

JULY 2021 - JULY 2022



Statewide Children's
Resource Program

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YEARLY REPORT

Prepared by the Statewide Children's
Resource Program Coordinators



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THE STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S RESOURCE PROGRAM - AN OVERVIEW

The Statewide Children's Resource Program (SCRCP) was developed in recognition that accompanying children formed a large cohort within adult-focused Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and Family Violence Services. Data captured by services highlighted that service delivery largely focussed on meeting adult needs, whilst children's needs were being inconsistently assessed and met. The ongoing work of the SCRCP is to support capacity-building and continue to promote and encourage best practices in responding to children who experience homelessness and/or family violence, to ensure that children receive the assessment, support, and care essential to their safety and wellbeing.

The best interests of children should be a major focus for service provision and the needs and views of children heard, acknowledged and given sufficient weight in decision making

-SCRCP

The SCRCP supports and promotes the premise that children everywhere are entitled to human rights under international human rights law. Children within service systems are afforded the right to be seen as clients in their own right, to have views and wishes different to their caregivers, and to have their needs, safety and wellbeing responded to. The best interests of children should be a major focus for service provision and the needs and views of children heard, acknowledged and given sufficient weight in decision making. Children's rights cover their developmental and age-appropriate needs that change over time as a child grows.

There are nine SCRCP Coordinator positions across the state who are responsible for supporting all SHS and family violence agencies, across the four divisions and 17 areas of Victoria. Each of the positions is auspiced by one agency on behalf of the region covered by that position. Individual regions developed a model that reflects the particular needs of their service sector. Whilst the programs are responsive locally, each regional program shares the same statewide aims and core functions, endorsed by Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

SCRCP Coordinators engage and collaborate with SHS programs, allied services and related networks to build on existing practitioner strengths to address the needs of children. This involves identifying and addressing the systemic and structural limitations that impact on effective service responses to children. The Coordinators work to build the capacity of practitioners within the sector to recognise the impacts of trauma on children, provide assessment and engagement strategies and ongoing case management support. This contributes to a sustainable, skilled workforce within SHS and FV services.

Through regular communication, strategic planning and collaboration, the SCRCP are able to strongly advocate, share information, deliver training, develop resources, contribute to ongoing policy and academic discourse and be involved in consultative processes.



CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS AND/OR FAMILY VIOLENCE

The impact that homelessness and family violence have on children is evident across all developmental domains and can have a profound impact on children's physical and mental health.

A significant proportion of women and children presenting to homeless services in Australia are escaping domestic and family violence. Family violence exacerbates the negative outcomes. A perpetrator's choice to use violence disrupts and violates the sense of safety and belonging within the family home, denying children the ability to play freely, or to experience loving care that meets their emotional needs. To assist vulnerable children, we need to shift our focus and provide more individualised trauma recovery interventions in an attempt to reduce cumulative harm and trans-generational homelessness.

During the 2021-2022 financial year of brokerage applications identified family violence as the main presenting reason families sought assistance from specialist homelessness services (figure ...). The provision of the Homeless Children's Brokerage Program provides opportunity for practitioners to engage with and reflect on the experiences and needs of children who may be highly traumatised. Effectively supporting children who are affected by homelessness and/or family violence through the brokerage program delivers opportunities to develop the necessary skills to overcome the adversity they face.

In 2020-2021 children (0-18 years) made up 28% of all clients accessing SHS services in Australia. It is critical that children receive a services response that is trauma informed and appropriate for their needs.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

Within Indigenous communities, family violence needs to be understood in the context of a history of colonisation, dispossession of land, forced child removal, racism and discrimination, and the resulting intergenerational trauma that has arisen from this history. The following issues all need to be considered in understanding domestic and family violence in Indigenous communities:

- breakdown of kinship systems and Aboriginal lore;
- experiences of racism, discrimination, and vilification;
- economic exclusion and entrenched poverty;
- alcohol and drug abuse;
- institutionalisation and child removal policies; and
- the effects of grief and trauma on parenting.

Responses to Indigenous children need to be culturally sensitive, trauma and community informed.

2021-2022 data is not yet available from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identifying the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing services.

CHILDREN FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) AND CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

The effects of family violence on CALD children and children seeking asylum can be compounded by many factors including: cultural and language barriers, discrimination, racism, isolation from peers, and a history of trauma arising from having witnessed conflict in their homeland or from their journey to Australia.

It is important for service providers working with children and families from CALD communities to be aware of these issues.

2021-2022 data is not yet available from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identifying the percentage of CALD people accessing SHS support.



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S BROKERAGE PROGRAM (HCBP)

The HCBP was established to enhance opportunities for children experiencing homelessness and family violence. The HCBP is specifically for accompanying children who have had their needs assessed by a case manager and together outlined goals that support the activity of goods they are applying for. The brokerage program is child-specific and aims to encourage practitioners to view children as clients in their own right and experiences, needs, views and wishes of each individual child engaged in ongoing support with an SHS service.

Brokerage is able to fund up to \$400.00 per child, per financial year. The purpose of the brokerage is to support infants, children and young people to experience and participate in age appropriate activities that they are denied because of the circumstances of their family situation. This can include but is not limited to engaging in community and social activities, engagement and maintenance of education and training, reduce social isolation, or provide social and emotional growth opportunities.

Brokerage aims to address, repair, and mitigate the significant challenges that children experiencing homelessness face, to assist involvement in the community with the opportunity to engage with peers and participate in education from an equal starting point.

THE THREE MAIN AIMS OF BROKERAGE ARE TO:

- engage and maintain children in their education (including early education services such as childcare and kindergarten)
- reduce social isolation by enhancing access to a range of specialist support, and social and recreational opportunities within their community
- provide social, emotional, and cultural growth opportunities for children and provide opportunities to increase relational bonds between parents/carers and their children.



REPORTING

The data presented in this report is from all DFFH areas across Victoria. It evidences the use of the HCBP to support children who experience homelessness and/or family violence for the costs associated with education, sport and recreation, specialist services and developmental activities and other needs identified.

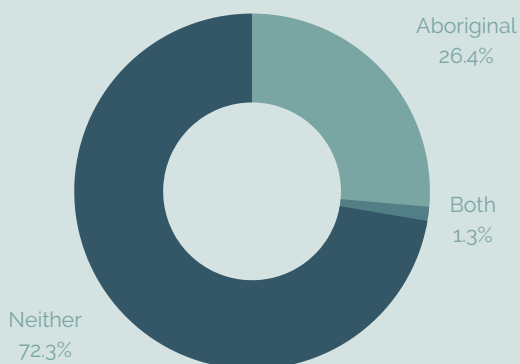
All data in this report is collected by the application process completed by the practitioner supporting the child and family and submitted for approval to the SCRP.

Percentage of children who've experienced family violence

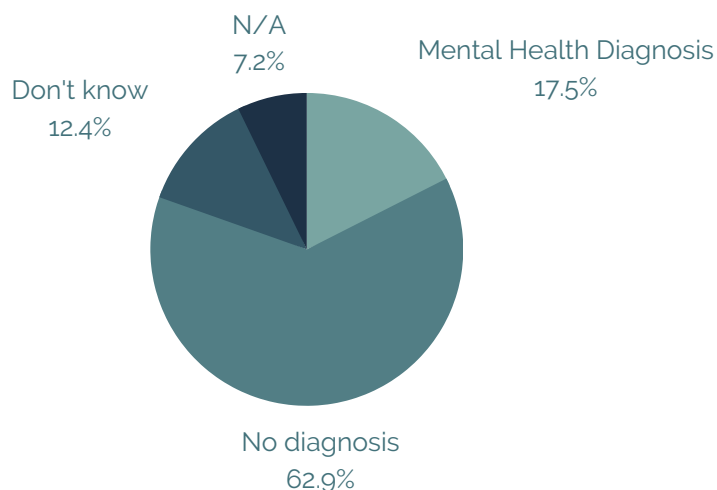


The HCBP assisted over 600 children across Victoria in the 2021-2022 financial year

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status



Child's prior mental health diagnosis



Percentage of single parent families

74.6%



Gender of children accessing brokerage

49% male 50% female 1% other



Top 3 main presenting reasons for accessing services:



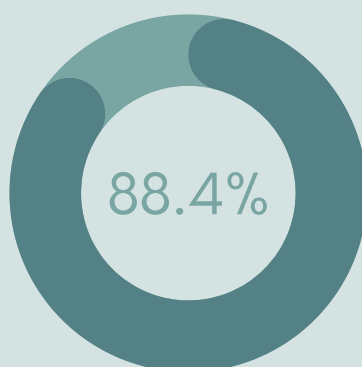
44.2% - family violence

10.3% - inadequate accommodation



10.26% - family breakdown

Percentage of
children undertaking
formal study or
training when
presenting to services



DATA OVERVIEW

Over the 2021–2022 financial year, the HCBP has helped over 600 children who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence. The top three reasons that infants, children, and young people accessed the brokerage program were as follows:

- Domestic Family Violence.
- Family Breakdown
- Inadequate or inappropriate housing

The top three categories for expenditure included education, sports and recreational costs and other miscellaneous costs. The large percentage of education costs funded by brokerage included fees, excursions, uniforms, school materials and education. The SCRPs acknowledges the significant support provided by the Victorian Government's State School's Relief and Camps Sports & Excursions Fund programs, however significant costs remain within the state education system. This has been a rising financial burden to families and significant barrier for children. The ongoing impacts of the global pandemic meant that the HCBP was a flexible resource for many infants, children and young people who were experiencing unique challenges. This meant that the "Other: Miscellaneous" category featured as one of the top three uses of HCBP for the first time. The HCBP continues to fund existing gaps in funding support available for homeless children.



HOMELESS CHILDREN'S BROKERAGE SUCCESS STORIES

The most successful Homeless Children's Brokerage applications are those that are derived from a thorough assessment process, have analysed the impacts on the child, and truly reflect items, services and activities that support them to heal and develop.

Case study 1:

A brokerage application was received for a 17-year-old seeking support to pay for a training course costing \$280.

A goal of the young person's case plan was to obtain employment working in traffic control. The young person has an interest in cars and recently obtained her learner's permit.

The young person has a low literacy level and is currently attending two sessions of school per week for her functional assessments to be completed. The young person does not consider full-time school to be an option and feels the traffic management field is within her capabilities.

The brokerage was approved fund a one-day training course to allow future employment in traffic management. The young person will be able to have an income of her own and build her sense of self-worth.

The brokerage program has assisted children experiencing homelessness and/or family violence throughout Victoria for the costs associated with education, sport and recreation, specialist services and developmental activities.

Case study 2:

A brokerage application was received to purchase a mellow mat for a four-year-old child with multiple disabilities including Global Development Delay, Acquired Brain Injury, and poor eyesight. The child is also nonverbal and has limited ability to be able to eat and swallow.

The mellow mat allows for high impact absorption and will minimise harm whilst playing as the child throws himself backward on the ground banging his head when he is unable to regulate his emotions.

The brokerage was requested to enable the child to have a safe place to play and self-regulate to minimise harm. Total expenditure for the mellow mat was \$339.

WHAT HAS THE SCRP BEEN UP TO

In another year of on and off COVID lockdowns, the SCRP have maintained a presence across the sector and regional networks. This has involved participating in a number of systemic meetings and discussions highlighting the rights, needs and outcomes for infants, children and young people such as the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) Youth Homelessness Strategy and CHP Victorian Homelessness Election Platform Survey.

It has been a very productive year with the release of new tools to support the sector to engage and place children at the centre of their practice.

The Hear My Voice Conversation Cards were released earlier this year and have been well received by the sector with many agencies taking up copies and training of the cards. The Conversation Cards offers guidance to practitioners to have supportive conversation with infants, children and young people about their experience of family violence and homelessness in order to receive the supports they deserve. The cards compliment MARAM, the Information Sharing Schemes and prioritises the child's safety and wellbeing. The SCRP was recently nominated for the Victorian Protecting Children Awards in the Child and Youth Empowerment category due to the impact of the Conversation Cards.



The SCRP met with Emerging Minds Australia to record a podcast about the impacts on children living without a home. This podcast highlights conversation around the need for children to receive supports to reduce the effects of trauma.

The SCRP have also developed and released a number of tools including:

- Children's Wellbeing Case Management Reflection Tool
- Discussions with Children and Young People Accessing Services document
- Homeless Children's Brokerage training video

Many of these resources and others are located on the SCRP's Practitioner Toolkit [here](#). For further information and training, please contact your local SCRC in your region.

This year the SCRP teamed up with Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) and Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to develop a suite of e-learns. The first module is featured on the CHP learning platform, while another three modules are currently undergoing final touches. These modules have been endorsed by Family Safety Victoria and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and are aimed at putting children at the forefront of practitioners thinking and decision making. They provide an overview of the SCRP and HCBP as well as the basis to develop an understanding of the impacts of trauma, family violence and living without a home on child development, and how to meaningfully support children in case management role. New practitioners are encouraged to enrol into these e-learns.

In a new initiative, the SCRP obtained funding from DFFH to purchase fidget toys that were distributed by practitioners to children they are working with. The fidget toys included stress balls, bouncy putty, popits, fidget spinners, and more.



CONCLUSION



This report demonstrates the ongoing need for specialist services for children and the importance of providing support to access assistance. The use of the Homeless Children's Brokerage Program this year shows there is an increasing need for support for children who are affected by homelessness and/or family violence.

The ability to make a real difference in the lives of children who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence is reliant on the ability of SHS and FV workers to be child focused and keep the needs of children at the forefront of decision-making. The brokerage application process involves secondary consultation discussions with practitioners and encourages consideration and understanding of the unique needs of children in these circumstances and to case plan accordingly.

As the Homeless Children's Brokerage program is specifically targeted at children, it remains an important option within a suite of brokerage and other funding options to access supports for children accessing SHS. By providing opportunities for children to engage in activities that stimulate their social and emotional development, provide resources and training for practitioners to increase current service capacity, and increase the diversity of services available for children, the SHS sector can ensure children's negative experience of homelessness and family violence can be mitigated.

Everybody can make a difference in a child's life and a positive intervention can bolster their chances of having a healthy childhood and solid social, emotional and educational foundation for later life.

The Statewide Children's Resource Program is privileged to assist case managers and practitioners to better support children experiencing homelessness and/or family violence and build confidence and capacity in responding to children.

Over the next financial year, Coordinators will continue with resource development, face to face training and education across the regions.

We look forward to the roll out of our e-learns mentioned earlier in this report, to support the sectors knowledge of the importance of engaging children in case management in Homelessness and Family Violence Services. We also hope to see many more of you face-to-face over the coming year during agency visits to support you in your work with children.

Your local Children's Resource Coordinator is very excited to continue to support brokerage applications into the 2022-2023 financial year. The Statewide Children's Resource Program will continue to respond and support practitioners within the sector and will also continue to advocate and promote the interests of infants, children and young people accessing homelessness and family violence services to increase their visibility across these services to ensure that they receive the assessment, support, and care essential to their safety and wellbeing.

The SCRPP would like to thank all who have thought about children meaningfully and engaged with us through brokerage and secondary consults