



The Victorian State-wide Children's Resource Program was developed in 2006 to assist the homelessness and family violence sectors in identifying and addressing the specific needs of children experiencing homelessness and/ or family violence. The program provides a range of support to homelessness and family violence services across Victoria. The program is state-wide with co-ordinators in each metropolitan and rural region.

We value the opportunity to raise the specific needs of children who experience homelessness and family violence as separate to those of their parents.

The link between homelessness and family violence

Homelessness is inextricably linked with family violence. The vast majority of children who are homeless are so due to fleeing family violence. Children are the silent and voiceless victims. According to homelessness Australia over 55% of women who present to homelessness support services are victims of family violence, the vast majority of these women also have children.

For too long the service system has considered children as appendages to their parents, and their individual and unique needs have not been recognised. This has been reflected in policy as children have only recently been counted within the homelessness service system, as it was previously assumed that addressing parents needs would address children's needs. We know that this is not the case and as a result there are very few programs that provide direct support to children who have experienced homelessness and family violence.

There is still a gap in policy in addressing the needs of children. Looking to the future there must be more child focus which includes children as participants in decisions and policies and responses to domestic violence.

Children's experience of trauma as a result of experiencing Family violence

Children need stability and safety, they have neither of these things when they are exposed to family violence or are experiencing homelessness as a result of fleeing a violent home. These experiences are cumulative and reoccurring and are not something that children can just 'bounce back' from. There needs to be appropriate therapeutic support for children at the earliest possible time. The government need to fund programs that focus on the emotional impacts of trauma on children in the early years. Early intervention programs have significant impacts on children recovering from traumatic events, including reducing the trans-generational cycle of violence. Addressing children's trauma in the early years will have a significant cost benefit as this will reduce the likelihood that these children will become adult service system users.

Impact on Physical and mental health

Children who are homeless or experience family violence have been exposed to a range of negative life events which may cause significant distress and place them at risk for future difficulties.

Recent Australian research exploring children's experiences of homelessness found that children showed a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties including 'clinginess', bedwetting, tantrums, aggressive behaviour and profound unhappiness.



In addition, children who are experiencing homelessness or family violence have been found to have less access to health services due to increased mobility, lack of transport and financial difficulties. Research has shown that these children often have chronic health issues which go untreated or inadequately treated.

Impact on Education

Children experiencing homelessness and family violence struggle to engage in education.

According to an article written by Victorian Council of Social Services and the State-wide Children's Resource Program, changes to government payments will further disadvantage children who experience family violence. Over 200,000 Victorian school students currently receive the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). For more than 20 years, the EMA has helped low-income families meet school costs such as books, uniforms, excursions, camps, and IT equipment. From 2015, this support will no longer be available. EMA will no longer be paid to families, instead would be funded directly to schools. This funding will not cover the costs of uniforms, excursions, camps or IT at home all of which assist students to participate in educational opportunities.

The evidence is already clear that families struggle to meet the costs of education. For example, an Anglicare Victoria survey of emergency relief recipients found that:

- 29 per cent of families could not afford outside-school activities
- 24 per cent could not afford school books and uniforms
- 20 per cent could not afford in-school activities and outings.

In many cases, teenagers do not merely disengage from education; they were never fully engaged from the very early years. They simply do not feel they have the same entitlement to participation as other, more engaged, students.

Intergenerational poverty, joblessness and homelessness can mean there is no one in a family with the positive experiences of education that encourage support for the notion that all children should have equal access to the high quality education available in Australia.

The barriers to the lifelong positive outcomes that quality education can offer are substantial enough without the added burden that school costs put on students and their families.

The Gonski report also stated that no child should complete their education without the basic competency needed to participate in the workforce. Family violence and homelessness disrupts schooling. Many children experience prolonged absences and many moves which impacts on their ability to gain these basic competencies.

For children experiencing homelessness and family violence, attending school can be an important protective factor in their emotional wellbeing. When thinking about the cost that family violence has on society, it is important to remember that by not supporting these children to engage fully in education we are creating another generation of service users who will be reliant on the system in the future.



Support for families

Support for families should not be episodic; rather families who have experienced family violence require long term support. Current support is focussed on crisis, and resource constraints mean that often the more high risk cases receive support. Once the immediate crisis is over, women need support with education and training to be able to enter employment. They also need support with parenting, access to health and wellbeing programs and therapeutic support. Due to resource constraints services must cease support when families are 'stable' and often this is when families need support the most. This contributes to the 'revolving door' which is far less cost effective than providing the appropriate support to a family.

Community education

The wider community needs to be skilled up to be able to recognise and respond to homelessness and family violence. Schools and health care professionals need to be able to appropriately respond and provide support to children and their mothers as often they will be the first point of contact. They need to be able to allow children to tell their stories and provide the right support to help break the cycle of homelessness and family violence.

We would be more than happy to discuss these issues with you at further length.

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