



Statewide Children's Resource Program

YEARLY REPORT

JULY 2022 - JUNE 2023

STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S RESOURCE PROGRAM

Prepared by the Statewide Children's Resource Program Coordinators



The Statewide Children's Resource Program would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands & waters we live, work and play on. We pay our respects to all Elders past and present and acknowledge that these lands were never ceded.

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THE STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S RESOURCE PROGRAM - AN OVERVIEW

The Statewide Children's Resource Program (SCRP) 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 focused on meeting adult needs, whilst children's needs were 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 SCRCP supports and promotes the premise that children everywhere have 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 are 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).

STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S BROKERAGE REPORT

2022-2023

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.

WHAT HAS THE SCRCP BEEN UP TO?

We are proud to present you the 2022-2023 Homeless Childrens Brokerage Report for the Statewide Children's Resource Program (SCRCP).

Over the past year, our program has provided support to the Specialist Homelessness Services, including Family and Domestic Violence services sector which supports the most vulnerable members of our community - infants, children and young people living without a home and/or victim survivors of family violence.

The mission of the SCRCP is “Giving a voice to vulnerable children”, and we believe that every child deserves a safe and nurturing environment, free from the effects of family violence and living without a home. Through the application of the SCRCP's programs and resources, practitioners have strived to create a positive change in the lives of children, empowering them to heal, grow, and thrive.

This report provides an overview of the Homeless Children's Brokerage Program (HCBP) and the achievements across the regions throughout the past 12 months. In the following pages, you will find a detailed account of our activities, outcomes, and the stories of resilience that have unfolded over the past year. We invite you to explore this report, reflect on our Regions' collective achievements, and join us as we continue our mission to create a brighter future for children impacted by family violence and living without a home.

Over the past year, the SCRCP have remained committed to enhancing knowledge across the sector and promoting the well-being of children and their families. The SCRCP focuses on four key areas of work: knowledge building, brokerage management, training provision, and advocacy.

STATEWIDE CHILDRENS BROKERAGE 2022-2023

KNOWLEDGE

One of our primary objectives is to support practitioners to expand their understanding and expertise in working with children impacted by family violence and homelessness. By offering comprehensive resources, and secondary consultations, we aim to equip practitioners with the tools they need to provide effective support and care to children using best practice principles.

Throughout the last 12 months, the SCRP released a range of new free resources including:

- Children Accessing Specialist Homelessness Services: An induction for new practitioners
- A Child's Rights A4 handout
- Mock brokerage applications demonstrating successful and unsuccessful examples
- Children's Wellbeing Case Management Reflection Tool

Practitioners can access all of the SCRP's resources through the Practitioners Toolkit. The toolkit is also updated regularly with new, child and youth friendly resources.

The SCRP are currently working on developing a new and improved website which will improve access to resources, enhance communication, and promote the program across the sector. It is anticipated that the website should be completed by December 2023.

For more information about available resources or to obtain a secondary consultation for a child you are working with, please contact your local Coordinator.

16%

Children receiving
brokerage identified as
Aboriginal

**NUMBER OF
CHILDREN
SUPPORTED**

655

1%

Children receiving
brokerage identified as
Gender Diverse.

STATEWIDE CHILDRENS BROKERAGE 2022-2023

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The SCRP understand that the key to effective intervention lies in the knowledge and expertise of practitioners working directly with children and their families. The SCRP has placed a significant emphasis on delivering accessible training programs to practitioners in the field.

The SCRP have developed three e-learns. These training opportunities cover a range of topics, including how to navigate the Homeless Children's Brokerage Program application process, brain development, and trauma-informed practice through children's case management. By empowering practitioners with the latest research and evidence-based approaches, we strive to enhance their capacity to meet the diverse needs of the children they serve. These e-learns can be found on the Council to Homeless Persons Learning Hub and the Centre for Excellence learning platform.

There are a range of face-to-face training options available in every region. These are at no cost to services and free, hard copy resources are also provided. These sessions can be adapted to local need. An example of this is our 3 hour 'Hear My Voice' training, featuring our Conversation Cards. This has been very popular and has no role play and no PowerPoint presentation.

For more information on available training, please refer to the Council to Homeless Persons Learning Hub or contact your local Coordinator to book your team into the Hear My Voice training.

ADVOCACY

We firmly believe in advocating for the rights and well-being of children impacted by family violence and living without a home. We work consistently to raise awareness about the issues they face, collaborating with policymakers, government bodies, and community stakeholders to drive systemic change. Through advocacy efforts, we aim to create a community that prioritises the safety, stability, and holistic development of all children across our communities.

HOMELESS CHILDRENS BROKERAGE PROGRAM (HCBP)

The HCBP provides brokerage funds across the state through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness now known as the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The brokerage program is child-specific and aims to encourage practitioners to recognize children as clients in their own right and respond to their individual needs.

The HCBP was established to enhance opportunities for children experiencing homelessness and family violence. The purpose of the brokerage is to support infants, children and young people to engage and maintain education, reduce social isolation, or provide social and emotional growth opportunities. The HCBP is also designed to support practitioners to think about the experience of the child/young person and how they may support them in a very child/young person-focused way.

This brokerage is able to fund items such as activities for infants and toddlers, school engagement materials and fees, vacation care, and specialist medical or psychological assessments. Practitioners are required to consult with the children and/or their caregiver to identify ways in which they should be supported.

The brokerage provides up to \$400 per child, per financial year. The program aims to improve service delivery for children in the homelessness and family violence sector. The program aims to raise awareness of the issues facing children and young people experiencing homelessness and/or family violence.

The three main aims are to:

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

Please note that brokerage applications can only be made by practitioners supporting eligible families. Practitioners are invited to contact their local coordinator.

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 individualized trauma recovery interventions in an attempt to reduce cumulative harm and transgenerational homelessness.

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 2022-2023, over 272,000 people sought assistance from homelessness support services. 62,560 of this number were under 18 years old. It is critical that children receive a service 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, ongoing 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;
- effects of grief and trauma on parenting;
- destruction of language and cultural knowledge

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.

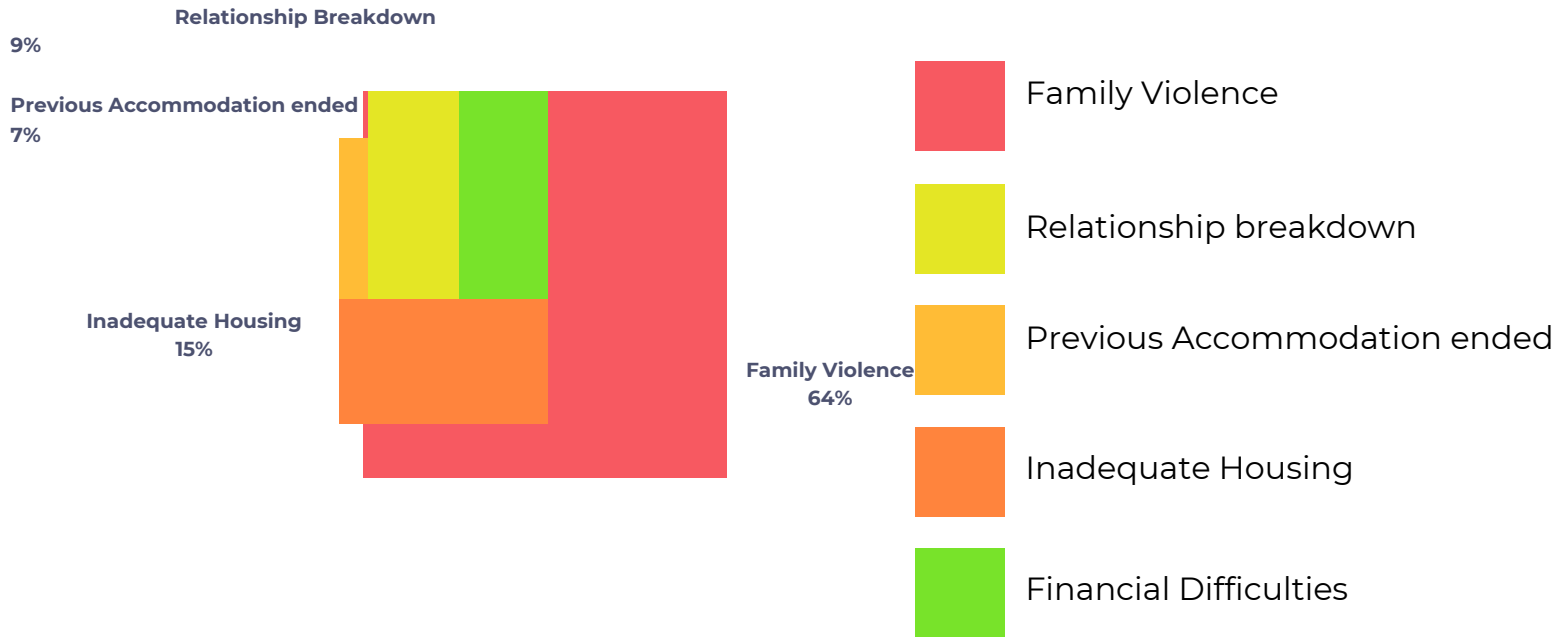
CHILDREN FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) & CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

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.

STATEWIDE CHILDRENS BROKERAGE STATISTICS 2022-2023

MAIN PRESENTING REASONS



The three main reasons for accessing the Homeless Children's Brokerage Fund were:

1. Family Violence 2. Inadequate Housing 3. Relationship breakdown

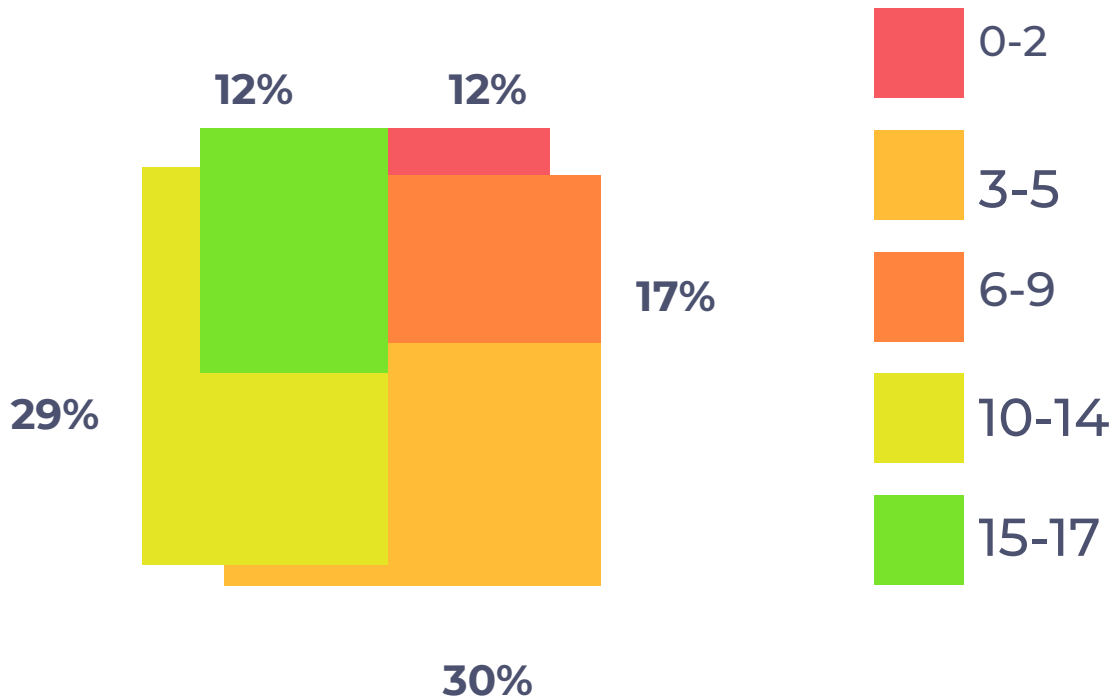
Family violence was listed overwhelmingly as the main presenting reason for all children participating. This is a significant increase from last year's report where the two biggest reasons for accessing support were almost equally housing crisis and family violence respectively.

87 %

Children receiving
brokerage funding
experienced housing
instability

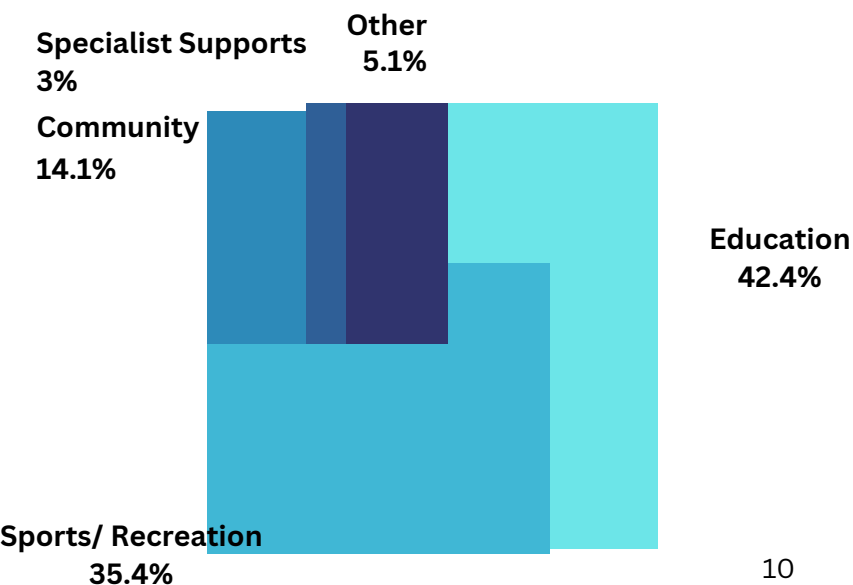
STATEWIDE CHILDRENS BROKERAGE STATISTICS 2022-2023

AGES OF CHILDREN



The majority of children that were supported by the HCBP were school aged. With primary school aged children being the largest cohort. This is consistent with previous years and brokerage reports.

TYPE OF EXPENDITURE



The top three uses of brokerage across the state were:

1. School Equipment
2. Sports and Rec
3. Community Supports

The majority of HCBP spending is used for school items

BROKERAGE CASE STUDIES

NORTH WEST METRO

A young person was supported to access essential medical appointments by applying for the HCBP from the North West Children's Resource Program. Due to limited public transport accessibility, getting to these appointments became a real roadblock for the young person. We used the brokerage to pay for taxi vouchers for the young child and his parent to visit the Royal Children's Hospital so that they could attend these appointments. The young person had experienced homelessness and community violence, and as a result his family were struggling with financial hardship. Without support from the HCBP, the family would have struggled to get to these essential appointments.

INNER AND OUTER GIPPSLAND

"The Homeless childrens brokerage program was used for a sibling group of two to purchase safety watches specifically designed for children to keep connected to family, the watches have GPS and safety alert (SOS) capacity. 'The safety watch that will allow the child to contact their mother or other family members if feeling unsafe when in the care of person using violence. It was also used for therapeutic funding for four sessions of play therapy, mindfulness, guided imagery meditation 'Young person attends school regularly, it is her safe place. Family around her have noticed how the family violence and the changes have impacted on her emotionally and physically. The young person's need is for mental health support to address trauma from the family violence and recent changes in the home.' The young person has started to overcome the needs above with support of psychologist. Learning coping mechanisms for anxiety that are healthy".

INNER AND OUTER EASTERN METRO

Maddie*, a 12yr old young person, was very keen to attend their Yr 6 Graduation in a pair of shoes that felt special and allowed Maddie to feel included with their peer group. The Homeless Children's Brokerage Program provided Maddie with the shoes of their choice. Maddie's practitioner reported Maddie had a wonderful night, felt an important part of the graduation and participated fully in the occasion. The practitioner recognized the importance of Maddie attending this milestone event, feeling fully included and able to enjoy the event marking such an important transition. Young people feel heard seen and as though they have some choice and influence when their views and wishes are heard and responded to. *Not their real name

CONCLUSION

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 work to mitigate children's adverse experience of homelessness and 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.

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.

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.

Your local Children's Resource Coordinator are very excited to continue to support brokerage applications into the 2023-2024 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.

Thanks to all of the great work that you do in supporting children. By committing to this work, you are building a strong foundation for children to access necessary supports and overcome the challenges of family violence and homelessness. We 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.

For further information or questions on this report, more information about available resources or to obtain a secondary consultation for a child you are working with, please contact your local coordinator.