confirm dialogue and interpretations of the themes and to select specific quotes that supported the major findings and discussion.

Quantitative data and analysis

De-identified secondary quantitative data describing the service was provided for analysis by the Department for Families and Communities. Analysis essentially described the client population, their key demographic attributes, presenting needs and service inputs and outputs. A basic thematic analysis was also conducted on mission statements, funding agreements, and any reports produced between the periods of 2006-2010.

Ethics

Ethics applications were submitted to and approved by:

- The Human Research Ethics Committee – University of South Australia.
- The Human Research Ethics Committee – Flinders University.
- Department for Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee.

Ethics issues that were addressed as part of the application process included dependency, coercion, risk, and confidentiality.

Aboriginal women using the Sturt Street Project and service providers working at or with this Project were considered a dependent group. It is for these reasons that the researchers closely adhered to Chapter 4.3 “People in Dependent or Unequal Relationships” of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The following steps were taken to ensure a transparent and fully informed consent process.

Service Providers

Management of the Sturt Street Project did not invite service providers to participate in the study; instead the researchers invited them via email. If service providers were interested in participating they contacted the researchers directly in order that a time and place that suited the service provider could be arranged. Email was deliberately selected to decrease obligation or pressure to participate, that is, verbal invitations face to face and/or telephone was thought to have the potential to put service providers ‘on the spot’. Using email provided service providers with time to read, consider and ask questions in a time frame that was comfortable for them. If they did not want to participate they could simply ignore the email.

Aboriginal Women

Management of the Sturt Street Project did not invite Aboriginal women to participate in the study; instead the two researchers (who are not known to the service) offered the invitation through the women’s allocated case workers. The National Statement (4.3.2) suggests that vulnerable participants should be able to discuss their participation with someone who is able to support them in making their decision. If they wanted to participate this was arranged with the researchers through their worker.

Aboriginal women were given the option of contacting the researchers directly, however all participated in the interviews with the support of their workers. It is believed this contributed to the high response rate because the Aboriginal women provided the following feedback:

- They had time to ask their workers questions about the purpose of the research;
- They could clarify what might be asked in the interview; and
- They appreciated the workers setting up the interview on their behalf.

In summary, Aboriginal women felt much more comfortable participating in the research with the assistance of their worker who was someone they trusted and having this interview conducted at the Sturt Street premises.

Because Aboriginal women expressed their desire to participate in the evaluation with the support of their case worker and to have the interview held at the Sturt Street office, the researchers recognised the privacy implications of this process. For example, the case workers would know which Aboriginal women decided to participate, and participants would also be visible as participants through the use of the Sturt Street Offices in conducting interviews. Yet again, the decision to work with workers and to conduct interviews at the office was informed by the desire to ensure the safety of Aboriginal women and to increase their support during participation in the research. But to address privacy implications the researchers emphasised and paid particular attention to the anonymising of the interview data. Interviews were conducted one-on-one with the researcher and only first names were used during interviews. All interviews were transcribed and both researchers ensured that all identifying material was removed. Each interview was assigned a code name. Before each interview the researchers reiterated the strategy of names being changed, and particular identifying material being removed, altered or not used in the writing up of findings e.g. details such as number/age of children, specifics of their experiences. Although a small number of case workers may be aware of the Aboriginal women's participation, the researchers reassured the Aboriginal women that any options or ideas they express would not be tracked back to them or identified as their views.

The researchers did not anticipate any potential risks to individual subjects' well being because the project was focused on evaluation, that is, people's opinions, perceptions and thoughts about the effectiveness of a service. However, it was also recognised that because the service is aimed at assisting Aboriginal women experiencing family violence, participants may experience some emotional distress during interviews. It is for these reasons that Aboriginal women were referred to their case worker if they felt they needed extra support after participation in the study. Alternatively, if they did not want to see their case worker they were given other appropriate referrals but again Aboriginal women did not take up this option.

It was recognised (4.3.4 National Statement) that Aboriginal Women can be considered a vulnerable group that is over-researched, however, the likely benefit of the research (to improve services for Aboriginal women), has the potential to see the continuation of the service and inform other services Australia wide. For such reasons, the nature of the methodology ensured that Aboriginal women's voices and experiences predominantly informed the findings and conclusions of the evaluation.

Ethical and good practice approaches to evaluation

While the need to evaluate domestic and family violence services is not disputed, there is a large body of work which emphasises the need for evaluations to be methodologically and ethically sound. The involvement of those using the services to be evaluated is strongly endorsed by the feminist (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger, Bennett et al. 2002; Sullivan and Cain 2004; Braaf 2008) and service-user movement literature (Beresford 2002) as well as the growing body of work emphasising participatory evaluation in general (for example Boyd, Boyd et al. 1997) and cross-culturally competent participatory approaches in particular (such as Lee 2007). Rollins, Saris et al. (2001) note that quantitative studies on the topic of homelessness are far more common than qualitative ones and homeless women themselves are infrequently invited to share their experiences. Owens (2003) agrees that the voices of women and vulnerable people are not often taken into consideration for policy making and provision of services. It is for these reasons, that the voices of both service providers and most importantly, Aboriginal women inform the majority of the findings and conclusions of the evaluation.

Campbell and Dienemann (2001) note that although the idea that those researching in sensitive areas should be culturally matched with respondents is intuitively appealing, this is not an imperative because it can introduce other problems such as lack of confidentiality within small communities. They argue that communication skills and sensitivity may therefore be more important but must be accompanied by acute attention to the presence and danger of racism in both data collection and analysis. Malley-Morrison and Hines (2008) and Laing (2003) also emphasise careful assessments of the potential role of race and ethnicity in family violence, and cultural competence and appropriateness. In a similar vein, Lee (2007) considers that nobody can ever be entirely knowledgeable about culture and that the focus must therefore be on cross-cultural competence. This includes self-reflection about how culture, social identity, and privilege and power affect one's work and personal life. It also includes developing the capacity to not make assumptions and to respectfully ask the right questions. It is for these reasons, the evaluation was informed by the National Statement on on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and that recruitment of Aboriginal women was conducted with the assistance of workers employed at Sturt Street.

Braaf (2008) identifies several elements for good practice in evaluation. She notes that it is important that evaluators working in this field have an in-depth understanding of violence within families, its dynamics and impacts. Evaluators need to recognise the use of violence in relationships as a means of maintaining power and control, its gendered nature, the multiple forms of abuse, the impacts for victims and likely responses to violence. This knowledge will inform the evaluation design and increase evaluators' sensitivity to particular issues, such as the safety of participants, victim empowerment and perpetrator accountability. Both researchers who conducted this evaluation have extensive experience

working in the field of domestic violence and consequently have an in-depth understanding of violence within families from a feminist point of view. Please see Appendix G for an outline of their backgrounds.

The importance of ethical conduct in evaluation is emphasised across the literature and in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Care must be taken to ensure that participants give informed consent, have the option of withdrawing from the process, have their privacy protected and are not endangered by participating in the process (Campbell and Dienemann 2001; Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger, Bennett et al. 2002; Laing 2003; Sullivan and Cain 2004; Braaf 2008). Researchers must ensure that no detail identifies a participant (especially in small communities), that appropriate assistance is offered to participants as required and that participation is voluntary and not a condition of access to services (Laing 2003). It is for these reasons that at the beginning of the interview the researchers talked to both service providers and Aboriginal women about the following issues:

- Being mindful that they may not directly benefit from taking part in the study;
- Their participation is strictly voluntary and they can ask questions at anytime or refuse to answer any questions anytime;
- They are able to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty;
- Their decision to participate or not will have no bearing on their relationship with the Sturt Street Project and/or receiving other services; and
- That confidentiality will be safeguarded at all times during and after data collection and analysis as well as report writing.

Timeframe

The evaluation commenced in December 2009 and was completed in June 2010.

Project Governance

A Reference Group was established, incorporating the Department for Families and Communities Research Unit and Housing SA and FaHCSIA representatives. The Reference Group assisted with the determination of project methodology and with the identification of key service providers for consultation.

4a. Summary of Findings: Client Profiles and Service Outcomes

This section of the report is concerned with examining the client profile and service activity to determine the numbers assisted and characteristics of the client group. It also documents the service outcomes for women and families post-transition from the program.

Client profile

The client profile shows that since its inception in June 2006, 31 women and 86 children/young people have accessed the Sturt Street Project. Analysis of the age and sex of the children/young people reveals 38 male and 48 female children/young people accompanied women to Sturt Street, with an age range from a month to over 17 years old. Eight boys aged 14 and above have lived at Sturt Street. The average family size is one woman and 3 children. Nine Aboriginal women came from rural/regional centres. Three came from interstate. The remaining women came from metropolitan Adelaide.

Primary need/reason for entry to the Sturt Street Project

Analysis of intake data shows that family violence is a reason for all of the Aboriginal women entering the service and that it has contributed significantly to their experience of homelessness. Violence is reported to have resulted in failed public and private tenancies and the need to leave existing housing through fear. These issues frequently co-existed with drug and alcohol dependency and physical and mental health issues.

Service activity and outcomes

The average time spent in the service is approximately 10 months – an increase from the 3-6 months originally anticipated but an increase that is justified by the sustainable outcomes that are reported. Of the 31 families who have accessed the Sturt Street Project, 26 (including 76 children/young people) have left the service and 23 (88%) are in stable public housing, with just over a third of these sustaining their tenancies for over 2 years. The Sturt Street Project has consistently exit-housed an average of 5 families per financial year.

Reporting Data - Performance Indicators

The Sturt Street Project's role and function includes providing pathways to supported housing, intensive service intervention and assistance, the development of new life skills, the stabilisation of factors affecting well-being, and the maintenance of living arrangements that are free of violence. This section notes that performance measures must be clear and linked to service role and function so that they provide useful and important insights about what is and is not working and should address questions about whether the intervention addressed user needs.

Reports submitted between June 2006 and June 2009 document a range of Activity Performance Indicators, including sustained tenancies, no contact with perpetrators of violence, improved health and well-being for women and children (including improved school attendance and educational support, counselling, employment) and the provision of additional activities such school holiday excursions, parenting support and art classes. A significant decrease in the number and speed of public housing offers to clients is also reported.

4b. Findings: Client Profiles and Service Outcomes

The evaluation of the Sturt Street Project aimed to:

- Examine client profile and service activity to determine numbers assisted and characteristics of the client group; and
- Investigate service outcomes for women and families post-transition from the program.

De-identified quantitative data describing the client population, their key demographic attributes, presenting needs, and service inputs, was provided as well as the following documents for analysis by Department for Families and Communities.

Documents provided

- Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. Family Violence Funding Program. Application for funding. Start date September 2005 – end date 30 June 2008.
- Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs notice of additional funding 2008-09.
- Australian Government Indigenous Co-ordination Centre, Adelaide Office. Funding Agreement 1 July 2009 – 30 June 2010.
- Memorandum of Understanding between The Commonwealth of Australia represented by the Department of Family and Community Services and The South Australian Government represented by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (in relation to the Australian Government *Family Violence Partnership Programme – FVPP*).
- Activity Performance Indicators Report 2005-2007.
- Operating Processes and Procedures for Sturt Street Supported Tenancy Accommodation Project.
- Draft Business Plan 2008/09
- Role and procedures for Outreach Worker at Pathways Housing.
- 2 x work package documents. Description of internal and external services and management work package and resources.
- 6 reports dating November 2007 – June 2009

Client Profile (June 2006 - 1 March 2010)

Summary

- 31 women have accessed the Sturt Street Project

- 86 children/young people (38 male, 48 female) + 1 pregnancy (including 2 young relatives for whom women were the primary carer or custodial parent)
- Numbers exit-housed to date: 26 women, 76 children/young people
- 8 young men aged 14-17+ years old have been housed at Sturt Street

Age Profile

Table A and Graph A: Age Profile of Aboriginal Women

Age range	Number of women
20-24 years	6
25-29 years	8
30-34 years	5
35-39 years	7
40-44 years	3
45-49 years	2
Total	31

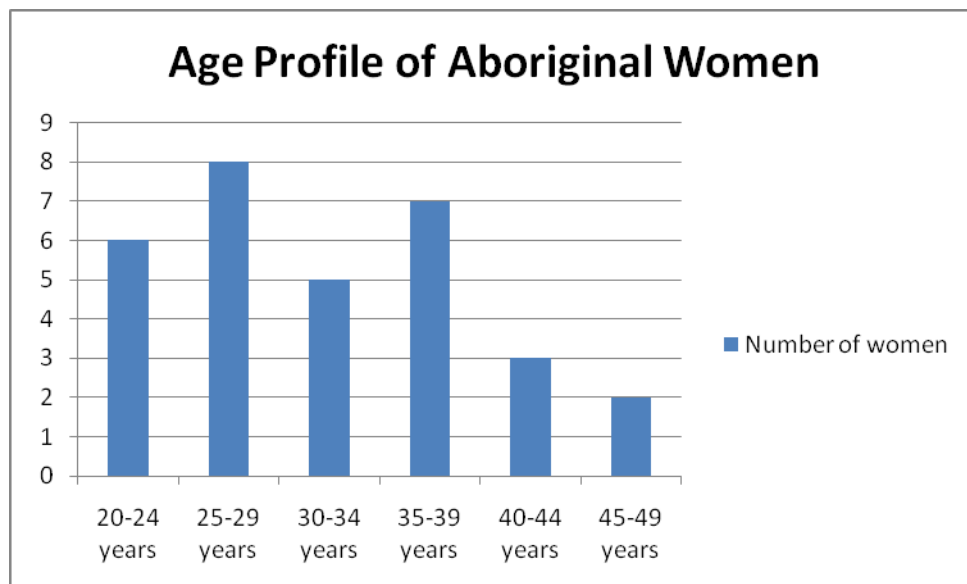


Table A and Graph A show that the majority of Aboriginal women who have accessed the Sturt Street Project are between the ages of 20-39 years and the average age is 32 years.

Table B and Graph B: Age and Sex Profile for Children

Age range	Number of children	Sex of children by age
Less than 2 years	7	4 Female 4 Male
2-4 years	12	4 Female 7 Male
5-7 years	21	13 Female 8 Male
8-10 years	19	9 Female 10 Male
11-13 years	7	5 Female 2 Male
14-16 years	9	6 Female 3 Male
17 years +	11	6 Female 5 Male
Total	86	

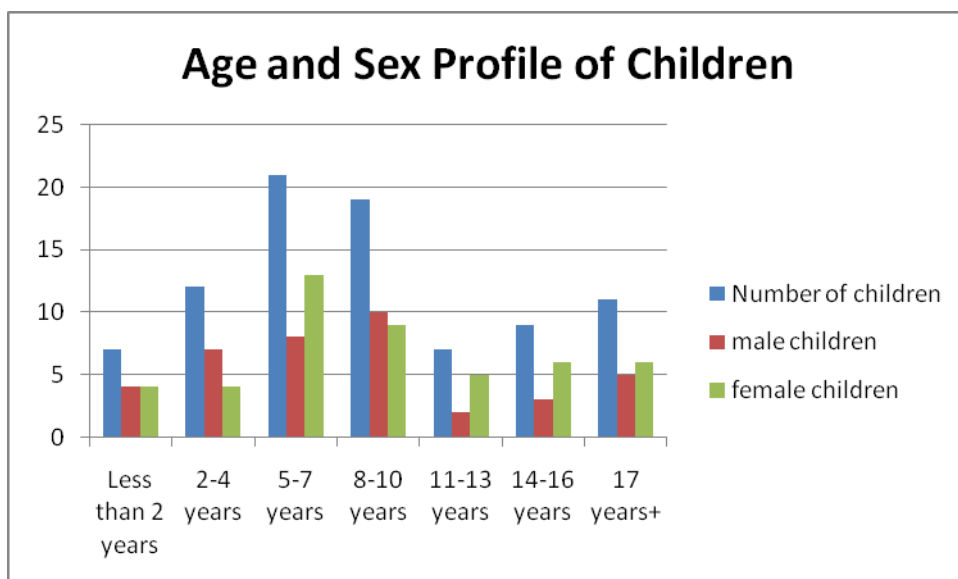


Table B and Graph B show that the majority of children who access the Sturt Street Project are between the ages of 2-10 years. However, it is worth noting that there is a strong representation of those aged 17 years or older, particularly males. The average age of a child is 9.5 years (not including 7 children under the age of one e.g. 3 x 1 month old, 1 x 2 month old, 1 x 3 month old, 1 x 8 month old, and 1 x 10 month old) plus one pregnancy.

The most common family structure that accesses the service is one mother and 3 children.

Primary need/reason for entry to the Sturt Street Project

The intake data recorded by the Sturt Street Project shows that family violence is a reason for all Aboriginal women entering the service. The reasons recorded also shows that family violence has impacted on other aspects of the Aboriginal women's lives that also contributed to their need for assistance. For example,

- Family violence resulting in the following
 - Failed public housing tenancy as result of family violence x 8
 - Failed private rental as result of family violence x 9
 - Children being at risk of being placed in State Care x 2
 - Living in parklands, car, hotels, lounge rooms, and other transient options x 11.
- Family violence together with:
 - Alcohol dependency x 3
 - Mental health issues x 4
 - Physical health issues x 2

- Pregnancy
- Drug dependency x 4
- Prison time x 2

Nine Aboriginal women came from rural/regional centres. 3 came from interstate. 2 had spent time in prison. The remaining women came from metropolitan Adelaide.

Service Activity

Table C: Number of Families Exit Housed

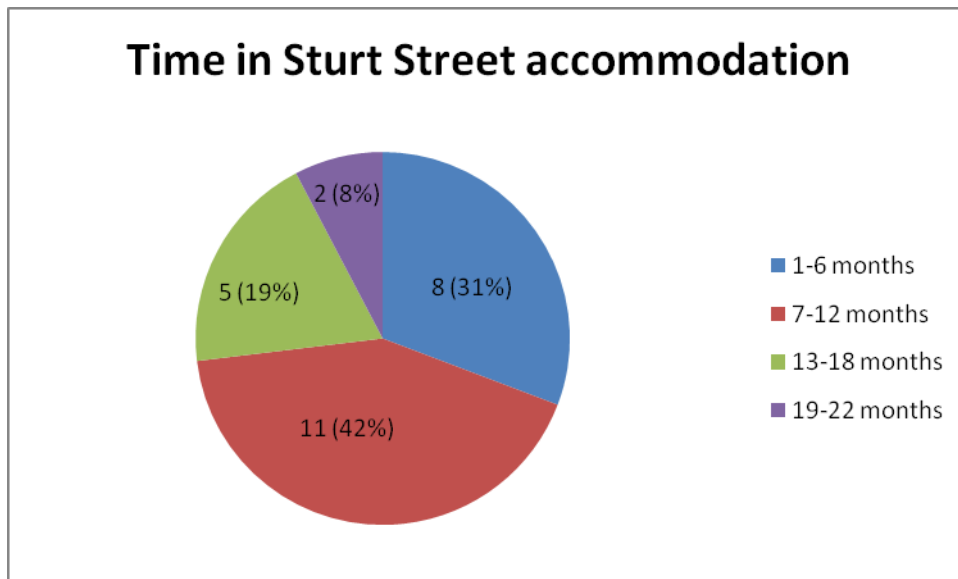
Financial year	No. of families exit-housed
2006-07	5
2007-08	4
2008-09	7
2009-10	6
2010-11	4

Table C shows that since its commencement in 2006, Sturt Street Project has consistently exit housed on average 5 families per financial year.

Table D and Graph D: Time in Sturt Street Accommodation

Length of time in Sturt Street accommodation	No. of families	% of families
1-2 months	2	31%
3-4 months	3	
5-6 months	3	
7-8 months	5	42%
9-10 months	3	
11-12 months	3	
13-14 months	3	19%

15-16 months	2	
17-18 months	0	
19-20 months	1	8%
21-22 months	1	
	26	



The average time spent in the service is approximately 10 months (not including the 5 families currently in the service). Although early documentation about the service anticipated that each family would stay at Sturt Street for 3-6 months, the experience of its operation has demonstrated that longer periods of residence are required in order to achieve its long term, sustainable outcomes. Given the successful program outcomes documented in this report, the average length of stay (10 months) could be regarded as a modest and well-justified increase from that originally expected.

Service outcomes for women and families post-transition from the program.

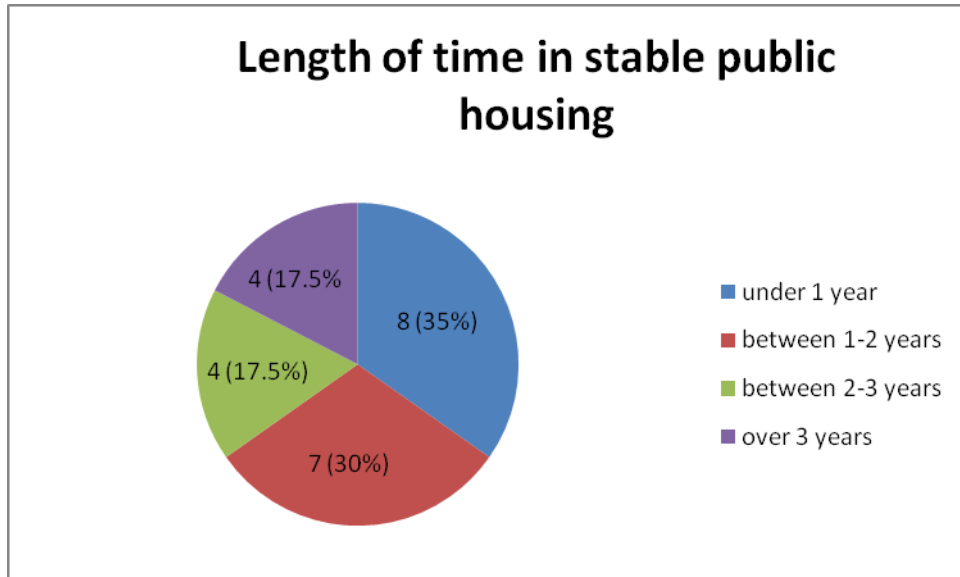
Twenty three women and their children were in stable public housing at the time of the evaluation. This indicates that 88% of the 26 Aboriginal families have maintained stable accommodation after they have left Sturt Street Accommodation. Three women failed to secure stable housing (available information indicates that one woman vacated her public housing because the family violence resumed and her whereabouts is unknown, one woman left after 2 months of being at Sturt Street resulting in transient living and children therefore being removed). Table E shows the time spent by each of the 23 women and their families in stable public housing following residence at the Sturt Street Project. Graph E summarises

this information, showing how many women have been in stable housing for over 3 years, between 2 and 3 years, between 1 and 2 years and under a year.

Table E and Graph E: Length of Time in stable Public Housing after exiting Sturt Street Accommodation.

Woman	Exited Sturt Street Accommodation	Time spent in Stable Public Housing as at April 2010.
1	10/11/2006	3 years 5 months
2	3/6/2006	3 years 10 months
3	6/11/2006	3 years 5 months
4	12/7/2008	1 year 9 months
5	15/9/2007	2 years 7 months
6	9/6/2007	2 years 10 months
7	26/5/2007	2 years 11 months
8	16/2/2008	2 years 1 month
9	24/11/2007	2 years 5 months
10	4/4/2009	1 year
11	17/5/2008	1 year 11 months
12	25/4/2008	2 years
13	21/7/2006	3 years 9 months
14	12/1/2008	2 years 3 months
15	6/9/2008	1 year 7 months
16	20/7/2009	9 months
17	20/2/2010	2 months
18	5/9/2009	7 months
19	7/11/2009	5 months
20	6/6/2009	10 months
21	24/4/2010	1 month

22	31/12/2009	4 months
23	26/2/2010	2 months



Reporting Data - Performance Indicators

As stated from the Business Plan, the Sturt Street Project Role and Function included:

- To provide supported pathways housing,
- To provide intensive service intervention and assistance,
- To enable development of new life skills and stabilisation of factors affecting well-being, and
- To develop and maintain living arrangements that are free of violence.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and the State Government stated that the Funding Recipient will provide as specified a written or oral report about any of the following:

- Implementation and progress of the Project;
- Expenditure;
- Issues encountered in performing the Project;
- Any recommendations in relation to future conduct of the project, and
- Other matters reasonably requested by the Commonwealth.

During the period of commencement June 2006 through to 31/1/2007 the following Activity Performance Indicators were listed as part of the funding agreement and reported on:

- Women and children experiencing repeated episodes of homelessness as a result of family violence are able to sustain tenancies after exiting transitional

- Women and children in the program demonstrate improved health and well-being. (OUTCOMES REPORTED: women have ceased substance misuse, engaged in further education; children attending school and after-school activities. Ten children have started new schools or early childhood services. DECS has provided an Aboriginal Education worker for 10 hours per week during and after class to support the children.
- Women in the program make positive choices about personal safety and well-being after exiting transitional accommodation (OUTCOMES REPORTED: 5 out of 6 women housed have had no contact with family violence perpetrators.)

During 31/1/2007 - 1/6/2009 four brief reports were written outlining the following outcomes from the Sturt Street Project:

- Engagement of an Aboriginal grief, loss and wellbeing counsellor to assist women and children with personal issues. It was recorded as highly successful (Report 5).
- Engagement of a child psychologist with the assistance of Department for Education and Children's Services for individual children with 'acting out' behaviours (Report 5).
- Exit housed families were reported as doing well, for example, one woman had secured full time employment and another family had successfully connected to their new school (Report 5).
- Regular housing meetings were being held which helped improve communication between clients and staff (Reports 5 & 6).
- Group excursions for children in the holidays (Report 5).
- The Project met the milestone of 100% success in the post housing of families in long-term Housing SA Housing (Report 6).
- New computer system installed to assist with longitudinal case management recording (Report 6).
- Engagement of a child psychologist with the assistance of Department for Education and Children's Services. It was recorded as being helpful to 4 children with 'acting out' behaviours. This was also being complemented by after school tutoring (Report 6).
- The majority of women at Sturt Street were enrolled in adult education (Report 6).
- In 2008 achieved a high level of fulltime employment for women at Sturt Street (Report 7).
- After school tutoring program 80% attendance (Report 7).
- Introduction of Friday Art Classes, well attended (Report 7).

- Experienced a noticeable slow down in number and speed of public housing offers to clients as a result of State Government continuing to sell many public housing dwelling (Report 8).
- Sturt Street has completed 26 successful housing outcomes with more than 64 children and their mothers (Report 8).
- New parenting support plan run in conjunction with Lutheran Community Care is popular (Report 8).
- Large number of women employed part-time (Report 8).

The literature argues that performance measures must be linked to what a service can actually meet and should address questions about whether the intervention addressed user needs, reached the anticipated target group, was appropriately designed for that group, and was executed efficiently, safely and respectfully. In terms of outcomes, it is more useful to know if the users or target groups gained new information or knowledge as result of the intervention, acquired new skills, changed their attitudes or behaviours, if their circumstances were changed (e.g. whether it actually made victims safer or perpetrators more accountable), and whether these changes were sustained. Edleson and Bible (2001) Riger, Bennett et al. (2002) and Campbell and Dienemann (2001) discuss the importance of collaborative approaches which are inclusive of the expertise of workers in services under evaluation and such expertise should also usefully inform the development of meaningful performance indicators. In summary, the literature argues it is important to have performance indicators but indicators must be clear so that they provide useful and important insights about what is working, what is not working, and why a service or program is successful.

5a. Summary of Findings: Interviews with Service Providers

"I think the women love going to Sturt Street, they will just come in, grab a cuppa and have a sit down and have a yarn. So it's not really, structure is not the right word, but it's more relaxed I think and they feel comfortable to be here. They draw and they do art, the mums do art with the kids. So it's nice, it's not like an office, the workers are just themselves, not intimidating."(Service Provider)

What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?

Service Providers reported that the Sturt Street Project prepared carefully and thoroughly for every Aboriginal family's entry into the service. It was transparent and honest about the complexities of women's and children's lives that resulted from long-term family violence and homelessness, and consequently both women and children's individual needs were identified and plans were put in place to meet them (e.g. schooling, counselling, financial assistance and education, and long-term housing goals).

The Sturt Street accommodation and office space was described as a place that was unassuming, relaxed and therefore not intimidating. The approach to working with Aboriginal families was flexible and organic whereby the workers were gentle, inviting and supportive. These attributes enabled the building of trust and rapport with both women and children, which enabled long-term working relationships. Such an approach also enabled the workers to sensitively challenge problematic behaviour or decision making by Aboriginal women (for example in times of crisis or when issues/decisions were impacting on their tenancy) because relationships were built on strong foundations based on respect, honesty and commitment.

"Every family's so different, the dynamics, their children, their issues and so it takes at least a month to two months to really get to know the real story for the family. You need that time and developing that trust. Slowly the women will let their defences down. The workers at Sturt Street are very cluey at working out the underlying issues. They've got a great instinct and intuition about what's really happening. The workers at Sturt Street encourage them to take steps and it is about encouragement. But then there are times when you do need to have different sorts of conversations especially after a crisis and say we have to actually address this issue.

Sturt Street is a small service but pretty passionate of the families.” (Service Provider)

What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?

Some weakness of the Sturt Street Project were identified such as maintaining clear communication pathways and protocols with other agencies (particularly schools) and balancing this with flexible ways of working. Similarly, negotiating the tensions between Sturt Street’s flexible, gentle, and organic working approach with the Department for Families and Communities/Housing SA strict policy and procedural mainstreaming approach was often expressed as a point of frustration and concern by service providers.

Why is the Sturt Street Project Effective?

It can be argued that the Sturt Street Project is effective because the purpose and aims of the Project are clear, and the workers employed at the service have extensive experience working with Aboriginal people and are informed by passion and social justice. Sturt Street is a service that is built on and emanates cultural sensitivity and awareness. Specifically the workers have a strong understanding of Aboriginal people and culture and an awareness of white privilege. This allowed them to engage with cultural values, beliefs, and understandings to sensitively challenge Aboriginal women’s decisions and choices around safety for themselves and their children as well as to embrace and use Aboriginal culture to help them re-connect and strengthen their own identities and sense of belonging as Aboriginal people.

“The workers have worked in Aboriginal Services for a long-time and understand the Aboriginal community. But most important is that they have a genuine empathy and aspiration to close the gap. They understand their privileged position in that they can actually bring in resources and assistance to actually change lives.” (Service Provider)

The Sturt Street Project is successful because it creates sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal women and their children. It provides practical and material support but equally emotional and educational support (especially about keeping a home). The long-term, intense investment builds strong foundations for women and children, allowing them to successfully leave Sturt Street with stability and independence. Women were allowed time to prepare themselves for public housing and so were not pushed or rushed to make decisions about leaving the service. Examples of long-term investment included women receiving:

- coping skills to face crisis in their lives;
- support to understand the complexities of their experiences resulting from family violence;
- support to build positive relationships with their children;
- support to address their children’s individual needs and wellbeing;

- material assistance to set up a home;
- education and support about keeping their home (e.g. budget skills); and
- outreach support after exiting the service.

Sturt Street provided practical resources and material support but also long-term commitment and investment with Aboriginal women and their children. Long-term investment allows growth of emotional and educational support which builds the potential for sustainable, long-term, outcomes. It stops the cycle of entering and exiting human services that so many Aboriginal women and children experience as a result of family violence.

"We have a lot of women who have done TAFE training since they've been here. We've had a good number re-enter the workforce. I think those things happen when people get a chance to catch their breath. For the children then it's all about educational gains that they can make when they've got some kind of stability in housing. But it's also about them engaging in some of life's sort of rich promises as a child."
(Service Provider)

5b. Findings: Interviews with Service Providers

Themes

The majority of the themes that emerged from the interviews with service providers painted a positive picture about the Sturt Street Project. Only a small number of themes pointed to ways in which the Sturt Street Project could be developed or improved. The findings are therefore presented under the broad categories of “What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?” and “What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?” Finally, to provide evidence that Sturt Street is making a difference to women and children’s lives, the broad category of “Why is the Sturt Street Project Effective?” is presented.

What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?

The Sturt Street Project was recognised for its focus on long-term support, building strong foundations for the future, and creating sustainable outcomes for the families that it assisted. All service workers named multiple strengths of the Sturt Street Project.

Woman Focused

Sturt Street developed a positive reputation amongst all service providers for being focused on who they assisted. Specifically, it was praised for taking time to carefully consider who would enter the service, for trying to understand the potential range of issues a woman might be experiencing, and preparing for what potential strategies and ways of working might be needed to respond appropriately. In short, Sturt Street was known for preparing for every woman’s entry into the service thoroughly and being focused on her needs.

“We have a committee of agencies that refer women to Sturt Street and we have to be very careful of who comes into Sturt Street. We prefer to work with women who are ready to move to this level of housing, that is, a bit of independence but still need supports in some way. We also have to be mindful of our decisions due to the closeness of the housing. We have found in the past that if the women haven’t been ready to engage it does impact on the other families. We look for indications that they are serious about what they want to do with the kids and themselves.”

The Project developed a positive reputation for transparency and honesty about the complexity of women’s lives resulting from long-term family violence and homelessness. Service providers believed this avoided both women and workers being ‘set up to fail’ as a result of poor preparation and/or other agencies trying to move women on quickly.

"It is about being transparent about what the actual issues are and how we are going to deal with it. You need to have that grounding and understanding of the cultural issues".

"So yes it's sort of those awkward conversations. If you do it frank and honestly but with a way forward, it is not an excuse to get a woman out of a service and into another. The goal is permanent housing and to fix the issues."

Child focused

Not only was the Sturt Street Project recognised for its preparation, commitment and focus on Aboriginal women but also their children. All service providers told stories of seeing children flourish in the time they spent at Sturt Street. One story often told was Sturt Street's ability and willingness to help children attend school almost immediately when they entered the service. The workers helped with intake assessments and procedures for schools and provided children with appropriate uniforms, bags, and lunches so children felt like they 'fitted in' and belonged at the school.

"The workers at Sturt Street really make sure that the schools have proper intake and the children have proper introductions and connect with any Aboriginal education workers. It is also the importance of practical things like helping with uniforms and Sturt Street pay for that, making sure that they're all school ready. So they have got their school bags and lunch boxes and all that kind of stuff."

The Sturt Street Project was also recognised for its willingness to provide services that met individual children's needs. For example, if a child needed help with behavioural issues, psychological counselling was provided; or if a child needed extra help with homework, tutorial services were put in place. This not only assisted children while they were at Sturt Street but built skills that children could take with them into permanent housing and/or other schools.

"We have had children who have witnessed terrible things and are emotionally disturbed and we'll often see that arising at school. For example, Sturt Street employed a psychologist to work with a family and the child. The other example I can think of Sturt Street responded by setting up art classes for the children, which is a part of the opportunity for children to work through their own non verbal worries. The other one is they set up a homework tutor system. These things are very supportive for all the children."

"These children are going to have permanent accommodation and they can start really interacting with that community and being a part of it."

Working in gentle/flexible ways

All service providers described the Sturt Street Project as being flexible in its approach to working with Aboriginal women and children. Specifically the workers employed at Sturt Street were described as gentle, inviting, and supportive of families. These attributes were identified as being major strengths of the Project and contributed much too why it was considered successful. For example, working in gentle ways was described as an effective strategy for building trust with Aboriginal women and children as it helped gain perspective on complex issues.

"Every family's so different, the dynamics, their children, their issues and so it takes at least a month to two months to really get to know the real story for the family. You need that time and developing that trust. Slowly the women will let their defences down. The workers at Sturt Street are very cluey at working out the underlying issues. They've got a great instinct and intuition about what's really happening. They take the time to have discussions like 'wouldn't it be better this way' or 'do you want to pursue this'. You have to have a view of the complexity; you really need to understand that this can unravel quickly. The workers at Sturt Street encourage them to take steps and it is about encouragement. It is not about saying you must do this. It is about this would be the benefits of doing that. Sturt Street is not paternalistic and tries not to be too directive. It is really conversation-like. They help walk kids to school for example. Yes, so it's softly, gently. But then there are times when you do need to have different sorts of conversations especially after a crisis and say we have to actually address this issue. Sturt Street is a small service but pretty passionate of the families."

Being flexible allowed the Sturt Street Project to grow and gain experience and insights into working effectively with Aboriginal families. The gentle, flexible approach contributed to the success of the service over time because it allowed the workers to learn and reflect on their practice.

"Sturt Street has been brave to try different things, which might work and might fail. And the Department needs to recognise that they need to actually put resources into things

that might be risky so that people can have a try at something, so action learning. So Sturt Street has been like a growing model and has evolved with what does work and why does it work. I think one of the reasons why it works is that it is flexible - the flexibilities are really the influential thing. Sturt Street is client based and works around each individual client. Rather than here's our regulations, here's our rules, if you don't fit we'll squeeze you out of the system, which is what a lot of parts of the Department are like. So at the end of the day they're still a family in poverty, in crisis and we need to help with that."

As a result of the Sturt Street Project being able to try different strategies and take some risks in working with Aboriginal women and children this resulted in providing services and programs which are regularly offered.

"Sturt Street has tried some things that have worked and some that haven't for example self defence training did not work. But the art has worked really well. It has a good child psychologist who can come and talk with the kids that are really struggling, acting out. It has good relationships with schools."

To demonstrate the benefits of flexibility when working with Aboriginal families, a specific example that some of the service providers gave was allowing Aboriginal women to have their older sons or relatives (nephews they were parenting) live with them. This helped build stability for the families and helped build trust with the service.

"No male visitors, a lot of shelters will say you're not allowed to have any male visitors. But Sturt Street says you can have male visitors as long as they're a support to you. For example, like your dad can come because he might be a support, or your brother or your cousin, but a person that's abusing you obviously can't be here."

"Obviously one of the big ones is that the boys can stay here. They are about family reunification so that works really well for families. I think because it's not as strict as other places as well, that works for a lot of families."

To reach long-term outcomes, flexibility was identified as a vital ingredient. Adherence to rigid policies and procedures that had the ability to remove a family from a service if they didn't abide by the rules (as seen in other government departments) was not enforced as

directly at Sturt Street. One of the dominant strengths named numerous times by service providers was that the workers at Sturt Street were very responsive to each family and recognised their individual needs and so took time to work through the issues that may impact on their tenancy instead of enforcing instant eviction.

"Sturt Street is the pathway to permanent housing and so it is not about putting Aboriginal women into private rental immediately or telling them 'you only have six months'. It is about being stable first and we will support you. It really depends as everyone is different and everyone is seen as individual. We can offer a lot of different things and it's up to them if they want to take it or not. So there's no pressure for women or the children to do a particular program".

"The organisation is very responsive to each family. They are not coming in as "You must do this as part of your agreement" because it's a time of nurture and trust. For example, if children haven't arrived to school by 9:30 this starts conversations with the workers at Sturt Street, who will then contact the parents and then encouragement will start about why school is important. They don't stipulate that their housing centres on their child being at school. So, I think that they are working with the best understanding about where the families are at and growing from there."

The Environment

Approximately half of the service providers talked about the environment that was 'felt' at the Sturt Street Project. They identified that the environment was a reflection of the workers, that is, the warm, positive environment that existed at Sturt Street was fostered by the workers. The Sturt Street Project as a place that was inviting, unassuming, relaxed and therefore not intimidating. This environment was named as a vital part of engaging and working effectively with Aboriginal families.

"I think the women love going to Sturt Street. They will come in, grab a cuppa, sit down and have a yarn. So it's more relaxed I think and they feel comfortable to be here. It's not like an office, the workers are just themselves, not intimidating."

"They are very home like at Sturt Street and the women come and go as if it is an extension of their flat. I think it is good for the women because they feel so comfortable."

"I think it's got a very therapeutic chaos about it. Right from the beginning I sensed that it had a good therapeutic contained environment. They are very therapeutically supportive, without necessarily having technical awareness about what's going on. I think that carries through with their relationships with the families. I think the families feel very at ease coming in."

Some service providers stated that having the Sturt Street office close to the women's units was positive because it helped the workers build rapport and trust with the women and children. It also helped build a relaxed way of working.

"The idea of working in close proximity to the women's housing is good. You can respond to the women and children's needs quickly and they know you are around. It provides a base to hang out here. Having this base helps build that sort of trust, that rapport, that relationship, because we are here. The women are more likely to embrace us in a sense because they know we are really here and mean it, we are not just public servants in an office. We actually want to work with them."

The Workers

The themes of *working in gentle and flexible ways* and creating a *relaxed, homely environment* were very much attributed to the three workers employed at Sturt Street Project. It is therefore important to recognise that all service providers interviewed identified these workers as being a major strength of the Project. They described them as passionate, caring, and central to creating an environment that was inviting, unassuming and relaxed.

"I think it's the passion really. The workers at Sturt Street are quite passionate. It is like they are more than just workers in an office. They don't just see it as a job but more like being part of a bigger thing. I think attitude has helped the women feel really comfortable about being at Sturt Street and just making themselves feel at home... the door's never shut."

"I think it's because they have staff who are very warm, welcoming personable people who are also not critical - that they want to give everybody the benefit of the doubt and are just so supportive emotionally and materially too".

On the other hand, service providers recognised that the workers were also able to sensitively challenge the Aboriginal women when needed in ways that did not disrupt the relationships they had built, especially in times of crisis or when issues were impacting on tenancy. The workers helped the women make positive and sustainable decisions for their future.

"It is not perfect but the workers do an excellent job. They know the Aboriginal community really well and have a lot of experience with them. When needed they can play the hard hand but they also have such good rapport with the women to be able to do this. They are level headed, not fluffy and they are to the point. It is like 'well, that's not on, and that's not good enough, so what are we going to do and they listen."

Some service providers pointed out that there were benefits to having both male and female workers or a manager and case workers at the service as this provided some structure and consistency in responses to high risk situations impacting on Aboriginal families.

"I think it's been good having a male presence at Sturt Street as well as a female presence and even though the women are plenty tough enough to actually take care of problems there are times when it's actually good for a male to be able to say to unwanted males, trouble-making males, move along or the police will be here. When it comes to a crisis point, the manager can have those hard discussions, for example about mandatory notifications and so it doesn't compromise the case worker's relationship with the families."

Many service providers also mentioned that the workers were committed, available, and willing to engage with other workers and services outside Sturt Street to benefit the women and children. The workers had developed rapport and trust with a range of human service workers.

"I've had quite good communication with (names a worker) and I have worked with her with a number of families. I can always get her on the phone and if I can't she'll ring back and say what's up and I'll say well the kids haven't been at school for 3 days and we're unsure of where they are. We will contact (names the worker) and just say listen this is what's happening and she'll then look into it for us."

What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?

All service workers named some weaknesses of the Sturt Street Project.

Communication

Some service providers expressed concern that flexibility or a relaxed style of working can hinder clear communication pathways with other agencies. For example, workers at schools in particular appreciated being informed in advance of a children entering or exiting schools so professional and appropriate plans could be put in place.

"Sometimes the processes that we put in place don't necessarily happen. What we need is for Sturt Street to let us know when a family is coming in and we would like to have at least 2 weeks leaving time. This gives an opportunity to communicate with another school. Keeping structures and processes are important as I don't want families to be put off and we can't always respond last minute. Flexibility's okay but it can be a bit embarrassing to be put in last minute situations".

"The thing I think we need to do better is when the children are leaving school. If we have the warning and preparation time we can arrange for an exit interview and plan for teachers from the new school to meet the family. This is an important step to stop the pattern of non attendance and get them at school within a couple of days of moving. We need to communicate better between ourselves and Sturt Street in relation to that."

Confidentiality or trying to determine how much other agencies needed to know about the background of Aboriginal families was also raised as an issue that created uncertainty.

"I think individual families come with their own issues and sometimes I would really like to have a bit more information about them without crossing confidentiality. We need to have some context of each family rather than trying to work it out for ourselves. It does not necessarily mean knowing their life story but we need to have some context fairly quickly so maybe that can be a part of the confidentiality agreement. It would be important to invest time in that."

Support from the Department for Families and Communities

All service providers expressed concern and frustration that the Department for Families and Communities or HousingSA did not fully understand Sturt Street's way of working to build sustainable outcomes. The clashing of two systems or approaches to human service work can be identified in this theme. Those who worked in culturally specific and sensitive ways built on flexibility, gentleness, and organic formations often felt in conflict with those who were informed by mainstream approaches to human service delivery, that is, adherence to strict policy and procedure and enforcing consequences for not following such guidelines.

"HousingSA don't really know what it is like to work in the front line. I think they struggle with roles that you can't measure or they don't fully understand that this job is more than just numbers and four walls."

This tension had the potential for creating feelings of being unappreciated or having to constantly justify work practices. For example, service providers often talked about the slowness of the Department in paying people for the services they provided at Sturt Street (for example, art work, homework, psychological services).

"Having issues with paying people that provide for services or goods has been an issue... and the workers get hauled in from HousingSA like they want to try and catch them out or something. They don't get the essence of the service for example, why Sturt Street might want to buy a woman a new tracksuit before she goes to rehab."

Housing Options

Some service providers specifically described their concerns about the housing or units the women and children occupied. The main issue raised was that they provided limited space, especially for children and large families. For example,

"I have concerns with the box like accommodation and the limited space for children; you know there's no backyard. Each woman and family has their own particular needs and they're right on top of each other. It is mainly a criticism about the design."

Why is the Sturt Street Project Considered Effective by Service Providers?"

The themes presented so far have built qualitative evidence that the Sturt Street Project is considered effective by service providers. In addition, other themes emerged from the interviews that specifically provided important insights into why is it effective. The four

themes of knowing the purpose and aims of the Project, the importance of longevity, being culturally aware and sensitive when working with Aboriginal families, and producing sustainable outcomes, will be discussed to provide answers to why the Sturt Street Project is considered an effective service.

Purpose and Aims of the Sturt Street Project

All service providers clearly understood the purpose of the Sturt Street Project. It was known for providing practical assistance but also long-term support, building strong foundations for the future, and creating sustainable outcomes.

"My understanding of Sturt Street is that it's a pathway for long term stable housing. It is one of the few places where women can go in there and they have nothing, they start from scratch. They also have the benefit of when they leave there, of having a really good starting foundation, that is, services in place and they can leave with what was given to them."

"The main thing is an opportunity for families to stabilise, break free of family violence, but also to break free of poverty and insecurity in homelessness. It is those 2 things that are cycled together. If you are financially and shelter insecure you are more likely to go back to the perpetrator and compromise your children. The service is about empowerment of the families that come here, the women as the head of those families. It is an opportunity of growth particularly for the mothers. "

Furthermore, the complexity of Aboriginal women's and children's lives were named and acknowledged by all service providers and the Sturt Street Project was praised for being upfront about such issues and taking the time to understand such complexity to make long lasting changes with families.

"I think it's a wonderful program because it's almost a one stop shop for getting families back on track. The families have such complex problems such as homelessness or domestic abuse. Sturt Street provides intensive support and deeper issues are dealt with, so looking at what is the underlying issue and what are the things that need to be worked on with the families to actually make lasting and long lasting changes. So it is a service for women whose lives are really in dire straits, get all the support they need, and make real changes and then that impacts on the children in particular positive ways."

Building a clear, shared understanding about the Project and being transparent about its aims and purpose was a vital first step in creating an effective service. This provided direction and reachable goals, even if these goals were long-term.

Longevity with the Sturt Street & working with Aboriginal people

All service providers interviewed had extensive experience working with Aboriginal people and expressed passion and energy about such work. Furthermore, they acknowledged and appreciated how much they had learned from Aboriginal people, which strengthened their practice.

"You get a good understanding of generosity of the Aboriginal community, the kinship. You learn quickly that the Aboriginal people want to know whether you're legitimate about helping or whether you're just on a power trip. I learned a lot of things from the community that was good. It is always challenging and can be hard but I have got a better, or good, broad knowledge of the Aboriginal community right across the state. The clear thing is that you understand what the fundamental or compounded social disadvantage really means for the Aboriginal community."

"The thing about the workers at Sturt Street is that they have been in Aboriginal Housing for a long time. They have a lot of expertise in the case management side and working intensively with families. You know very good empathy with the families and cultural understandings".

The majority of service providers who were either working at or closely with the Sturt Street Project had been doing so since its commencement. This was acknowledged as creating continuity and consistency for both the workers and the women and children accessing the service. This allowed time to establish networks and familiarity with the systems surrounding the Sturt Street Project.

"I have been working with Aboriginal people for 15 years. I think that really helps with being able to get them housed and to understand how the system works, and to know the agencies and people in the agencies. There is a real sense of networking. And the sad thing is that with a lot of these other agencies, they have so many staff turnovers that you lose that relationship that you had with them, and they might have workers for six month contracts."

"The workers at Sturt Street are very good at advocating for the women. They know how to interact with other agencies so well. They know so many people in human services and many contacts. I guess and there's no occasion where I have seen that they've got nowhere at all. There's usually somebody they can talk to who can be helpful. I think the mothers really appreciate that. It's because they have been doing this kind of work for so long that they are absolutely fantastically well connected. It's great and it's because they are such outgoing positive people that other people do like working with them and interact and have seen them find resources that you think 'goodness that would have taken months to organise.'"

Furthermore, longevity with the Project allowed workers time to develop rapport and relationship building with the Aboriginal women and children over time; something that cannot be rushed.

"The kids give me feedback because they get really excited to see me and often waiting for me. The mums are often pretty quiet and keep to themselves, but might give a smile every now and then. They take a while to get to know you, and I guess a lot of them have gone through hard times, so they don't want to put their hearts on the line. They will get to know you a bit first and it goes from there. It's quite possible I can work with a family for up to a year."

All service providers named the three workers employed at Sturt Street as being a major factor in why the Project was effective. The consistency and continuity that the workers created for the Aboriginal families as well as their extensive experience and passion of working with Aboriginal people were major factors underpinning Sturt Street's success.

Cultural awareness

One of the most dominant themes that emerged from the interviews with service providers was the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity when working with Aboriginal families. Cultural awareness was named as strength of the service that was displayed by, and specifically emanated from the three workers employed at the Sturt Street Project.

"The people (at Sturt Street) are really committed and really passionate about what they do. The biggest thing is clients really relate to them and they relate really well with the clients whereas in a lot of other services, it doesn't happen that way. Obviously they've got really good skills and an

understanding of Aboriginal culture and the different issues that come with that. I think they also understand that to work where Sturt Street runs, (near the West Terrace Parklands) you have to be really mindful of the clients that you take in there. That is one of my benefits of having a broader understanding of Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal issues, and building a really good rapport with clients."

Furthermore, the three workers at Sturt Street were also identified as not only having a strong understanding of Aboriginal people and culture but also of being aware of white privilege and having genuine empathy and passion built on social justice ideals for wanting to work within this field.

"The workers have worked in Aboriginal Services for a long-time and understand the Aboriginal community. But most important is that they have a genuine empathy and aspiration to close the gap. They understand their privileged position in that they can actually bring in resources and assistance to actually changing lives."

Some service providers gave examples of how the workers employed at Sturt Street used their cultural awareness and understandings of Aboriginal families in ways that benefited the women and children, especially in helping women make safer choices for their future. The following example of family obligations as part of Aboriginal culture was given numerous times.

"Some children might go to school and present really tired and tell the teacher they had a whole house full of people at night. The unhealthy ties that the women have with members of their community, ex partners, and things like that are quite strong and the family keeps pulling them back into the situation that perhaps caused the problem in the first place. Sturt Street is a really good model of getting people re engaged with society and education and their rights and their own learning and budget management and buying food and empowering the women to say no. For example, one child was absent quite a bit and the mother had said to me that she felt the pull from her family who lived at (names the place) and if there was a death in the community that she had to go. The kids would miss days of school. But one day she said to me 'I'm not going to do that anymore, it's really important that he's at school and I'll only do it for immediate family'. I know that's cultural but it's her saying well I actually need

to put my kids first and it's important that they're at school and they're learning and so that empowering of them to perhaps breaking unhealthy ties is important and I think Sturt Street helps a lot with that and is a good model".

Some service providers also spoke about the importance of embracing Aboriginal culture as a way of working with the Aboriginal women and children, which Sturt Street regularly displayed. This helped women and children connect with other Aboriginal families and strengthen their own identities and sense of belonging as Aboriginal people.

"One of the things that we do with the assistance of Sturt Street when trying to re-engage the mums is to organise cultural experiences for our Aboriginal families and they get to meet other Aboriginal families who perhaps are not living at Sturt Street. For example, we plan cultural experiences for the kids and their families and they often get to bring another friend from the school. For example, they go to the Botanical gardens to do the Aboriginal food trail and we have a celebration here with food and they share their art work."

"We use art, water colours and oil pastels and try and get the kids and mothers involved but I'm pretty conscious of not putting my own views onto adults, especially when a lot of them are talented traditional artists anyway, I just want to try to help them enhance their skills and get them art supplies, if I can, for their own style. I would never try to do dot painting or any - because I'm not Indigenous."

During the interviews, all service providers engaged with the question of non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal people and all concluded that cultural awareness was more important to service provision than simply whether a worker was Aboriginal or not.

"I mean the thing about being non-Aboriginal is that if Aboriginal community members can see that you're legitimate about making the resources available and helping the family get somewhere and so they don't have a mean spirit or a bureaucratic approach but instead a let's see how we can actually do mentality, that is what demonstrates your commitment to them as people and their family."

"I would have to say that the families that I've known and the work that I've seen them (workers at Sturt Street) do, I haven't seen that being non-Aboriginal as prohibitive of

anything. In some ways the non relatedness of them, so they're not family or distant relatives, is helpful. And that's not to say that an Indigenous worker wouldn't, and may not be related, and politically, it is important to have Indigenous workers there, but I've also seen the other side of the coin where that has really backfired and not worked well."

"Aboriginal workers working with Aboriginal clients...that's not necessarily the best way. I think it's up to the individual as to how much they put aside their own issues and their own ideas and sit with clients where they are and understand where they are, everyone's different. It's also being able to understand the diversity within Aboriginal people and whether you are Aboriginal or non Aboriginal you are always going to face difficulties, it's how you deal with it every day and they do a great job I mean the amount of people that go through there, ... and they have a good relationship with them all so at the end of the day, that speaks for itself I think."

Some service providers pointed out that it was vital not to be tokenistic about working with Aboriginal people as this potentially isolates Aboriginal people from engaging with services. All service provider interviewed stated that Sturt Street was an excellent example of a service that worked in culturally appropriate ways. However, some workers wanted to point out that this level of awareness was not evident at the State Department level.

"Housing SA has not embraced this Project. Although they will give out innovation awards and want to say isn't this fabulous, the service is so innovative but then they don't support it. If it's 'trendy' we'll be there, if it's good to be Aboriginal-friendly, we'll be there, but if it's not, and it's not at the moment, nah, don't really want to know about it, it's a bit too hard. I think they're scared of Aboriginal people as well. They don't understand the culture and they can stick up posters in their office and pretend that they do."

In summary, the Sturt Street Project was considered as effective by service providers because the workers employed at the service were identified as being culturally aware and sensitive to working with Aboriginal women and children. Their knowledge and passion for working with Aboriginal families allowed them to challenge unhealthy patterns that women and children followed but also allowed them build opportunities for the women and children to embrace and re-engage with their culture. Being genuine, empathetic, and

passionate about working with Aboriginal people were also named as the key to creating effective outcomes for Aboriginal families.

Sustainable outcomes

All service providers emphasised that Sturt Street was successful because it created sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal women and their children. The Project was recognised for its ability to provide practical, material support but equally it was also recognised for providing emotional and educational support, especially about keeping a home. The long-term, intense investment made by the Sturt Street Project set up strong foundations for women and children so that they could successfully leave Sturt Street with stability and independence. Many examples were given by service providers to support such claims and so it is important to share these for the purpose of evaluation because such examples show why the Project can be argued to be effective.

Women and stability

Service providers shared examples of Aboriginal women obtaining stability in their lives as a result of working intensively over a length of time with the workers at Sturt Street. The complexity of women's lives were not ignored but instead, service providers recognised that women were better prepared and equipped to deal with crisis in their lives because they learned coping skills while being engaged with the service.

"The support that the women get is timely and needed. The linking to other agencies is good as it can help in different areas. The focus of Sturt Street is to provide intense support then slowly letting go of the dependency. That starts off as they come in and they're actually quite dependent and I see the workers there and the function of the unit itself is providing that intensive support. But then slowly I guess withdrawing it so that the families learn over time to stand on their own feet and be relocated. Women can still experience up and downs. For example, there is a family that should be leaving Sturt Street soon but they've just had a huge custody type thing where dad's taken the kids and mum's had to go and take them back. She needed some more support but when you look at the time she spent at the Sturt Street she is actually equipped better and she is managing this crisis well. That is a reflection on her which is really good."

"I hear of success stories and even if when sometimes the women leave they fall in a hole again they're better equipped to get themselves out of it because they've learnt the skills. So it's not all roses when they leave because they do have to

still interact with the people that perhaps contributed to them getting in that situation but they are better equipped."

Evidence that the Sturt Street is effective often comes at the time the woman is ready to leave the service. They are not rushed or pushed to make the decision to exit Sturt Street but instead prepared and educated overtime to reach this point with confidence.

"One of the really nice things has been how happy and pleased they've been when they're exit housed. To see that huge transformation and they're very up front, they're really happy about where they're at and stuff, so we get a lot of that feed back off them. I think the nice thing about it is actually when you catch up with the families that you haven't seen for a long time and just how friendly they are it's just great."

Children and stability

Service providers also recognised that if the women reached a point of stability and independence in their lives and learned coping skills as a result of engaging with Sturt Street, this also impacted positively on their relationships with their children and their children's overall wellbeing.

"Yes Sturt Street pays for a lot of the practicalities such as children's excursions, swimming lessons and all of those things and when needed their lunches and things. But the thing is the families are being helped and getting very good at getting their children organised to go school. This really benefits mum and the kids to have them at school. It means they can actually have more quality time when they're with their children and develop other sort of at home routines, bed times, meals all that kind of stuff that everyone with kids sort of knows about. So yeah, work between Sturt Street and the primary schools are really important and are a big part of the service for kids."

In building evidence for why long-term investment by the Sturt Street Project was seen as effective, the example that was identified numerous times was educational gains for children.

"I think one of the spin offs from Sturt Street is the importance of the educational aspect of it on the children and the parents. One child I remember, before he came to Sturt Street had something like 95 days off school in one year, now that is 2 terms. Last year when he was at Sturt Street, he had

50 days off. Now it's not great to still have nearly a term off school but since this New Year he's attended nearly every day and so I can see that we have made a difference. He is learning now and he's moving in his reading and we've got these programs in and mum's aware of it. So I think by just chipping away. My vision for it or my hypothesis or whatever you want to call it is that the way the kids interact with school and mums with their children we might see some impact here but the next generation hopefully will see the importance of coming to school the importance of learning, reading at home."

"One of the children the other day, she said to me "I went to bed really early last night" so she's in year 2 and I said "And you were here before the bell" she said "Yes" so we gave her a big hug. And I thought it's the children's sense of security and safety, we are also seeing them blossom. It is the children, seeing them coming in and their being proactive and managing "I went to bed early" because they know, they want to get to school and be here. So, that may not have happened in their life ever before Sturt Street."

The examples provided by service providers of women and children gaining stability point to the importance of bringing together practical/material support, emotional and educational support, and long-term investment. These components are evident in the workings of the Sturt Street Project.

Setting up and keeping a home

In providing further evidence for why Sturt Street is considered effective many examples can be shared of women and children actually setting up and keeping a home, that is, the ultimate goal of the service. Sharing these examples also points to the importance of bringing together practical/material support, emotional and educational support, and long-term investment to make a difference in women's and children's lives that are sustainable. A vital first step in setting up a home for women and children is providing practical and material support. Sturt Street was identified as a unique service in being able to provide this initial investment for the future, that is, such support was seen as an essential building block to creating working relationships with women and children that could be long-term.

"Sturt Street is known for its sort of privileged position, especially providing material assistance. This has always been a really good part of the project. It can set up a house for a family that has got absolutely nothing. And the families get to take that with them when they leave, that is furniture,

housing utensils, towels and curtains and mops and brooms and all that sort of stuff, so they get set up, it's good. They need it because they come here and they've usually got nothing, or very, very little. We don't do TV's or things like that, just basics."

"It's basics that they get, and then they take their basics with them, and they've got them and they're theirs and they've got that sense of ownership. They become really house proud; it's really nice to see."

Sturt Street was also considered effective because it not only provided practical or material support but this was also coupled with education. To build sustainable outcomes Sturt Street invested time in educating women about keeping a house, budgeting, coping skills, and parenting skills. Such a way of working moved away from dependency or rescuing models to using practical and material recourses for the purposes of building sustainable skills for the future.

"Sturt Street provides not only emotional support but it is so nice to have a place that can have both emotional support and practical support. Those little things like bus tickets, bread and I think people need to have their independence and that self esteem that they can know how to budget their money properly that they can manage and that a handout makes that goodwill just grow a little bit. It is easy to think 'gee they give a lot of stuff away' but as I have seen time going past I think these women have been deprived of everything, got no homes, they've lost their relationships and their support group has fallen down and no home. It means such a lot to them to get some material support. It has been fantastic and for somebody wanting to start a new it's really been important for them, but it must go hand in hand with the empathy and education."

"It's just trying to help them out because if they come here they get financial support but also education and that's a big step. For example, we try and get their debts written off. They carry their debts with them so they might have been in housing for ten years before they lob here so they've got this huge debt that they just can't pay. Or we will try and make an arrangement such as you need to pay \$25 a week, so that's \$50 a fortnight. So we give them financial counselling, it's not just a matter of getting your debt written off, you get your debt written off, you get your financial counselling, let's

stay on top of this. It is like a huge weight off their shoulders. And that's what is good; when they leave here it is like a fresh start."

"The poverty stuff is very hard especially with large numbers of children on a benefit. So if we can up-skill the women in that area in terms of financial counselling and how they can sort of stretch the money they've got. A lot of the women, especially the ones with young families they aren't necessarily thinking I'm going to go into employment, but some do, but it is just about empowering them to be able to cope with whatever - what money they have got. It is for the long term and so when they're exit housed they feel stable."

The Sturt Street Project was clearly known for not rushing women into public housing. Instead it was known for taking time to prepare women, aiding them through education and emotional support to feel ready, able and independent enough to make that step into permanent public housing. In summary, Sturt Street earned a reputation for building the best chance for a woman to keep a house for the long-term. However, service providers also recognised that Aboriginal women also often experienced difficulties settling into their public housing and so the workers at Sturt Street were committed to continuing to support them into their permanent housing.

"It's hard the HousingSA aspect because when they go into housing, and transferred into a probation tenancy which runs for 6 months, once they complete the probation then they have got the life tenure to the property. So we've had a few hiccups with over-officious housing managers saying well I'm not going to renew your probationary tenancy because Centrelink cut you off or your rent was late. We will have a conversation and say well look that's not a fair reason to do that, look at the work that has been done so far, it's your own organisation terminating a tenancy and starting all again."

"Overtime we have learned about the length of grass and how that's such a critical issue for everybody. So everyone's given a lawn mower when they leave here, because if you don't, had one client who didn't get their lawn mower in time, the housing officer was writing them up for a debt of \$240 to have this yard flagged and stuff and you know some sort of notice about not maintaining the property. You sort of have to go and help them navigate through that."

The workers at Sturt Street continued to work hard, provide strong advocacy, and showed long-term commitment even after the women exited their service. They did not want to jeopardise reaching the goal of long-term housing in any way, particularly by rigid government policies and procedures.

Outreach

Despite case management workloads, the workers still managed to support the women on a needs basis after they left to help them ultimately keep their home and to provide that continued long-term emotional support. Service providers shared many examples of Aboriginal women keeping in contact with the Sturt Street Project as evidence for the effectiveness of the service because they continued to appreciate it.

"I really like the way Sturt Street follow up the mums after they have left, they keep in touch with them. The women can ring anytime even though they might have left for a year or something. It is like they have an extra support person who is there and who will listen. That's one of the really good things of this service, the mother and her family have left one of the units but she is not cut adrift. That's the really extra bonus I think that Sturt Street has."

"Many of the women still have a really good rapport with Sturt Street. I know one woman who left the service probably eight or nine months ago and she'll still ring up and have a chat if she needs to query something. I dare say Sturt Street is not funded for it but they do still continue to do that and with all the clients that I speak to, the feedback, I haven't had any negative feedback about Sturt Street at all and I can't say about other places."

Aboriginal women and children wanting to say engaged with Sturt Street after they have left the service speak volumes about the effectiveness of the Project.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Sturt Street Project

It can be argued from the themes above that the Sturt Street Project is effective because it not only provides practice resources and material support but also invests time with Aboriginal women and their children for the long-term. Long-term investment allows the growth of emotional and educational support that ultimately builds the potential for sustainable, long-term, outcomes. It stops the human service churn of Aboriginal women and children in and out of services. A service worker said the following, which captured this common message from the data.

"If you do invest in resources and materials and some longitudinal systems, or long term support you will get a whole lot further than just churning people to nowhere. For example, what is the cost to the department of evicting families from public housing, splitting up the children, putting children in care, creating another 12 months of service churn. Whereas if they actually said 'well let's hang on right at the beginning and spend some money on making sure the family is secure' all the casualties that happen can be avoided. No one ever measures the long-term gain, for example, children remaining in school. It is just hurdle, block, hurdle, and block. There is an associated cost of the so called punishment of not doing - or meeting certain criteria. Being an enabler not a blocker is important."

Finally, to add to the evidence of Sturt Street being effective and providing insights into why it is effective, all service providers confidently shared their perceptions that the Aboriginal women and children who have experienced Sturt Street found the service to be rewarding and helpful. This feedback is important.

"I have had lots of positive feedback from the mums saying how they appreciate it and they really value being part of this program because they realise not every mum who's been a DV situation and has got children has been able to get here. The fact that they feel privileged to be here says something about the service".

"I think they have got a creative chaos, a therapeutic chaos and are touching the population that they're working with, they're connecting with them. They give so much; the nature of the work is built on their longevity and their sustainability with what they're giving out. The nature of the work it does cost but it also has that caring level and so it should continue and expand or at least be well resourced."

"We have had some really great success stories. We have a lot of women who have done TAFE training since they've been here. We've had a good number re-enter the workforce. I think those kind of things happen when people get a chance to catch their breath. For the children then it's all about educational gains that they can make when they've got some kind of stability in housing. But it's also about them engaging in some of life's sort of rich promises as a child. So holiday programs like going to the zoo, Festival Theatre. So opening their eyes to

the horizons to the world, it is actually more than a cycle of poverty. Trying to really get them optimistic and thinking well actually I can be someone."

The cost of Aboriginal women and children needing to access multiple services for short periods of time over and over again versus investing money and resources to working in long-term, intensive and sustainable ways was a question raised by many of the service providers. Bringing together practical, emotional, and education support, that is long-term investment does this ultimately produce better outcomes as opposed to the service provision merry-go-around many Aboriginal women and children find themselves on? The data produced from the service provider interviews points to yes; long term investment produces effective and sustainable outcomes.

"The service is not always appreciated, how important it is and what it actually does achieve. From a community level, it's one of the best. The work they do with women and children, in a really difficult area and where it's situated makes it extremely difficult. But they've made a success out of it. They have really good outcomes because clients get housed, clients are actually improving their life and so they aren't being bounced around lots of services so to speak. I hear positive stories as a social worker, from client's and so the Government should be expanding a service like that more, they should be expanding it and supporting it more as far as I'm concerned."

"We would love for this model to be replicated in most of the suburbs in Adelaide and I'm not talking just for Aboriginal women, I'm talking about women in general. I think it'd make a huge difference in the community. But like everything else it's all about the dollar really, isn't it? But we have actually made a huge difference and put a lot of families in housing - permanent housing, and stable accommodation. It takes a lot of energy to be able to do that."

6a. Summary of Findings: Interviews with Aboriginal Women

"You end up being kind of like a different person. And the things they do, they don't kind of push it onto you to do this, or do that...But you do change without actually realising it." (Aboriginal woman)

Background of Aboriginal women

The respondents had experienced domestic or family violence-related homelessness well as a range of other issues such as problematic substance use and mental health issues. This experience was often preceded by domestic or family violence in their family of origin and was associated with disrupted education and moving around. The majority of women were referred to the Sturt Street Project by Nunga Mi Minar Aboriginal women's shelter.

What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?

The Aboriginal women's reflections on their time at the Sturt Street Project portrayed an overwhelmingly positive experience. Their descriptions reveal practice which is valued for its gentleness, flexibility and compassion and which takes place in a warm, informal, unthreatening environment. The qualities of the individual workers were regarded as more important than the fact that they were non-Aboriginal; their understanding of racism and their cultural awareness were noted. The child and family focused nature of the service was also particularly appreciated.

The extensive practical support provided women with the opportunity to attend to the emotional well-being of themselves and their children rather than worrying about basic physiological requirements such as food and shelter. The existing connections and networks of the workers, as well as the provision of systemic advocacy and referrals were identified as helpful. The continuation of outreach support after leaving Sturt Street was reported as ensuring that women did not feel 'cut off' from the supportive environment they had experienced and also enabled them to maintain their stability.

What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?

Given their overall satisfaction with the service, the women had very few suggestions for changes or additions to what is offered. The city location of the Sturt Street townhouses was mentioned because it is close to busy traffic and there is a lack of outside play space for children. Noise problems associated with high-density housing were also mentioned.

Why is the Sturt Street Project Consider Effective by Aboriginal Women?

The participants spoke in positive terms about the practical outcomes of stable, safe housing and increased involvement in educational and employment opportunities.

Significantly, these were added to by feelings of strengthened confidence and self-efficacy as a result of the responsive and individualised support they received whilst at Sturt Street.

6b. Findings: Interviews with Aboriginal Women

Background of Aboriginal women

Early interview questions asked about the participants' family background and life events leading to their use of the Sturt Street Project. A summary of this information is provided in order to give a sense of the history and circumstances that preceded their arrival at the Sturt Street project and to place their experience of the service in context.

All but one of the respondents identified having experienced domestic or family violence in their intimate relationship. Five of the 13 women also described domestic or family violence in their family of origin. Such difficulties commonly led to them moving around and living with different family member, experiencing disrupted schooling and often leaving school early. The focus of the evaluation did not require the interviews to go into detail about the violence that women and their children had experienced. However, from their descriptions of their lives it was clear that it had wrought profound effects:

"Ever since I have been going through the domestics and stuff, I just pretty much went downhill and I got to that point where I just didn't really care about myself."

"My life was stressed you know. I was in and out of women's shelters and me hair was everywhere. I wasn't even dressing up, you know. I looked a scraggly way all the time, worrying about the kids and getting them off to school and everything. And they getting in dramas at school."

"I didn't have a life before." "I owe my life to this place."

In many cases, the women had needed to leave the home they shared with their partners in order to protect themselves and their children. Several described needing to leave quickly and without any of their possessions. Following the escape from violence, two women described living in their car. Twelve women had used emergency accommodation or women's shelters, sometimes multiple times. Several mentioned that they had been put up in motel accommodation with their children because shelters were full. Eight of the women described living with friends and/or family members after they left their partner. This commonly involved living in overcrowded conditions, on limited resources. These difficulties created tensions and meant that it was often necessary to move between the homes of different friends and family:

"I been in and out going like door to door with my four kids it's been hard" and "Me and my kids we've been struggling you know, make a move, we running out of places to go. We can't stay at people's houses and we're unwelcome and that, you know."

"Yeah I actually left then if that mean leaving my car behind, my clothes and my son that's what happened you know eventually I got my son back and my car and I never got my stuff back but it doesn't matter."

"Left him for a while and stuff, but then, because he was taking over my house, that we had, he wouldn't leave the house, so I always had to leave...and he wouldn't get out of my house, taken over my house."

"(In motel accommodation organised by a crisis line because women's shelters were full) You've got to get out at 10, and then you have to ring again at 4, only to maybe go back to the same one, and you're dragging your kids around all day. It's crazy."

In addition to their experiences of domestic and family violence, the women also described other complex, compounding issues that they had experienced. Just under half of the respondents mentioned the problematic drug and/or alcohol use of their partner or other family members and 4 identified their own problematic substance use or gambling. Drug use also meant that partners or family members of 4 of the women, and one of the women, had spent time in jail. The death (including suicide) of a friend or family member was described by 4 women as affecting their lives in particular and significant ways. Important mental or physical health issues were mentioned by 3 of the participants. Two thirds of the women were dealing with family law processes or disputes or with child residence or contact issues outside of the family law system.

The participants were asked how, specifically, they came to be at Sturt Street. The majority of women – 9 in all – were referred to the Sturt Street Project by Nunga Mi Minar Aboriginal women's shelter. One participant was referred by a mainstream homelessness service, one from Housing SA and one from a prison case worker.

Themes

As with the themes that emerged from the interviews with service providers, the comments and descriptions from women reflecting on their time at the Sturt Street Project portrayed an overwhelmingly positive experience. Very few suggestions were made about ways in which the Sturt Street Project could be improved. Following a similar structure to the

previous findings section from the interviews with service providers, the findings are presented under the broad categories of “What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?” and “What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?” The final category of “Why is the Sturt Street Project Effective?” includes themes which emerged from the interviews with Aboriginal women that provided testimony about the outcomes of using the service and how it had made a difference to women and children’s lives.

What is working well at the Sturt Street Project?

Each Aboriginal woman clearly stated that their experience of the Sturt Street Project was an extremely positive one. The detail that they provided about what they had liked about the service has been organised into themes which inform the question of what is working well.

The Workers

The most common responses to questions about what the participants had liked about the Sturt Street Project identified positive features of its workers. Every participant made some kind of comment about their general helpfulness, approachability, friendliness, openness and non-judgemental nature. The following selection of comments is representative of the kinds of descriptions offered:

“Very open-minded, laid back, non-judgemental.”

“You couldn’t get any more help than they give you sort of thing and it could just be some words sometimes without anything material.”

“They pretty cool and understanding and it’s like they’ve been round everything...all the time because they know things you know.”

“They’ll listen and they’ll help in whatever way they can and they don’t sound like, they don’t look like they just sitting there and you’re just ear bashing them, they try and help you through.”

“They didn’t judge you and they were good listeners, and they offered you the advice, and they gave you choices, so they directed you, gave you choices, in what services was out there, and if you wanted to use them ones and this was an opportunity to use them, to your full advantage.”

“You end up being kind of like a different person. And the things they do, they don’t kind of push it onto you to do

this, or do that...But you do change without actually realising it."

"Here I felt so, telling things, you know anything. I was more open. And I was able to, because I knew it didn't matter what you said, what you done, or anything, which I didn't do anything, but what you done is just, they accept that and help you through it."

"They support you and when you got problems you can come to them and if they can help you they do. They put you on, you now they give you advice for things and stuff, it's real good. And they had, like you can have a one on one with them as well, it's good...I mean the workers are here for you all the time. If you've got problems they're here and they'll come to you or you can go to them."

These quotes illustrate the gentleness also noted by the service providers. The non-intrusive and flexible approach allowed for trusting relationships to develop and enabled women to reveal the nature and complexity of issues that they were facing. The respondents indicated that the workers were committed to their role, were available to them and did not give the impression that the women's needs were ever unimportant.

Similar to the interviews with service providers, comments from Aboriginal women also indicated that, when needed, the workers were able to sensitively remind women about some of the ground rules of living at Sturt Street or to gently challenge them about behaviour or decisions that might not have the best long term outcomes for them or their children:

"They know when people are pissing in their pocket but they're very compassionate people at the same time".

Some participants made specific comments about their appreciation of being included and consulted about matters relating to their stay at Sturt Street and their move into public housing. The welcoming and friendly nature of the workers' support did not appear to be experienced as intrusive or as comprising the desired privacy or independence of the women staying at Sturt Street. Four women specifically mentioned that they felt their privacy was very clearly respected and in general comments suggested that workers struck the right note of demonstrating care, concern and interest in residents in a manner that was not found to be pushy or invasive:

"They're really involved with you like you know without even asking if there's problems or whatever just because you know

they make you feel comfortable and you feel that connection with them you can just sit down and tell them 'well you know this is bothering me...'"

"They make you feel really at home like as soon as you come in and you know that you're being placed here and you're sitting down and they make you feel really at home. It's really homely here especially in their office you know they make you feel very welcome and they show a lot of hospitality and stuff you know not really in your face or anything you know they give you that space, they respect the fact even though they work here you live here and it's your space you know what I mean they really don't invade your privacy and stuff like that. Whereas when you're coming from the shelter it's a big difference."

During discussions about what participants liked about the workers, some offered their views about there being non-Aboriginal workers at the Sturt Street Project. Eight women indicated that Aboriginality didn't matter or didn't make any difference to the way they felt about the workers at the Sturt Street project. For these women, the qualities of the individual worker were most important:

"A person's a person, regardless of whatever their koori, colour, whatever, so you know if they're doing their job."

"I reckon it was good. Like I said it doesn't really worry me that much whether there was Aboriginal workers here or not."

It was also apparent that the workers' significant experience of working with Aboriginal people, their acute understanding of the origins and dynamics of racism and their cultural awareness contributed to the women's general satisfaction with the absence of Aboriginal workers.

"They understand your culture side of things I guess it just depends on their personality you know how they fit in with the job itself, how they communicate with people every day and you know I think they do a really good job of it actually they really honestly do a good job of it you know I think it just comes down to their attitude and you know that they really enjoy what they do."

"I've never had any issues with that because like I said they've been so helpful and again not judgemental. They

haven't been prejudiced in any of the facts of the different backgrounds, the cultural side of it so I've never had any issues with them being non-Aboriginal to us being Aboriginal. They've just been welcoming."

"I guess the cultural aspect would be having extended family, knowing that Aboriginal people have always been around a lot of family and they've allowed us to just have the family come and go as long as it was all within the boundaries of doing the right thing...It's meant for us women still being able to still have our family come and have that support as well and they've been really good with that."

"They not racist, they good."

In addition to expressing this view, 2 participants thought that some Aboriginal presence would be good – but not in the context of any criticism or deficit that they perceived on the part of the current workers:

"Maybe have one Aboriginal person but I wouldn't suggest being run by Aboriginal people. I think they do an excellent job and what they do doesn't really, because of who I know, who are the workers here that I'd say they'd probably be the best people for this job."

Three women identified some ways that non-Aboriginal workers may provide a useful alternative to Aboriginal workers. It was suggested that there could be fewer problems with confidentiality or favouritism where workers were not part of a (sometimes small) Aboriginal community. One woman thought that the high incidence of violence experienced by many Indigenous people meant that it was the normative experience of many Aboriginal workers, who might then downplay its significance and affects:

"I just feel like if I was to work with an Aboriginal worker that they had pretty much all been through it...I spoke to a lot of (mainstream) counsellors and that and they pretty much told me that 'that's pretty wrong' you know, what you've been through and stuff and so now I believe that DV and all that stuff is wrong and it shouldn't happen and I shouldn't have to go through it."

The Environment

As some of the quotes in the previous sections indicate, a theme related to the approachability of the workers was the informal and welcoming environment of the Sturt

Street Project office. The useful proximity of the office to the townhouses was referred to in some detail by half of the participants, who appreciated the opportunity it provided for casual-drop-ins rather than scheduled appointments. Similar to the interviews with service providers, it was clear that the workers were central to creating an environment that was experienced as hospitable, inclusive and relaxed. This environment appeared to facilitate effective work with the Aboriginal women and their children. This was contrasted with the more intimidating, formal, bureaucratic environment some women had encountered when accessing social welfare services:

"Not going into what I call sterile places, going into the offices and everything's white and desks are cleared."

"Having this place here, I wouldn't be able to come in and just sit around if I had to go into the office and see them." and "And I feel it's because it's more relaxed and like home here more than an office that people are able to open up and tell that gut wrenching stuff to them."

"I find that a lot of us wouldn't go into the city to see them in an office, it's like a safe environment here."

"Just to feel that we were able to just come around at any time just to sit for a cuppa and just have a conversation so it's been that sort of atmosphere of just feeling like it's just one big family type of thing."

In addition to facilitating relaxed opportunities for engaging with the workers, the Sturt Street environment provided opportunities for mutual support and the development of friendships with other residents. Eight of the 13 women mentioned the supportive friendships forged with other women and children staying at the Sturt Street accommodation:

"I've got nothing bad to say about the service; it's been really, really good. They've just been really helpful and it's been like all the units along here it's just been like your own little family of support every one of us has supported each other." and "Chat to each other and get along really well with the workers, the workers here have always got the time to really sit and listen to any of our issues that we have so they've been a big support."

The theme of safety was repeated through the women's reflections on the Sturt Street environment. More than half of the respondents mentioned the feeling of safety and relief

that they experienced on arrival at the Sturt Street Project, settling into safe, secure housing.

"It was such a relief honestly it was such a relief that I got in here, you feel it straight away as soon as you get it you know."

"I was real happy. All the weight fell off my shoulders. When I first moved (into Sturt Street), oh what are we going to do, where are we going to get furniture from and the lady said you don't have to worry about nothing and I was just flattered, everything just fell into place."

"Felt safe here, because they had a monitor, like, we could see who was out the front as well, we had like screens, we had videos inside our house...and you had to talk through an intercom, so you could make out that you wasn't home, if you didn't want that person at the front door."

"It was just very comforting to know that if you needed someone in an emergency that they were just a phone call away."

Children focused

A significant feature of the positive Sturt Street experience described by each of the 13 respondents was the care that was demonstrated for their children, as well as the specific help that was given. Appreciative mention was made of the provision of activities for children, learning materials and school holiday excursions. Women also identified support to find childcare, settle their children into new schools for their children as well as help with a variety of child health and wellbeing issues. Thus, the support for children was holistic, responsive and tailored to their individual needs. The meaning and significance of such support is well expressed by one of the participants:

"I felt comfortable here, and safe here, and they just made me look forward to getting a house and getting stable with the kids, and they were looking - the kids getting good at school and that, you know, that just made a lot of relief off my shoulders, you know, because I felt someone else there thinking of my kids and it's not just me."

"So I reckon Sturt Street was really good and it worked really well for me and my kids."

"My kids really like it up here, they didn't really wanna move. They wished they could have stayed here, they said."

"Everything that I wanted for myself and for the kids, they got them in, and I used to my full advantage and they were so pleased with me, yeah, I reckon it worked really well for me and my kids."

"And my children, it's just a lot, and they helped me out heaps with my children because they'd gone through all the things."

"Like in the school holidays they would have art sessions, would go to the movies so they often ask us well this is what we think will do with the kids is there anything else that you think you know will benefit the kids so they'll still ask us you know if there's anything you might want to do that would benefit you and your family."

"They have helped me out with a lot of things. Like with the kids because they were always bored and stuff so they always, they give me stuff like activity books and pencils and they do the (art) program here...Like if I needed something, like if I needed to go to an appointment they help with that as well; just whatever I need help with. Yeah if they can't help me they'll know someone who can sort of thing."

The connections between the Sturt Street Project and local schools were identified as valuable by several respondents. Many of the children living at Sturt Street had experienced disrupted schooling from frequent moves and the harmful effects of living with violence. The ability of workers to connect Aboriginal women with school personnel and to advocate on their behalf facilitated discussion about the issues that children had been contending with. This allowed schools to respond sensitively and resulted in some positive educational outcomes for children:

"And they kind of all helped me out with (name of child) at school and everything, no matter what he'd done and how much he was bad and everything, you know. They were there to help you out, which is good. And the school would actually listen to them (the workers)."

"She'd (worker) pick the kids up, and on rainy days they'd give us taxi. And I reckon Gilles Street (school) was really good, because (worker's name) and that had a relationship with

the, I think it's the vice-principal and so I met with (vice principal), and I went through and I told her, I had like a son, who was a bit behind on stuff, like all the kids were a bit behind on their reading, because I said we went, going through domestic violence, and we moved so much around and went to, you know, 3 different schools in a year."

Family focused

In addition to the child-centred approach described above, features of family focused practice were also described by participants. Women specifically mentioned the fact that older boys are allowed to live at Sturt Street with their family. Many of the respondents had older male children who stayed with them but did not specifically mention this as a notable feature of the Sturt Street Project – perhaps indicating their expectation that this should be so. Two Aboriginal women mentioned that extended family were able to visit and stay with residents at Sturt Street, providing this met the guidelines of the program. This was also identified as demonstrating the cultural appropriateness of the service. The flexible and family-focused approach also allowed family reunification following the end of a prison term. Several women commented that before they were able to stay in the Sturt Street Project, they had experienced fear that their children would be removed into state care because of their homelessness. Two women identified very specific situations where access to Sturt Street expressly prevented family members for whom they held guardianship status being removed from their care.

"I've moved in here then and that was the best thing that could have happened honestly at that time...Family SA put this child in my care knowing I had no home of my own living with family and they place him into my care and then they realise that you know this is not going to last for long and so they threw that at me...it was heart breaking because I was trying everything to get my own place but nothing worked." and "Even though they placed him in my care I had to find somewhere to live and you know going about living in my car...Yeah and having the child removed out of my care because it wasn't suitable that's what they thought so and at that time I thought well you know they set me up to fail."

"Yes I did worry. I thought I was going to get them taken off me and everything."

Practical support

Every participant made positive mention of the practical support that they received. For some, this was almost overwhelming and beyond any kind of assistance they had previously experienced. The practical support was wide-ranging, timely and responsive. It included the

provision of furniture and homewares in the townhouses, clothing (especially school uniforms), bus tickets and help with food and nappies. The pride and pleasure that the women took of their new possessions was often mentioned, as was the contrast with their previous living conditions and lack of possessions:

"Getting sorted, folded all the clothes nice way and sorted them out nice for the kids, got up early, got them ready for school."

"They (children) loved it they thought they were living in a mansion, they'd never been in a two storey place. There were all nice stuff and everything."

"Because no one has ever done that for me before that's why I said like 'are you serious?'"

The relief of having a secure, furnished place to stay for a while was expressed by the participants. It allowed them a break from worrying about basic physiological needs such as food and shelter and provided them the opportunity to attend to the emotional well-being of themselves and their children:

"It took a big load off me and that's another thing, they tell me when I move and stuff and stressed out and I need this and they are like 'that's OK, we will do what we can to help you. All you gotta do is be a mother to your children and just concentrate on them. That took a lot of load off."

Two thirds of the participants noted that being able to access additional forms of support on site at the Sturt Street office added to their positive experience of the program. Some had used the services of a psychologist, parenting support, art therapy classes and yoga. Interestingly, although the vast majority of respondents reported using these services, and their holistic approach appealed to them, the fact that such activities were not compulsory (in comparison with some other shelters), was mentioned favourably.

"You never get offered that many services in one particular place where you're staying, and it was good to have the case workers because they gave you the choice, and then they got the service in for you."

"I really enjoyed it (yoga classes), it was just something for myself to do you know because there was nothing else I was really doing besides looking after children, maintaining the house."

Ten of the 13 women specifically mentioned the practical use of systemic advocacy and referral they received from the Sturt Street workers. This was mentioned in relation to help that they received with issues such as budgeting, gambling, problematic drug and alcohol use, access to education and training opportunities and job applications.

"I've tried to use what I could with the services here. I've found being outside of the services, or before I came here, I didn't know where to go and who to get in contact with and stuff like that and since I've been here I've been able to use a lot of services because of the networks that they have. So I've been able to tap into that and get help with the things that I needed to get myself in front. So it's been really helpful with that."

Continuum of support/outreach

Two thirds of the participants included the outreach feature of the Sturt Street Project in their positive comments. It ensured that women did not feel 'cut off' from the supportive environment they had experienced and also enabled them to maintain their stability and continue the friendships they had made:

"I used to come in all the time, I used to drop in all the time after I left and just you know sometimes it might have been to use the phone even or just to see what's happening and if there's any, whatever's going, see who's here, I know a lot of people and that and just to have a coffee even."

"And every time I come to the doctor's I always just drop in, and I'm always welcome to have coffee and things like that." For some, their time at Sturt Street had been such a good experience that, although they were looking forward to being able to move into permanent housing, they were reluctant to leave."

"I was sad to leave here, because the services that they provided was so good, like for me and the kids."

What needs developing or improving at the Sturt Street Project?

During the interviews Aboriginal women were asked to talk about what they believed could be improved at Sturt Street. Given their overall satisfaction with the service, the women had very few suggestions for changes or additions to what is offered. The following comments were typical:

"I don't think I'd change anything at all, I couldn't think of anything at all that I would change because they've pretty much got it covered."

"I can't actually say to make it better; I think it's pretty good."

Location of housing

Where suggestions were made, these were offered after some reflection on the question – what would they improve at the Sturt Street project? Thus, the suggestions were not presented as 'burning' issues that the participants could identify readily. Where they did mention things they would change, these related to the location of the accommodation. Three women mentioned that the city location of the Sturt Street townhouses meant that there was quite a lot of traffic and a lack of outside play space for children.

"They (the children) like it but they can't really play outside sort of thing but other than that they love it and they are always in the office all the time when they're home."

"The location maybe. It wasn't much of an issue you know but the downfall to it maybe you know is the location...being just a small place and having children it can be you know confined space where they can play and stuff."

Other issues related to the proximity of neighbours. Noise between townhouses was commented on by two participants and one other mentioned a dispute with a neighbour. Several women noted the townhouses' proximity to parklands where some Aboriginal people live, which they felt caused problems for some women. With regard to the amenities of the accommodation, two women noted issues with security (such as a sliding door not being properly fixed) and one mentioned the lack of air conditioning or heating upstairs.

Why is the Sturt Street Project Considered Effective by Aboriginal Women?"

This information was given in response to questions about how the Sturt Street Project had helped the participants, what impact it had on their lives. The responses given suggest that it has created sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal women and their children.

Suitable housing and sustainable tenancies

Each of the women and children who had left the service was living in what they described as suitable housing and were managing to budget effectively and sustain their tenancies. Several mentioned the practical assistance they received to actually make the move into the new home. Two women mentioned that their house was rather small for the size of their family but did not wish to emphasise this issue. Each woman who had been exit housed

stated that their home was secure and close to schools, shops and public transport. Several of the participants described themselves as having been “ready” to move into their own home following their experience at Sturt Street.

“At the end of the day you know that support’s there and it makes a whole lot of difference so when I moved out of here...while I was here you know getting that support with the house itself and keeping that connection and the program that they have for your children and for you.”

This supports the views of service providers that the individualised, intense support at Sturt Street set up strong foundations for women and children so that they and their children left in a more robust emotional and physical state and with a range of practical supports in place. Gratitude was frequently expressed:

“I just find myself really fortunate to have got into this service here.”

“I’m so lucky that I got through and that I got to meet these guys and come through Sturt Street, especially when they come to my house and see all my stuff.”

“This place was, you know, without it I don’t think I would be where I am at the moment.”

In addition to improved housing stability, women also made mention of education or training programs that they were involved in, or plans that they had to engage in such activities when their children were older and there was more “time for me”.

Improvements to women’s stability

In addition to the tangible outcome of secure housing, over half of the women identified less tangible changes to their sense of wellbeing. They described general improvements to their stability which included enhanced feelings of self-confidence and perceptions of control that had occurred as a result of their use of the Sturt Street Project.

“They helped me get my life on track and I noticed I stopped struggling since I been here.”

“I don’t know where I would be honestly I don’t know...the little boy removed and I would have, I don’t know.”

"You can't pinpoint why or how I changed what I did, but it's got to do with this place, because I was, like, mind you, I was messed up because I lost everything."

"Since coming through here I feel more stable now, I feel like I'm in more control of myself and 'cos I lived in fear through the domestic violence and stuff and you know, it's good 'cos I can come through here sort of like pick me up, you know you got good workers."

"But coming here just feels really good and I don't really know. They could see and notice a difference in me within a couple of months as well and said that I've come along way."

Such feelings of empowerment allowed them to have reinvigorated aspirations as mothers, to feel less self-blame about the difficulties they had experienced, and to feel less intimidated by partners who had abused them:

"But I wasn't very confident because being around family violence and stuff. I could be like a better mum, yeah, better mum."

"It's made me feel better about my kids as well."

"And I've always just done what I'm told, stayed in that relationship, you know. And since I've been here it's the only time, you know, and, like, you know, so I was afraid it would turn out, you know, speak up for myself and say, you know, get stuffed."

"I just feel like I can stand up to him now. You know where I don't let him put it over me anymore which is good so it's sort of like built my confidence up as well...Now I feel so much better. So I'm in control now which is good."

One of the difficulties that several Aboriginal women had described was problematic family obligations and demands. One woman said, "They pretty much live off me, so I just feel really used and abused." Following the provision of safe and stable living conditions, and with increased feelings of confidence and control, some women mentioned an improved ability to deal with excessive demands from family members. This was connected to a determination to pay more attention to their needs, as well as those of their children:

"That's why I don't worry about relationships or anything like getting too involved with my family as well. I've just been concentrating on what I want to do, like what I want my kids to do and stuff. I want them to be educated and like go right through school and stuff and I want to do - get into my courses and stuff and like do a lot of things that I said I was going to do a long time ago."

"There is that cultural thing of having your family come and go in and out of your life as they please so I thought nuh, I need a new change now I need to just break away and do some good for myself and the kids so hopefully that's one of the reasons why I'm looking forward to just see how that change goes."

"I haven't been having that support from you as much as I would like so I just want to do something that's going to make me and my kids happy and not spend my time trying to please other people."

Improvements to children's stability

The women's reflections on the outcomes of accessing the Sturt Street Project included the identification of significant improvements to the stability of their children. They were frequently described as happier and more settled, as making good progress in school, and sometimes as being less aggressive:

"My children they've done a few art works that they said that once we get in they're going to get it all framed that they've done here to put up in the house and that would be a nice thing."

"Since I've been here there's been a big change, I've been finding my feet again and moving forward now and things are looking up for me and the kids which is really good."

"Yeah me and my children we feel more stable now 'cos like before that as well you know I was, like 3 years before that I was just staying with family and it was like really hard and I had a lot of problems with domestic violence."

"My kids feel happy and settled, you know, with what they've given us, like given a house and everything, and they've helped us out with things the kids needed, you know, and it's

like, yeah the kids feel more content and happy and stable and everything."

"I'd like it to keep going...to help others who are in my situation, homeless people like mums with the kiddies and that and I think it's very important if they can keep it going so to help other women and children out that were in the predicament that I was in."

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Sturt Street Project

The themes that have been drawn from Aboriginal women's reflections on their time at Sturt Street indicate that the program is providing a flexible and responsive service to their complex experiences and circumstances. Their testimonies point to the effectiveness of the assistance that the Sturt Street workers in particular; this included practical and emotional support for themselves and their children. Their descriptions reveal practice which is valued for its informality, flexibility and compassion and which takes place in a warm, unthreatening environment. The participants reported feeling respected, treated as valued individuals and as part of a family system that was also supported. The practical outcomes of stable, safe housing are augmented by feelings of strengthened confidence and self-efficacy.

"Because my kids feel happy and settled, you know, with what they've given us, like given a house and everything, and they've helped us out with things the kids needed, it's like, yeah the kids feel more content and happy, and stable and everything. Now I say to my mum that's my castle, you know. I have been here for two and half years. I can't pinpoint why or how I changed what I did, but it's got to do with this place. I was so messed up and lost everything. I had no furniture but I felt comfortable here, and safe here, and they just made me look forward to getting a house and getting stable with the kids, and they were looking out for the kids like getting good at school. I got a lot of relief off my shoulders. I love my big backyard and house."

7. Discussion & Conclusions

The evaluation of the Sturt Street Project aimed to examine the client profile and service activities to determine numbers assisted and investigate outcomes for women and families post-transition from the service. It also aimed to explore the perceptions of both the clients (Aboriginal women) and service providers/stakeholders to determine facilitators and barriers to success of the project and the overall service effectiveness.

The quantitative data showed that for the 31 women and 86 children who had accessed the Sturt Street Project, there was an 88% success rate of moving into stable, long-term public housing. Since its commencement in 2006, the Sturt Street Project consistently exit housed approximately 5 families a year.

The collaboration between the Sturt Street Project and Housing SA is an example of an integrated service response which combines the features of a transitional housing model which in turn facilitates the move to long-term, sustainable housing. The Project addresses the well-established theme in the literature about the desperate need for housing assistance for women and children following domestic and family violence. The integrated transition to suitable public housing is an outstanding feature of the Sturt Street project, and one that does not appear to be replicated in literature documenting responses to domestic and family-related homelessness.

The Aboriginal families that were assisted had experienced long-term family violence and homelessness. Furthermore, many women had experienced associated mental/physical health issues, addictions (drugs, alcohol, gambling), and long-term transient lifestyles. The majority of the Aboriginal families who have been exit housed remain in contact with the Sturt Street Project and this reflects their appreciation and support, and shows evidence for the positive impact the service had on their lives.

The qualitative data (interviews with service providers and Aboriginal women) provided detailed descriptions about what works well at Sturt Street and insights into why the Project can be argued to be effective. Furthermore, the evaluation interviewed 9 service providers from a sample size of 14 (64% success rate) and 13 Aboriginal women from a sample size of 31 (42% success rate). This response rate is extremely high for a specific, hard to reach population. The interviews with service providers and the interviews with Aboriginal women produced similar themes, which strengthens and reaffirms the findings and subsequent conclusions.

The Sturt Street Project works well and is effective because it produces sustainable, long-term outcomes for Aboriginal families. The outcomes include obtaining stable, long-term public housing, stability for Aboriginal women (shown in examples of developing coping skills, budgeting skills, parenting skills, increased self-esteem, employment in some cases, and the ability to make safe choices), and stability for Aboriginal children, especially attending school and increasing happiness and wellbeing. It provides the two types of assistance that Tually, Faulkner et al. (2008) identify as critical: individualised and open-ended holistic support and the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing. Having such outcomes stops women from needing to go back to violent relationships, which is noted in the literature as a common problem (Hanmer, Gloor et al. 2006; Abrahams 2007; Banga and Gill 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). It also prevents unwanted dependency on extended family members, and experiencing the human service 'merry-go-round'. In short, it stops transiency and needing to access a range of short term services over and over again.

The Sturt Street Project produced such positive outcomes for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is extremely focused on the wellbeing of Aboriginal women and their children. The service prepares thoroughly before a family enters the Project, is upfront and transparent about the complexity experienced by families, and establishes clear intended aims, goals, and purposes when working with families. Secondly, the Project emanates gentleness, flexibility and is non-judgemental. These characteristics are consistently identified in literature reporting what women value about workers (Melbin, Sullivan et al 2003; Owens 2003; Laing 2005; Abrahams 2007) and what is considered to constitute culturally sensitive practice in responding to violence and homelessness experienced by Aboriginal people (Health Canada 1997; Snell and Small 2009; Memmott, Chambers et al. 2006). Specifically, it was found that the three workers employed at Sturt Street contributed much to building this environment, which increases rapport building and engagement with Aboriginal families. On the other hand, the workers were also recognised for their ability to sensitively challenge unhealthy lifestyles, behaviours, and difficulties displayed by Aboriginal women in ways that encouraged them to examine consequences of their actions and plan for their futures. The workers could effectively have these difficult conversations because they had the skills to establish relationships with the Aboriginal women based on respect, openness, and being non-judgemental.

Thirdly, the Project is recognised as being culturally informed and aware. Specifically, the workers employed at the service were identified as working in culturally sensitively ways and has having genuine empathy, understanding, and passion for working with Aboriginal people. The warm, informal office environment, the openness and unthreatening, approachable style of the workers are all documented features of good practice in culturally sensitive service provision (Health Canada 1997; Memmott, Chambers et al. 2006; Snell and Small 2009). All workers had extensive backgrounds and experience working with Aboriginal

people in the local context (which Flatau, Coleman et al. 2009 recommend) and had been employed at the service since its commencement. These aspects of consistency, continuity and respect contribute much when working with Aboriginal women and their children.

The findings of this evaluation do not constitute any repudiation of the recommendations, noted in the literature review, that services should be developed and run by Aboriginal people. Rather, what the findings of this evaluation suggest is that it is possible for a service for Aboriginal women and their children to be successful if it has not been developed or operated by Aboriginal people but meets some of the conditions required for effective, culturally sensitive practice. It is important to note that this success can be attributed to ways in which the Sturt Street Project departs from some of the practice approaches associated with White, non-Aboriginal dominant culture such as bureaucratic formality, intimidating office structures, inflexibility and time-constrained service provision.

Finally, the Sturt Street Project is effective because it is a unique service that can offer immediate practical and material support for Aboriginal families as well as intense, emotional, educative, long-term support. Again, these features are present in the research literature emphasising the value placed on meeting the most fundamental material needs as well as emotional needs of women and as well as their children (Laing 2005; Abrahams 2007; Lyon, Lane et al. 2008; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009). Providing material possessions to set up a house (fridge, washing machine, furniture, utensils), to support Aboriginal women (e.g. bus tickets, clothes, food) and to support children at school (uniforms, lunches) are essential in building initial stability and safety for families. This assistance provides relief and a break from worrying about basic needs. Aboriginal women are therefore allowed time to focus on their children's wellbeing and their long-term goals of obtaining a house. Providing material/practical support also allows for opportunities to work with the Aboriginal women on building their skills, that is, it opens up space to provide education and capacity building. For example, the women often received budgeting counselling or counselling to help build esteem, coping abilities and parenting skills in conjunction with the material support. These features of the service match effective integrated responses and case management approaches described in the literature (Correia 1999a; Whitaker, Baker et al. 2007; Flatau, Coleman et al. 2008; Marshall, Ziersch et al. 2008; Gronda 2009). The provision of additional help on site at Sturt Street reduced the need for external, impersonal referrals. However, the strong connections between Sturt Street and important organisations such as local schools and child care meant that where external institutions were required, reliable links to specific people could be made.

The Sturt Street Project is effective because it is committed and focused on creating long-term outcomes for Aboriginal women that are sustainable. Aboriginal women are provided with individual attention and support to take their time to build and establish stability for

themselves and their children before they exit the service. They are not rushed to move out of the service or take the first public house offered to them, which potentially sets up failure. Instead, they are supported to reach a point in their lives where they are ready and able to move into their house. It is also important to recognise that often the workers from Sturt Street continued to support the Aboriginal families when they initially moved into permanent public housing to strengthen and reinforce this outcome. Again, the value of continuing support and advocacy is well reflected in the literature (Owens 2003; NSW Women Refuge Movement and the UWS Urban Research Centre 2009).

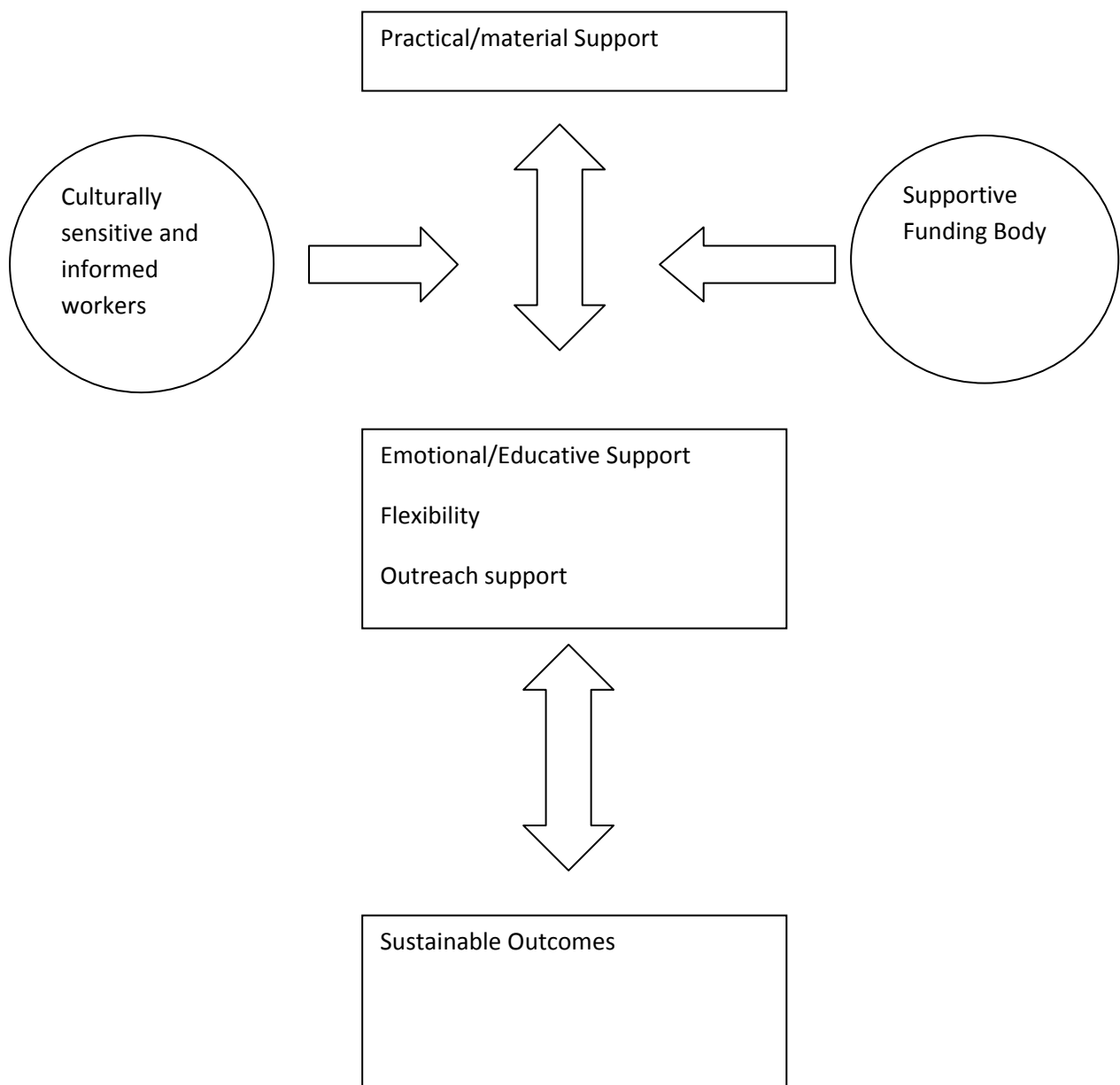
The qualitative data highlighted a common tension often experienced in human service delivery. It acknowledged that the Sturt Street Project, which is built on flexible, organic ways of working, does not sit comfortably alongside agencies that work in bureaucratically, mainstreamed informed ways. The Department for Families and Communities has invested in Sturt Street since its commencement in 2006, which has allowed Sturt Street to grow and flourish. The evaluation of Sturt Street Project has shown the complexity of working with Aboriginal women and children who have experienced long-term family violence and homelessness and the importance of working in culturally sensitive ways. The Department now has the opportunity to learn from the benefits of this model when working with Aboriginal families but also for practice and services more broadly within the domestic and family violence sector. This means allowing workers to work in flexible, responsive, gentle ways that provide both material, emotional, and educational support, which ultimately means investing in and being committed to working over the long-term.

The following conclusions can be made from the findings:

- Long-term investment produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families.
- Practical/material support coupled together with emotional and educative support produces sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families.
- Services must be culturally sensitive and aware when working with Aboriginal families.
- Services must focus on both the women's needs and children's needs when responding to long-term family violence.
- Working in organic, flexible, and gentle ways is effective when working with Aboriginal women and their children.
- Outreach support is important to help Aboriginal women keep and maintain their permanent public housing.

Model of Long-term Support Demonstrated by the Sturt Street Project

In summary, the Sturt Street Project is effective because it provides intense practical support together with emotional, educative support to build sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal families. Furthermore, much of the success of the service is dependent on the workers employed. Working in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways together with gentle, flexible and long-term commitment is the most likely way to reach long-term sustainable goals.



8. Appendices

Appendix A: Reference List

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Appendix B:

Interview Schedule for Service Providers who work directly or closely with Sturt St Family Violence Partnership Program.

1. Please tell me about yourself e.g. your role, employment, length of time in the sector of family violence/homelessness, working with Aboriginal women and children etc.
2. Please tell me about your understanding of the Sturt Street Program and its purpose, role, client group etc.
3. What is your perception of the service? Why? Prompts – meeting client outcomes etc.
4. What is your perception of the relationship Sturt Street has with other human service agencies – tell me about this?
5. Please tell me about the Sturt Street Referral pathways and information exchange with other agencies – has this been positive/negative, why?
6. What is your overall evaluation of the Program, do you think it is valuable – why, why not? Prompts: facilitators/barriers.
7. In your experience as a worker, do you think Aboriginal women have found Sturt Street useful – why, why not?
8. Do you know of other Aboriginal families that have not accessed or engaged with the service but would benefit from the service – explain?
9. Please tell me anything else you think is important for the purposes of evaluating this service.
 - Please note this is a semi-structured interview and will not be asked verbatim. The questions above reflect the themes that will be covered, leaving space for workers service providers to talk about other themes they believe are important for the evaluation.

Appendix C:

Interview Schedule for Aboriginal Women who are clients or past clients of Sturt St Family Violence Partnership Program.

1. Please tell me about yourself. E.g. (first name, children, a little life history) – this is used as a way for the women to feel comfortable talking and to gain some contextual background information.

2. How did you find out about Sturt Street and why did you decide to use this service?

3. Has Sturt Street program made any difference to your life? If so, in what way?

Prompts include: housing stability, safety, family life, health and wellbeing – for herself and children.

4. Please tell me if you have been happy with the service (why, why not? Prompts – cultural appropriateness, expectations). Please tell me if you have been unhappy with the service? (same prompts).

5. What do you think is good about Sturt Street? What do you think is not so good about Sturt Street? (Prompts: facilitators/ barriers).

6. In what ways do you think Sturt Street could be improved?

7. Did you receive support from the Sturt Street program after moving out from their accommodation?

If 'yes' - What was it like moving from Sturt Street? What do you think of services you received from the program when moving and afterwards?

No - Why not? How did you manage?

8. Please tell me anything else you think is important for us to know about the Sturt Street service.

Appendix D:



University of South Australia

Information Sheet For Service Providers

Title: **Evaluation of Sturt St Family Violence Partnership Program**

Researchers: *Dr Sarah Wendt*

Senior Lecturer, Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy

University of South Australia.

PH: 83024347 or sarah.wendt@unisa.edu.au

Dr Joanne Baker

Lecturer in Social Policy, School of Social and Policy Studies

Flinders University

PH: 82015752 or joanne.baker@flinders.edu.au

You are invited to participate in a research project evaluating the Sturt Street Family Violence Partnership Program. This project is funded by the Department for Families and Communities.

What will you have to do?

As part of the evaluation we would like to hear the opinions, experiences and perceptions of service providers who have worked specifically at Sturt Street, and/or have an indirect relationship with Sturt Street as part of their work within the domestic violence and homelessness sector.

We would like to interview you face to face about your experiences of working at or with using this service. The interview will be audio-taped but if you do not want this to happen written notes will be used instead. The interviews will be conducted by Sarah Wendt and/or Joanne Baker.

Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at anytime. Your decisions will not have any impact on your employment or relationships with Sturt Street. .

What are the possible benefits or risks to participating?

You may not personally benefit from taking part in the research but your interview, together with other service providers' interviews, will inform recommendations made from this evaluation to help improve Sturt Street and other similar Aboriginal women's services.

In the unlikely event that any issues arise in the interview that may be distressing to you, we would discuss support options with you.

What will happen to the information collected?

All audio-taping of interviews will be downloaded and filed on Dr Sarah Wendt's computer at the Magill campus, University of South Australia. All material will be given code names and no identifying material will be stored. All data will be stored for 7 years. Confidentiality will be adhered to at all times during and after the research and no information will be used in the writing of the final report that could identify you in any way.

What do I do if I want to participate?

If you want to participate please email or ring Dr Sarah Wendt and she will help set up an interview with a time and place that suits you. The interview will take approximately 1 hour.

A copy of the final report will be provided to Sturt Street if you want to read about the findings.

If you have any questions about participation in this research please contact Dr Sarah Wendt on 83024347 or email sarah.wendt@unisa.edu.au

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 08 83023118; Email: Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au. or Nancy Rogers, Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee on 08 8413 8170 or nancy.rogers@dfc.sa.gov.au

Appendix E:



University of South Australia

CONSENT FORM

Project title: Evaluation of Sturt St Family Violence Partnership Program

Researchers: *Dr Sarah Wendt*

Senior Lecturer, Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy

University of South Australia.

PH: 83024347 or sarah.wendt@unisa.edu.au

Dr Joanne Baker

Lecturer in Social Policy, School of Social and Policy Studies

Flinders University

PH: 82015752 or joanne.baker@flinders.edu.au

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio taped during the interview.
- I understand that the tape will be downloaded onto a computer and stored securely at the Magill Campus, University of South Australia and that the researchers are the only people that have access to it.
- I am 18 years of age or older.

Name of participant.....

Signed.....**Date**.....

I have provided information about the research to the research participant and believe that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature and date.....

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 08 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au or Nancy Rogers, Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee on 08 8413 8170 or nancy.rogers@dfc.sa.gov.au

Appendix F:



University of South Australia

Information Sheet For Aboriginal Women

Title: **Evaluation of Sturt St Family Violence Partnership Program**

Researchers: *Dr Sarah Wendt*

Senior Lecturer, Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy

University of South Australia.

PH: 83024347 or sarah.wendt@unisa.edu.au

Dr Joanne Baker

Lecturer in Social Policy, School of Social and Policy Studies

Flinders University

PH: 82015752 or joanne.baker@flinders.edu.au

You are invited to participate in an evaluation of the Sturt Street Family Violence Partnership Program. The evaluation is funded by the Department for Families and Communities.

What will you have to do?

It is important to hear the voices of Aboriginal women who have used Sturt Street and so we would like to talk to you face to face about your experiences of using this service. This will be audio-taped but if you do not want this to happen written notes will be used instead. You will speak to Sarah Wendt or Joanne Baker.

Participation is strictly voluntary. This means it is totally up to you if you want to talk to us and you can change your mind at anytime. Whatever decision you make, this will not make a difference to services you receive from Sturt Street or other related agencies.

What are the possible benefits or risks to you?

The evaluation is not likely to benefit you directly or put you at risk.

Your story, together with other women's stories, will help improve Sturt Street and other similar Aboriginal women's services.

In case you become upset while talking about your story and need support after the interview we will discuss what is available and refer you to appropriate service (for example to your caseworker from Sturt Street or another agency).

If you talk about your children being harmed we would have to notify the Child Abuse Report Line.

What will happen to the information collected?

We will not use your name or anything that could identify you in any reports written as part of the evaluation.

We will also make sure that the information you give us will be kept confidential and secure during and after the evaluation is finished. All audio-taping of conversations will be put on Dr Sarah Wendt's computer at the Magill campus, University of South Australia but instead of names she will use codes. All data will be stored for 7 years.

What do I do if I want to participate?

If you want to take part in the evaluation please contact Sarah or Joanne (phone numbers above). The interview will take about approximately 1 hour.

A summary copy of the final report will be provided to Sturt Street if you want to read about the findings.

If you have any questions about this research please contact Dr Sarah Wendt on 83024347 or email sarah.wendt@unisa.edu.au

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: 08 83023118; Email: Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au or Nancy Rogers, Chairperson of the Families and Communities Research Ethics Committee on 08 8413 8170 or nancy.rogers@dfc.sa.gov.au

Appendix G: Researcher's Backgrounds

Dr Sarah Wendt is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Australia. She is a qualified social worker (Bachelor of Social Work, 1st Class Honours & Bachelor of Arts, Gender Studies). Her PhD was conferred on the 18th October 2005. Sarah has been researching domestic/family violence for over a decade and has published her research in international and national journals as well as a sole authored book on this topic. She has worked in the field as a practitioner for 5 years and has specifically researched Aboriginal family violence in both Ceduna and Murray Bridge.

Dr Joanne Baker is a Lecturer in Social Policy at Flinders University. She has worked in the domestic/family violence field as a social welfare worker and as an NGO management committee member in Britain, Canada and North Queensland, Australia between 1991 and 2005. In Canada and Australia, this practice included work with First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. Joanne's research interests and publications have included a focus on violence against women.