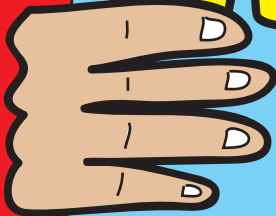
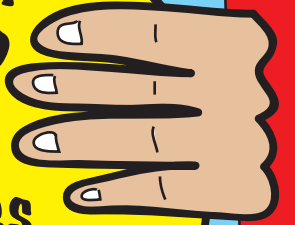


SHINING THE LIGHT:

Children
in SAAP
Family
Agencies



WRITTEN BY

KRISTIE BROWN

FOR THE

COUNCIL FOR

HOMELESS PERSONS

AUSTRALIA

Shining the light: Children in SAAP Family Agencies



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List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: All SAAP agencies need to be capable of working with children at an appropriate level, even where this may be an exceptional case. All SAAP agencies should be supported and resourced to do this.

Recommendation 2: That research is undertaken into the interaction between agencies classified as 'general/cross-target/multiple' with children. In particular the following points should be examined: how many general/multiple/cross-target agencies work with children and families; any barriers, resources or support needed by these agencies to better facilitate their work with children; and an evaluation of the response of these agencies to children.

Recommendation 3: That the needs and effects of homelessness and the risk of homelessness on children be established. This should facilitate the development of practice standards for working with children in SAAP.

Recommendation 4: That agencies working with children are trained, resourced and encouraged to accurately record the number of accompanying children assisted by their agency and the support provided to them.

Recommendation 5: That attention is paid to any particular vulnerabilities, needs, and support models for children based on their age. SAAP workers who come in to contact with children should be supported to undertake training in child development and age-appropriate activities.

Recommendation 6: That the vulnerability of young families to homelessness is investigated, with specific consideration given to the needs and support required for these families.

Recommendation 7: That the situation of accompanying children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in SAAP is examined, particularly in relation to family agencies. Attention should be paid to any differences in support methods for children with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Recommendation 8: That the needs of Indigenous accompanying children be specifically investigated and culturally appropriate ways of supporting these children developed. This is a particular priority given the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in SAAP.

Recommendation 9: That an investigation is undertaken on possible service gaps between different family groups with accompanying children seeking accommodation from SAAP services, particularly couples with accompanying children and men with accompanying children.

Recommendation 10: That a training needs analysis of SAAP family agency workers in relation to accompanying children be undertaken. Agencies should be supported to rectify any identified knowledge and training gaps.

Recommendation 11: That the needs of children accompanying couples and men are explored, with particular attention paid to unmet needs in relation to these groups.

Recommendation 12: That data collection on accompanying children is presented in a consistent manner, and that this includes 'agency profile' information to allow for an analysis of the resources available within agencies in relation to accompanying children.

Recommendation 13: Data on accompanying children should include information on the basis of the primary target group of agencies to allow for the development of information on how the needs of and response provided to children can vary depending on the type of agency that is supporting them.

Recommendation 14: The differences in requests for services across States/Territories should be examined more comprehensively. In particular, the apparent differences in needs requested and provided should be investigated to ensure that appropriate assessment and referral of children is being undertaken.

Recommendation 15: That differences in the provision of services to accompanying children by client group are investigated to ensure that the needs of all accompanying children are being adequately assessed and addressed. An investigation into the apparent disparity in service provision between agencies should also be undertaken to ensure equitability of service provision to accompanying children across the SAAP sector.

Recommendation 16: That the differences in provision and referral of services to accompanying children in relation to their reason for seeking assistance be investigated, and any inequalities and barriers in provision identified.

Recommendation 17: That the assessment and provision of specialist supports to accompanying children be examined, with particular reference to different client groups and agency types.

Recommendation 18: That qualitative feedback from children, their parents or guardians and workers is recognised as an essential element in discussing the needs of children, and that this information be respected and included in reports and research.

Recommendation 19: That in examining the needs of accompanying children both qualitative and quantitative information should be collected and analysed.

Recommendation 20: That good practice in relation to accompanying children in SAAP is understood within a human rights framework, and all services that work with children seek to implement and ensure consistency with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recommendation 21: That all state responses to homelessness specifically cite and consider accompanying children as an element of good practice.

Recommendation 22: That good practice principles in working with children involve recognising children as clients.

Recommendation 23: That good practice is holistic, flexible and dedicated to the needs of children and their families.

Recommendation 24: That good practice frameworks and practice standards be developed to guide work with homeless children.

Recommendation 25: That a comprehensive analysis of service delivery models for children in SAAP be undertaken. This should examine current models within SAAP as well as international and other good practice models. It should also give consideration to the diversity of children, children's needs, and service types.

Recommendation 26: That an analysis of SAAP service models be undertaken in relation to accompanying children, covering a range of SAAP agencies and service types.

Recommendation 27: That any identification of 'good practice' service models involve a critical analysis of the operation, outcomes and experiences of clients, including children.

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The context of children in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

Over the past 10 years awareness of accompanying children in SAAP agencies has grown. However little of this attention has extended to children in SAAP family agencies as a particular group. The intention of this report is to 'shine the light' on these children, reviewing the broad base of literature and data available on children in SAAP with a particular focus on developing an understanding of children in family agencies.

For the purposes of SAAP, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) defines an accompanying child as:

“...a person aged under 18 years who accompanies a client to a SAAP agency during a support period or who requires and/or receives assistance from a SAAP agency as a result of their parent or guardian being a client of the same agency.” (2004a:p.xi)

This definition sets the foundation for data collection of accompanying children, and gives a general understanding of how 'accompanying child' is understood for the purposes of the SAAP program. This definition is not without criticism. Gordon (Resolve Community Consulting 2004) states that the terminology of 'accompanying child' is symptomatic of the tone set towards children in SAAP, where children are framed as a subsidiary of their parent/s or guardian/s, and consequently “the needs of children...often come secondary to those of their parents” (p1). Paradoxically, children accompanying their parent(s) or guardian(s) are a significant part of SAAP in their own right. In 2002-03 53,800 accompanying children accessed SAAP, equating to over fifty percent of the number of SAAP clients recorded for that period (96,900) (AIHW 2004b:p16, p54).

Despite having such a large presence, literature on children in SAAP is often generic in nature, although some information on working with children escaping or affected by domestic violence has been released recently (Oberin et al 2005 and O'Neil 2005). As has already been stated, there is a notable gulf in information available that focuses on children in SAAP family agencies. However these agencies are part of the broader spectrum of SAAP agencies that work with children, and as such information on children in SAAP more generally is relevant, although not specific, to them.

One of the first reports to examine children in SAAP generally was the 1994 *Needs of children in SAAP services* report (Thomson Goodall Associates 1994). This report found that problems intrinsic to the design of SAAP impeded the capacity of the program to respond to children, arguing that:

“Historically SAAP was not specifically designed or structured to meet the needs of children accompanying parents to services. The primary Program objective has been to move people to independent living, or other alternatives, as appropriate. The Program has historically been specifically targeted at adult services users, with the exception of youth services, which in some cases cater for underage people. As a result, the presence of children in SAAP funded services, from a programmatic perspective, appears to have been incidental.” (p21)

Much of the literature on children in SAAP argues that the relationship is a fraught one. For instance, following the initial *Needs of children in SAAP services* report, *Case Management with Children in SAAP services – a family oriented approach* (Strategic Partners 1997) was released, providing a practical, general outline for how SAAP agencies should respond to children. In doing this, however, the authors reiterated the view that SAAP agencies have difficulty responding to children, asserting that a lack of resources both within SAAP and external agencies contributed to “inadequate provision of support to children” (p6). More specifically, they identified an “insufficient focus on children entering SAAP services, and insufficient skill of workers in attempting to meet the range of needs of these children in crisis.” (p8)

The Strategic Partners report is also useful for an examination of accompanying children in family agencies, as it is one of few generic reports that provides some analysis of the response to accompanying children by the primary target group of agencies. Under SAAP the provision of services specifically to families is separated into two main agency types: services for women and children escaping domestic violence and family agencies. The report identified “Inequitable service distribution and sub-optimal allocation of resourcing” in SAAP services dealing with accompanying children, and recommended “increased accessibility and service options” for a number of groups, including “children in non-domestic violence homeless families” and “children in chronically homeless families” (p6). This report indicated that family agencies as a particular type of agency appeared to be struggling to respond to the needs of accompanying children.

The exacerbated impediments faced by family agencies in responding to children were also acknowledged in the report *Appropriate responses for homeless people whose needs require a high level and complexity of service provision* (Bissett et al 1999). The report found that:

“[A] lack of sufficient support for effective work with children in families experiencing chronic homelessness was noted as a gap. Frequently the families’ needs are perceived as so complex and pressing, that children’s needs are not always adequately addressed. This is particularly the case in crisis intervention and extreme transience, where the family moves on before effective work can occur. The fact that accompanying children are not adequately catered for in SAAP program design and resourcing is exacerbated in the case of families with high needs. The children often have significant unmet needs and developmental delays, requiring a response. Finally, many family services have not traditionally been funded for child support workers, as are many domestic violence services.” (p102)

All of these reports indicate that family agencies have been recognised as facing particular difficulties in relation to service provision to children since attention was first paid to children in SAAP agencies. This makes the lack of research, literature and information specifically examining children in SAAP family agencies particularly concerning and reinforces the need for this situation to be rectified.

This report provides the starting point of this process, examining literature on children in the SAAP program with a particular focus on children in family agencies where possible. The report is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter provides a general profile of accompanying children in SAAP, providing a synthesis of quantitative data from the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) and literature. The second chapter then focuses more specifically on the needs of accompanying children in SAAP agencies, again utilising

both quantitative data and literature. The third chapter outlines information available on 'good practice', paying particular attention to good practice concepts in relation to children in SAAP. The fourth chapter builds on the discussion of good practice, outlining and providing some analysis of models of service provision to accompanying children.

Whilst the lack of information on family agencies often means the discussion frequently raises more questions than it provides answers, the report allows for an initial outline of some of the key issues in relation to children in family agencies, and through the use of recommendations indicates some of the ways that this profile can be further developed and our understanding of children in SAAP family agencies enhanced.

Chapter 1: Building a profile of Accompanying Children in SAAP

The following section draws on a range of quantitative and qualitative reports to build a general profile of accompanying children in SAAP. Quantitative data cited is from the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA), largely the two 'thematic reports' on accompanying children (AIHW 2004a, AIHW 1999). In order to provide a holistic analysis, discussion of quantitative data is interspersed with pertinent qualitative reports and other literature. Given the lack of data specifically on children in family agencies, this chapter provides a general profile of accompanying children in SAAP. Recommendations are used to illustrate points of interest or where further investigation or analysis could be undertaken to gain a better understanding of children in SAAP agencies specifically¹.

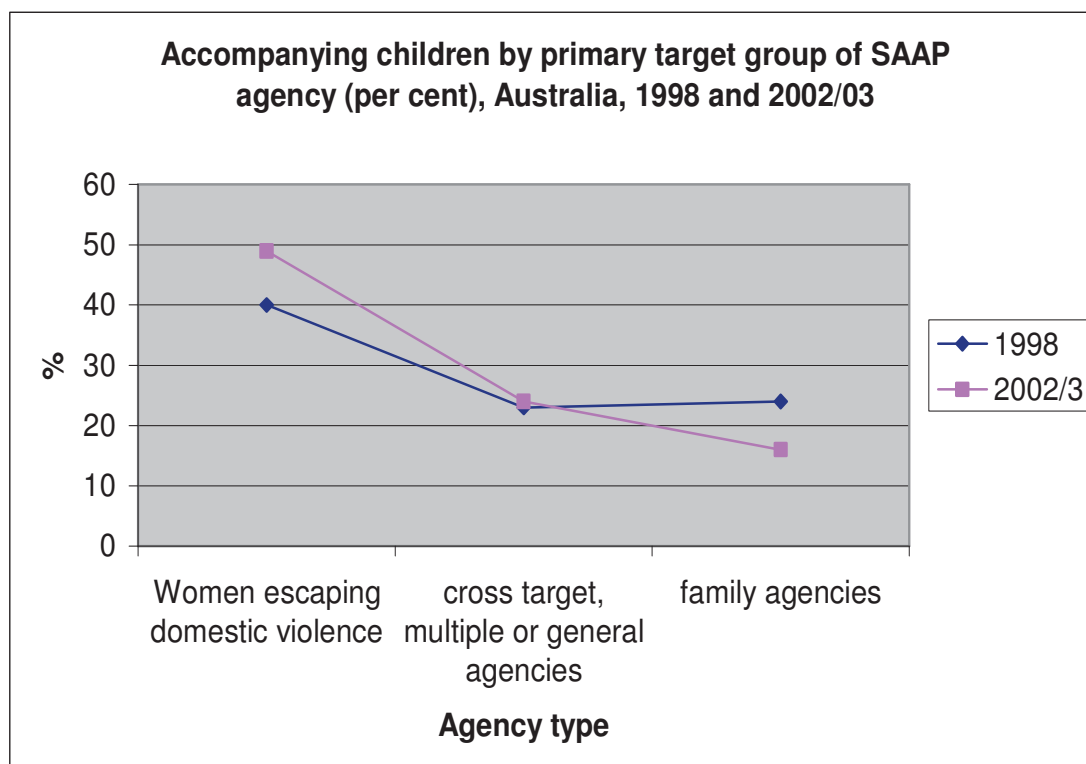
Distribution of accompanying children in SAAP

In 2003-04 one in every three people supported by a SAAP agency was a child accompanying a parent of a guardian (AIHW 2004b). Of the 53,700 accompanying children in SAAP services in 2002-03, agencies that target women escaping domestic violence provided approximately one of every two support periods for an accompanying child (49%). The second highest number of support periods was provided by cross-target, multiple and general agencies (24%), followed by family agencies (16%) (AIHW 2004a:p.xi). The large percentage of accompanying children in services for women and children escaping domestic violence is largely unsurprising given that domestic violence was cited as the main reason for seeking assistance in one in five support periods provided by SAAP agencies nationally during this period (AIHW 2004b:p27). There are also twice as many agencies with a primary target group of women escaping domestic violence than family agencies (286 compared to 119 family services) (AIHW 2004b:p6).

In 2002-03 there was a change in the distribution of accompanying children in SAAP agencies compared to information originally collected in 1998. In data published in 1999, agencies for women and children escaping domestic violence accounted for the largest percentage of accompanying children, although it was a lower percentage (40%). This was followed by family agencies (24%) and then cross-target, general and multiple agencies (23%) (AIHW 1999:p.xiii). This indicates that over the last five years cross-target, multiple and general agencies have overtaken family agencies as the agency type with the second largest number of support periods provided to accompanying children. However, it is interesting to note that the actual number of support periods provided by multiple/general/cross-target agencies did not increase across this time period, rather it appears that the number of support periods provided by family agencies to children decreased.

¹ In 2005 the Social Policy Research Centre completed a comprehensive analysis *Children in the supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP)*. This report provides an in-depth quantitative analysis of accompanying and unaccompanied children in SAAP and should be referred to for a more detailed analysis.

Figure 1: Accompanying children by primary target group of SAAP agency (per cent), Australia, 1998 and 2002/03



Source: AIHW, 2004a:p.xi; AIHW, 1999:p.xiii

The significant presence of children in agencies are not viewed as the ‘main agency target groups’ for children was also articulated by the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) in their review of children in SAAP. Examining all children in SAAP (both accompanied and unaccompanied), the report argued that:

“...a significant share of child support periods happened outside these two main agency target groups [youth services and services for women escaping domestic violence]... This means that other agencies need to have some capability for dealing with children even when children are not the main focus of their work. These agencies need to be able to refer children appropriately or address their needs adequately even if they are exceptional cases. Thus, even when agencies define themselves as targeting particular groups of people, they need to be prepared to handle cases that do not fit that mould.” (Norris et al 2005. p58)

The proportion of accompanying children in generalist/multiple/cross-target services is significant, and as the SPRC suggests, indicates the importance of examining the situation of accompanying children in SAAP beyond obvious agency types. It is also interesting to note that family agencies were not seen as a ‘main agency target group’ for children in SAAP, despite the fact that for most family agencies children are an inextricable part of the eligibility criteria.

Recommendation 1: All SAAP agencies need to be capable of working with children at an appropriate level, even where this may be an exceptional case. All SAAP agencies should be supported and resourced to do this.

The total lack of information available on cross-target/multiple/general agencies mean these agencies, and their interactions with children, are almost an enigma. On a purely hypothetical basis, it may be that the potential number of different client groups that can access one of these agencies mean that the obscurity of children is exacerbated. Alternatively, however, it may mean that these agencies provide an excellent response to children, as it is their 'core business' to support a variety of client groups. With one in four children in a general/cross-target/multiple agency, this conjecture needs to be replaced with fact.

Recommendation 2: That research is undertaken into the interaction between agencies classified as 'general/cross-target/multiple' with children. In particular the following points should be examined: how many general/multiple/cross-target agencies work with children and families; any barriers, resources or support needed by these agencies to better facilitate their work with children; and an evaluation of the response of these agencies to children.

Unsurprisingly given the large number of accompanying children in agencies for women escaping domestic violence, a large majority of children in SAAP are accompanying their mother or other female guardian (85%). Of the remainder, 9% are accompanying a couple and 4% are accompanying their father or other male guardian (AIHW 2004a:p1). However, the number of children accompanying a female guardian is not entirely attributable to agencies for women escaping domestic violence. There are a large number of women with children in family agencies, almost fifty per cent of support periods provided by family agencies are for women with children. Of the remaining support periods provided by family agencies 24.1% are provided to couples with children and 7.7% are provided to men with children (AIHW 2005b:p33).

The profile of accompanying children in SAAP developed so far shows strong links between accompanying children and domestic violence. The needs of children affected by domestic violence have been examined in a number of documents, most notably Gevers' (1999) *Practice Standards for working with children and young people who have lived with domestic violence* and O'Neil's (2004) *Shaping the future: strengths based frameworks for professionals who work with children living with domestic violence*. In examining quantitative data on children in SAAP agencies the AIHW (2004a) acknowledge that:

"Children who witness or experience domestic violence may suffer severe psychological trauma and have very specific needs. They display high levels of distress, low self-esteem and, in many cases, behavioural problems such as depression." (p17)

This is an indication of the recognition given to children who are in SAAP and have witnessed or been effected by domestic violence. However, what this statement doesn't cover, and what is sometimes missing from discussions of children in SAAP, is a recognition of the severe psychological trauma that can affect children who are homeless or have lived 'at risk' of homelessness, either in addition to or without domestic or family violence. For these children and the agencies that support them the admirable range of practice standards and other tools that exist to guide work with children affected by domestic violence are glaringly unavailable.

Recommendation 3: That the needs and effects of homelessness and the risk of homelessness on children be established. This should facilitate the development of practice standards for working with children in SAAP.

Accompanying children by State/Territory

In 2002-03 there was great variety in the numbers of support periods provided to accompanying children accessing SAAP agencies in each State and Territory. Victorian agencies provided the largest proportion of support periods to accompanying children (34%); the lowest proportion of child support periods was in the ACT (1%).

Table 1: Proportion of support periods provided to accompanying children by State/Territory

State/Territory	Proportion of support periods provided to accompanying children (%)
Victoria	34%
Queensland	18%
New South Wales	17%
South Australia	13%
Western Australia	10%
Northern Territory	3%
Australian Capital Territory	1%

Source: AIHW 2004b:p53

This information shows some differential access by accompanying children to SAAP agencies across States and Territories, but the AIHW warn that the figures may be problematic as “differences in agency profiles and the level of commitment to completing child data may explain why several jurisdictions reported higher numbers of accompanying child support periods than larger states or territories (AIHW 2004b:53). This highlights the importance of agencies being encouraged and supported to collect comprehensive and accurate data on accompanying children in their agencies.

Recommendation 4: That agencies working with children are trained, resourced and encouraged to accurately record the number of accompanying children assisted by their agency and the support provided to them.

Age

Children accompanying parents into SAAP services are mostly under 12 years of age (88%), which has remained largely unchanged since 1998 (87%) (AIHW 2004a and 1999). There is a relatively even percentage of children four years and under as children aged 5 to 12 (44% to 43%) (AIHW 2004:p7). The large proportion of children under 4 years of age is particularly important given the additional vulnerability of these children and the importance of these years developmentally (Waters et al 2002:p5). Age-specific issues also arise for children aged 5-12, particularly in relation to involvement in school. The

importance of age in relation to service responses to accompanying children has been documented in a report by Resolve Community Consulting, *An investigation into the Effect of Generalist Transitional (Medium-Term) Housing and Support on Primary School-Aged Children – Children in Transition Project* (2004). This report is one of a small number that look specifically at the issue of children in generalist SAAP services. Based on qualitative interviews with children, parents and staff of generalist family agencies, the report found that “Children’s schooling, behaviour, and development are affected by homelessness, with learning difficulties and behavioural problems being prevalent amongst families interviewed.” (p.vi) The proportion of children in these vulnerable age groups, and the age-related variances in their needs, highlight the importance of SAAP workers having an understanding of age-related development and associated work practices. The extent to which this occurs in generalist SAAP family agencies is not known, however based on the information discussed above it appears unlikely to be something there is a widespread understanding of.

Recommendation 5: That attention is paid to any particular vulnerabilities, needs, and support models for children based on their age. SAAP workers who come in to contact with children should be supported to undertake training in child development and age-appropriate activities.

Further concerns around the vulnerability of families and children emerge when the age of parent/s or guardian/s with accompanying children is examined. Whilst the largest age range for the parent/s or guardian/s of accompanying children was 25-44 (68%), over one in five parents or guardians fell within the 18-24 age bracket (22%). The combination of young parent/s or guardians and young children may indicate that young families are particularly vulnerable to family homelessness, however further research is warranted to both substantiate and examine this (AIHW 2004a:p7).

Recommendation 6: That the vulnerability of young families to homelessness is investigated, with specific consideration given to the needs and support required for these families.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Information available in the *Children accompanying homeless clients 2002-03* (AIHW 2004a) report allows for an expansion of the profile to the cultural and linguistic diversity of parents and accompanying children in SAAP. A large majority of accompanying children were born in Australia (95%). The situation is somewhat different for the parent/s or guardian/s of accompanying children, where twelve per cent were born in predominantly non-English speaking countries, and four per cent were born overseas in predominantly English speaking countries (AIHW 2004a:p7). Compared to the Australia population, families where parent/s or guardian/s were born in a predominantly non-English speaking country accessing SAAP are underrepresented (16% in general Australian population) (AIHW 2004a:p7). This was also identified by the Social Policy Research Centre (Norris et al. 2005) in their analysis of data pertaining to all children in SAAP; they argued that “it is not clear whether this is because they are less likely to be homeless or because they are less likely to access SAAP services if they do experience housing problems.” (p.xv) There is a general lack of information on culturally and linguistically diverse accompanying children in SAAP. One exception to this is a report produced for the Women’s Refuge Group WA (Jurak 2003). This report specifically investigated the needs of accompanying

children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in SAAP by gathering qualitative data from children through art therapy. The report found that the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children that participated were “not dissimilar to other children within the same age group: to feel heard; listened to; cared for; have fun; meet friends; express feelings; have companionship; and feel safe.” (p5) The findings are potentially restricted in their application to family agencies, as the focus of the report is the way that children react to and require support in response to domestic violence. The general lack of information available on children from culturally and linguistically diverse groups combined with an appearance of their under-representation in SAAP warrants further investigation, particularly in relation to family agencies.

Recommendation 7: That the situation of accompanying children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in SAAP is examined, particularly in relation to family agencies. Attention should be paid to any differences in support methods for children with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In contrast to the apparent under-representation of accompanying children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in SAAP, there is a significant over-representation of Indigenous accompanying children. This over-representation appears to be two-fold. In 2002-03 Indigenous people accounted for 22% of clients with accompanying children in SAAP, yet Indigenous people made up 2% of the Australian population overall. In the same period, Indigenous people comprised 18% of all SAAP clients. This indicates that while Indigenous people are generally over-represented in SAAP, family groups appear to be particularly over-represented (AIHW 2004a:p7).

Recommendation 8: That the needs of Indigenous accompanying children be specifically investigated and culturally appropriate ways of supporting these children developed. This is a particular priority given the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in SAAP.

Unmet requests and service gaps

During the unmet demand collection periods of 2001 and 2002², a daily average of 200 children with valid requests for accommodation were turned away from SAAP (AIHW 2004a:p.xi). This was based on at least 100 valid unmet requests from groups with accompanying children each day (AIHW 2004a:p3).

The AIHW data indicates that turn-away rates for valid requests for accommodation were exacerbated for particular *types* of groups with accompanying children. Children accompanying a female client were more likely to be accommodated than other groups (57% of their support periods). This compared to 43% of support periods for a couple with accompanying child/ren and 36% of support periods for male clients with accompanying child/ren (AIHW 2004a:p1). The report summarised that:

“The turn-away rates for different requesting groups suggest that SAAP had more difficulty in meeting the immediate requests for accommodation from people with children. Although they represented only a small proportion of the total number of

² 22-28 August 2001 and 8-14 May 2002

people requesting immediate accommodation, couples with children had considerable difficulty in obtaining accommodation: at the end of the day 83% of couples with children making a request for immediate accommodation were turned away” (p3)

There is a pronounced lack of information available on the circumstances of couples with accompanying children and men with accompanying children seeking or receiving support from SAAP, impeding further analysis of the situation of these groups. One exception to this is a report produced by Canberra Fathers and Children Services (CANFaCS), *Dad, where are we going to live now?* (2004). The report documented the service model of CANFaCS, thought to be the only service specifically for men and their accompanying children. Concentrating on homeless men with children, the report outlined that there had been a steady increase in the number of homeless men with children, which had been reflected in the increased provision of services to this group through SAAP. The report identified relationship breakdown as the main pathway into homelessness for sole father families, and suggested that “a more focused approach to understanding these impacts, as they relate to housing stability, is essential (p5.) In relation to couples with children, the South Australian *Family Homelessness Discussion Paper* (Stephenson & Hume 2001) analysed 1996 census data and found that couples with children constituted half of all homeless families with single-parent families constituting the other half. They found that there were significant differences between these two groups, asserting that:

“Homeless couples with children were mostly found in improvised dwellings (sleeping out, in squats, sleeping in cars, humpies and improvised shelters) while single parents with children were predominantly found in SAAP accommodation.” (p6)

The apparent low levels of homeless couples with children accessing SAAP as an accommodation option may go some way to explaining the lack of information available on couples with children in SAAP.

Recommendation 9: That an investigation is undertaken on possible service gaps between different family groups with accompanying children seeking accommodation from SAAP services, particularly couples with accompanying children and men with accompanying children.

In 2002-03, three per cent of requests for services for accompanying children were neither provided nor referred at the end of their support period. This is a lower figure than for SAAP clients as a whole, where 7% of requests for services were neither provided nor referred at the end of the support period, indicating that there is a strong response from agencies for services requested for children (AIHW 2004b:p62, p43).

Whilst the types of services requested for accompanying children varied across age groups (this is discussed in the next chapter) the level of unmet needs remained consistent. The highest levels of unmet need for all age groups were help with behavioural problems, sexual or physical abuse counselling, health or medical services and assistance with access arrangements (AIHW 2004a:p13). This is concerning given that all of these needs were amongst the highest services requested for accompanying children by age group.

As with access to accommodation, a 2005 AIHW report *Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence* found that services met the needs of children accompanying women presenting due to domestic violence in more support periods than children accompanying other parental groups (AIHW 2005a:p14). This report found that “Children who accompanied female clients in the domestic violence group had higher proportions of met requests for every service type, except for school liaison and access arrangements, than children accompanying other clients.” (2005a:p14) Particular points of difference between children presenting due to domestic violence and other groups by provision of services have been documented in multiple AIHW data reports. The 2005 report found disparities in provision between the DV group and other accompanying children in the provision of support for (AIHW 2005a:p26):

- child care services (93% compared to 75%)
- help with behavioural problems (85% compared to 66%)
- health and medical services (73% compared to 55%)

In addition to this, the AIHW *Children accompanying homeless clients 2002-03* (2004a:p21) report found additional disparities in provision of:

- skills education (90% compared to 71%)
- culturally sensitive services (95% compared to 78%),
- SAAP or CAP accommodation (97% to 91%).

In summary, the accompanying children report (AIHW 2004a) found that:

“As domestic violence agencies provide the majority of accompanying child support periods this indicates that this agency type is better able to provide for the needs for children than other agency types.” (19)

However, the 2003-04 SAAP NDCA Annual Report (AIHW 2005b) provides a somewhat contrary picture, with the report finding that the “number of unmet needs for children in each client group is roughly consistent with the number of accompanying child support periods for each client group” (p53). Somewhat confusingly, it appears that domestic violence agencies are more adept at the provision of services to children, but there is not a great distinction in the level of unmet requests between different agency types. This may be because agencies that do not have a primary target group of women and children escaping domestic violence are referring services for children to other agencies, whereas services for women and children escaping domestic violence are providing the support through the service (this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.) This could be based on a number of factors, but may possibly relate to differences in the knowledge or training staff have for working with children or may be a result of different resource capacities.

Recommendation 10: That a training needs analysis of SAAP family agency workers in relation to accompanying children be undertaken. Agencies should be supported to rectify any identified knowledge and training gaps.

Whilst not finding a difference in the percentage of unmet needs between agencies with different primary target groups, the 2003-04 Annual Report (AIHW 2005b) did identify some variance in the *types* of unmet needs for accompanying children for different agency

types. For instance, for females with accompanying children and couples with accompanying children, the greatest unmet need was counselling (27% and 24% of unmet needs for each group). For a male with accompanying children, the largest unmet need was for housing or accommodation services (25%) (p61).

Table 2: SAAP services requested for accompanying children in closed support periods that were neither provided nor referred: broad type of services by client group, Australia, 2003

Broad Type of service	Couple with children	Male with children	Female with children	Other with children	Total	
					%	Number
Accommodation	18.6	25	9.7	33	11	300
School liaison/child care	15.3	13.6	18	34	17.7	400
Counselling	24	20.1	27.2	-	26.6	700
General support advocacy	18.7	18.7	13.8	-	14.3	400
Specialist services	11.1	4.9	9.1	33	9.1	200
Basic support and services n.e.s	12.3	17.6	22.2	-	21.2	500
Total	100	100	100	100	100	2500

Source: AIHW 2005b:p61

This reinforces the recommendation cited above that all other agencies that come in to contact with children should be examined in relation to service provision to accompanying children. It also highlights an emerging disparity between service provision to children accompanying a female, and children accompanying other groups.

Recommendation 11: That the needs of children accompanying couples and men are explored, with particular attention paid to unmet needs in relation to these groups.

Data collection issues

Data collection that allows for a focus on children within SAAP has only developed recently, with the first specific report being released in 1999, presenting data collected in 1998 (AIHW 1999). This report provided some important preliminary information on accompanying children in SAAP, and was followed by another specific report on accompanying children in 2004, covering the 2002-03 periods (AIHW 2004a). Unfortunately, however, it is difficult to form a comparative analysis of much of the data in these reports, as some information presented in the initial report was not included in the second report. In particular, Part B of *Accompanying children 1998* provided an 'Agency Profile', which included information on:

- Resources and facilities at SAAP agencies
- Physical accessibility of agencies
- Services offered at SAAP agencies
- Human resources

This information is particularly interesting given some of the disparities articulated in relation to service delivery for accompanying children in different agency types, for instance the report articulated that:

“Across the primary target groups, agencies targeting families and cross target, multiple target and general client groups appear to have the greatest need for

resources and facilities to cater to accompanying children.” (AIHW 1999:p71)

An update of this information would facilitate an analysis of how resources and services have changed over the last decade given the increasing literary recognition of the needs of accompanying children in services over this period.

The lack of information presented in relation to the primary target group of agencies is a further impediment when analyzing data on accompanying children in SAAP. Many of the reports on Children in SAAP appear to operate on the assumption that there is some similarity in the needs and responses provided to accompanying children, irrespective of what type of service they are in and what their reasons for seeking assistance were. This combined with a general lack of literature on children accompanying homeless clients where the main reason for seeking assistance from SAAP is not domestic or family violence exacerbates the difficulties in conducting an analysis of the needs of accompanying children in family agencies.

Recommendation 12: That data collection on accompanying children is presented in a consistent manner, and that this includes 'agency profile' information to allow for an analysis of the resources available within agencies in relation to accompanying children.

A Profile of accompanying children

In building this broad profile of accompanying children in SAAP some significant issues have emerged that require further investigation. Notable amongst these is the young age of accompanying children and their parent/s or guardian/s, the overrepresentation of Indigenous families, and the seeming under-representation of culturally and linguistically diverse groups. It is also evident from this material that it is difficult to analyse the specific circumstances of accompanying children in family agencies with literature currently available. What can be seen is that the large numbers of children in cross-target, general and multiple agencies is perhaps higher than expected, and there are notable differences in unmet needs of client groups, particularly men with children. Much more investigation into accompanying children in SAAP agencies with different primary target groups needs to occur before a more accurate and detailed profile can be developed of SAAP responses to accompanying children, particularly the response provided to children in family agencies.

Chapter 2: The needs of Accompanying Children

Having established a general profile this section looks more specifically at the needs of children accompanying a parent or guardian into a SAAP agency. The focus on family agencies continues to be impeded by a lack of available information. Consequently the report utilises information available on the needs of accompanying children in SAAP generally, and supplements this by taking any appropriate information from literature available on children accompanying their mothers or female guardians escaping domestic violence.

Within literature on children in SAAP there are a number of different ways that the needs of children are documented and understood. Perhaps the most obvious approach is to examine the supports requested and provided to accompanying children in SAAP agencies using quantitative AIHW data. This information is discussed in the first part of this chapter. Another approach is to seek the voices of children in SAAP to examine what they articulate they need, and beyond this the views of workers and parents. This information is discussed in the second section of this chapter.

Services provision and requests to accompanying children in SAAP

Data collected from SAAP services and presented by the AIHW enables some analysis of the needs of accompanying children in SAAP generally. This can be measured in two ways: services provided and services requested. Services requested illustrates distinct services that were requested for accompanying children, that is, what was *asked* for. In contrast to this, services provided are broken down in to the response provided by agencies to requests: provision, referral or requests neither provided nor referred. This section analyses both types of data, as they are presented in different ways in SAAP NDCA reports, therefore allowing different sorts of analysis. Requests for services allows for an analysis based on the State/Territory location of the agency. Services provided allows for an analysis based on age, target group – i.e. couple with children, male with children and female with children – and a comparison of provision for children where domestic violence is cited as a factor compared to where it is not.

Recommendation 13: Data on accompanying children should include information on the basis of the primary target group of agencies to allow for the development of information on how the needs of and response provided to children can vary depending on the type of agency that is supporting them.

Requests for services to accompanying children

The State/Territory location of accompanying children appears to be an important differential factor in support requests for accompanying children, with the SAAP NDCA Annual Report for Australia finding that "...the pattern of expressed requests for accompanying children varied considerably across the states and territories." (AIHW 2005b:p47).

This report outlined that the main points of differentiation in requests for services to accompanying children by state/territory were:

- Tasmania had a lower proportion of requests for specialist services for accompanying children (5% compared to 16%- 43% in other states and territories)
- Requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation varied greatly, from a low of 52% in Victoria to a High of 91% in the Northern Territory.
- Northern Territory had a higher level of requests for basic support services
- The ACT had a higher proportion of requests for counselling services, general support or advocacy and specialist services
- NSW had high percentages of requests for assistance with school liaison and child care.

Across all states and territories the most frequent service requested was for SAAP/CAP accommodation, with an overall request of 72.2% across closed accompanying child support periods. This ranged from 52.2% in Victoria to 91.1% in the NT (AIHW 2005b:p55). Following this was requests for basic support and other services, with an overall percentage of 69.6% and a range of 56.3% in SA to 88.5% in the NT (AIHW 2005b:p55).

Interestingly, the least requested broad type of service for accompanying children was for specialist services, with an overall request for closed accompanying child support periods of 20.6%, and a range from 4.6% in Tasmania and 42.5% in the ACT. One of these generally low-requested services was for culturally sensitive services, which had the highest request rate in the NT (22.7%) and the lowest in Tasmania (2.1%) (AIHW 2005b:p55).

The lowest broad group of requests for services was for counselling, which ranged from 54.2% in the ACT to 13% in WA. The most requested counselling service was for general counselling/support, which ranged from a high of 45.2% in the ACT to 8.4% in WA. There were also some notable differences in requests for sexual/physical abuse/counselling/support, with a high of 6.6% in Tasmania and a low of 1.5% in the NT (AIHW 2005b:p55).

Overall, child care was more likely to be requested than school liaison (24.1% compared to 15.3%), although school liaison had a higher request rate than child care in Victoria and the NT (AIHW 2005b:p55).

Table 3: SAAP closed accompanying child support periods: services requested for accompanying children, by state and territory, Australia, 2003-04

Type of services	NSW	VIC	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	%	Total
										Number
Accommodation	69.3	52.2	85.4	88.9	67.3	60.6	70.8	91.1	72.2	26,800
SAAP/CAP Accommodation	69.3	52.2	85.4	88.9	67.3	60.6	70.8	91.1	72.2	26,800
School liaison/child care	46.1	27.5	32.7	28.8	31.4	28.5	37	20.3	33	12,300
School liaison	18.3	19.2	14.7	8.5	11.7	8.4	18.2	18.1	15.3	5,700
Child care	36.5	12.6	26	24.4	24	23.7	24.7	15.2	24.1	8,900
Counselling	29.9	29.9	37	13	27.6	26.3	54.2	11.9	27.5	10,200
Help with behavioural problems	11.8	12.3	18.6	4.8	11.2	8.1	29.2	2.2	11.6	4,300
Sexual/physical abuse counselling/support	4.7	5.3	4	2.4	3.9	6.6	6.1	1.5	4.2	1,600
Skills education	6.2	2.2	1.3	1.9	3.1	1.7	19.2	1.9	3.2	1,200
General counselling/support	22.3	21	22.3	8.4	20.1	19.8	45.2	8	19	7,100
General support/advocacy	40.6	48.4	22.3	12.4	39.6	36.1	57.5	6.9	32.7	12,100
Access arrangements	5.9	5.5	3	1.1	4.5	1	14.1	0.6	4.1	1,500
Advice/information	23.2	31.6	14.3	7.8	30.9	15.3	41.7	3.5	20.6	7,700
Brokerage services	7.6	5.9	0.6	0.5	2.9	20.6	13.3	1.1	4.5	1,700
Advocacy	24.2	30.8	10.9	5.4	17.4	11.2	38.4	2.4	18.4	6,800
Specialist services	24.6	15.5	16.4	22.4	17.6	4.6	42.5	42.4	20.6	7,700
Culturally sensitive services	13.9	5.3	7.9	15.9	9.4	2.1	16.8	22.7	10.9	4,000
Health/medical services	15.3	12	10.4	8.4	9.2	2.7	33.1	21.4	12.2	4,500
Basic support and other services n.e.s	74	56.9	71	80.6	56.3	59.3	83.2	88.5	69.6	25,900
Meals	54.9	28.2	53.9	64.3	34.1	36	49.5	80.6	49	18,200
Showers/hygiene	52.7	17.2	45.5	65.9	28.2	22.6	47.6	69.3	43	16,000
Recreation	42.3	21	41.9	32	19.8	9.7	45.6	58.6	33.5	12,400
Transport	51.1	32.7	55.3	49.6	30.2	29.8	52.8	63.5	45.6	16,900
Other	10.1	18.5	16.6	12.1	18.5	14.3	29.3	32.4	15.9	5,900
No needs recorded	5	2.6	5.1	2.3	4.5	12.6	0.2	0.3	3.8	1,400
Total (%)	22.8	24.3	18	17.3	7.5	3.1	1.8	5.2	100	..
Total (number)	8,500	9,000	6,700	6,400	2,800	1,200	700	1,900	..	37,200

Source: AIHW 2005b:p55

Recommendation 14: The differences in requests for services across States/Territories should be examined more comprehensively. In particular, the apparent differences in needs requested and provided should be investigated to ensure that appropriate assessment and referral of children is being undertaken.

Provision of services to accompanying children

It is interesting to look at service provision in addition to service requests, as service provision is presented in data according to the age of the accompanying child, the target group of the agency that is supporting them and allows of a comparison between groups seeking assistance because of domestic violence compared to family groups where domestic violence was not a factor.

Services requested in support periods for children varied with the age of the child. This reinforces the recommendation above that SAAP workers should have an understanding of needs according to age and development when working with children. Main largest services requested for children 0-4 were (AIHW 2004a:p14):

- SAAP or CAP accommodation
- Assistance with access arrangements
- Health or medical services
- child care

In comparison, the main services requested for children aged 5-12 to some extent focused on school related supports (AIHW 2004a:p15):

- skills education
- school liaison
- help with behavioural problems
- sexual or physical abuse counselling.

Client groups for accompanying children are classified as couple with children, male with children, and female with children. Whilst these client groups do not directly correlate with any particular agency type they do provide a more precise indication of how the needs of accompanying children can vary. However, as family agencies are the agency type with the largest percentages of support periods provided to couples with children and male with children, these groups are likely to be accessing family agencies (AIHW 2005b:p33).

Across all client groups, the most frequent broad type of service provided to accompanying children was SAAP/CAP Accommodation followed by basic support and other services and then general support/advocacy (this is consistent with requests for services, discussed above). This would suggest that for accompanying children across all client groups there is a strong focus on provision of accommodation and basic support. The provision of basic support and other services was notably higher for children accompanying a female than children accompanying a couple and children accompanying a male. Examples of this are meals: 51.1% compared to 16.4% and 25.6% respectively, and showers/hygiene: 45.4% compared to 8.4% and 16.7% respectively. This may reflect the differential rates of accommodation provided to these groups, as was also discussed above (AIHW 2005b:p46).

In contrast to the consistency in the high percentages of provision of accommodation and basic and general services across the client groups, there were notable differences in the provision of 'specialist services' for accompanying children depending on the type of agency they were accessing. Children accompanying a female client were provided with specialist services in 18.6% of support periods, compared to 11.1% of support periods for children accompanying a couple and 8.7% for children accompanying a male client. Similarly, there was a disparity in the provision of child care, with children accompanying a female client receiving child care in 24.2% of support periods and couples with children and men with children receiving it in 8.7% and 6.7% of support periods respectively (AIHW 2005b:p46).

Table 4: SAAP accompanying child support periods: services provided to accompanying children, by client group, Australia, 2003-04 (per cent)

	Couple with children	Male with children	Female with children	Other with children	Total	
					%	Number
Accommodation	63.5	61.7	72.5	70.4	71.5	30,200
SAAP/CAP accommodation	63.5	61.7	72.5	70.4	71.5	30,200
School liaison/child care	18.6	22.1	32.9	45.7	31.6	13,400
School liaison/child care	12	17.1	14.5	18.8	14.5	6,100
Child Care	8.7	6.7	24.2	34.4	22.6	9,500
Counselling	14.2	19.5	26	35.8	25	10,600
Help with behavioural problems	6.1	7	10.2	17.3	9.9	4,200
Sexual/physical abuse counselling support	1.5	1.9	3	2	2.8	1,200
Skills education	2.9	2.6	2.9	18.1	3	1,300
General counselling/support	10.7	15.8	18.7	19.7	18	7,600
General support/advocacy	31.1	40.8	33.4	46.1	33.5	14,200
Access arrangements	1.6	5.8	3.2	10.8	3.2	1,400
Advice/information	16.8	25.8	21.8	35.8	21.6	9,100
Brokerage services	6.1	8	3.9	6.4	4.2	1,800
Advocacy	17.9	22.6	19	31.3	19.1	8,100
Specialist services	11.1	8.7	18.6	31.9	17.9	7,600
Culturally sensitive services	5.2	3.3	11.5	17.4	10.8	4,600
Health medical services	6.7	5.5	9.2	18.1	9	3,800
Basic support and other services n.e.s	43.3	51.4	71.8	79	69.1	29,200
Meals	16.4	25.6	51.1	26.8	47.6	20,100
Showers/hygiene	8.4	16.7	45.4	49.9	41.9	17,700
Recreation	12	17.2	35.8	44.8	33.5	14,200
Transport	21	26	48.3	57.4	45.6	19,300
Other	16.8	17.7	14.5	29.5	14.9	6,300
No services provided directly provide by agency	4.4	4	3.4	1.6	3.4	1,500
Total accompanying child support periods %	7.6	2.7	89	0.7	100	
Total accompanying child support periods (number)	3,200	1,100	37,600	300		42,200

Source: AIHW 2005b:p46

Recommendation 15: That differences in the provision of services to accompanying children by client group are investigated to ensure that the needs of all accompanying children are being adequately assessed and addressed. An investigation into the apparent disparity in service provision between agencies should also be undertaken to ensure equitability of service provision to accompanying children across the SAAP sector.

In addition to the annual report, the *Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence 2003-04* report also published information on services requested for accompanying children, including a table that listed services requested for all children, comparing children accompanying female clients escaping domestic and family violence with those that were not in this group (AIHW 2005a). The report found major points of differentiation between the groups. These were:

- Accompanying children in the DV group were provided with child care services in more support periods than other groups (93% compared to 75%)
- Accompanying children in the DV group were more likely to receive counselling than the other group, e.g. for behavioural problems (85% compared to 60%)
- Accompanying children in the DV group were more likely to be provided with requested health and medical services (73% compared to 55%).

This table also shows that for all categories except school liaison and access arrangements, referral for services was higher for the 'other' group than for the DV group. This may suggest, as was cited above, that clients accessing agencies because of domestic violence are more likely to be provided services through the agency than groups accessing because of other reasons. It is unclear whether this is because agencies for women and children escaping domestic violence are better trained or resourced to provide support or for some other reason.

Recommendation 16: That the differences in provision and referral of services to accompanying children in relation to their reason for seeking assistance be investigated, and any inequalities and barriers in provision identified.

Additionally, the table also shows that the DV group had lower unmet needs for requests for every type of service except skills education (7.3% compared to 6.3%), access arrangements (6.4% compared to 5%) and brokerage (2.6% compared to 2.3%) (AIHW 2005a:p26).

Table 5: SAAP closed accompanying child support periods: SAAP services requested for children accompanying female clients escaping domestic violence compared with services requested for children accompanying other clients Australia 2003-04 (per cent)

Type of service	Domestic violence group			Other clients		
	Unmet	Referred	Provided	Unmet	Referred	Provided
Accommodation						
SAAP/CAP accommodation	0.7	2	97.3	2.5	4.5	93
School liaison/child care						
School liaison	4.7	9.5	85.9	4.9	7.3	87.8
Child care	1.8	5.2	93.1	3.8	20.9	75.3
Counselling						
Help with behavioural problems	4.8	10.7	84.5	6.9	27.1	66
Sexual/physical abuse counselling/support	9.3	25.3	65.4	11.6	39.4	49
Skills education	7.3	7.1	85.6	6.3	14.2	79.4
General counselling/support	3.1	5.7	91.2	3.8	10.2	86.1
General support /advocacy						
Access arrangements	6.4	21.1	72.5	5	17.7	77.4
Advice/information	1.2	0.8	98	2.2	1.9	95.9
Brokerage services	2.6	3	94.4	2.3	6.6	91.1
Advocacy	1.6	1	97.4	2.6	2.1	95.3
Specialist services						
Culturally sensitive services	1.1	2.5	96.4	1.9	12.3	85.8
Health/medical services	3.4	23.5	73.1	6.5	39	54.5
Basic support and other services n.e.s						
Meals	0.6	0.2	99.2	0.9	3.8	95.3
Showers/hygiene	0.6	0.2	99.2	2.4	0.6	97.1
Recreation	0.9	0.8	98.3	2.1	2.7	95.1
Transport	0.7	0.3	99	1.6	1	97.5
Other	0.7	5.1	94.2	2	10.3	87.7

Source: AIHW 2005a:p26

Based on this analysis it may be deduced that children accompanying a female receive more specialist supports than children accompanying other groups. However, this would require more specific substantiation.

Recommendation 17: That the assessment and provision of specialist supports to accompanying children be examined, with particular reference to different client groups and agency types.

The views of children, parents and workers

Some literature available on accompanying children in SAAP details information collected from accompanying children, parents and SAAP workers. This section provides a summary of some of this information. The aim is to provide an extra 'qualitative' layer of information on the needs of accompanying children to supplement the quantitative information discussed above. It is also particularly important that the voices of children themselves are heard in relation to a discussion of their needs.

The Strategic Partners *Case Management with children in SAAP services* (1997) report was one report to seek the opinion of accompanying children. By conducting interviews with children and parents, the report identified some issues "of importance for work with children in SAAP services" (p21). Issues articulated by children included:

- Having a place to be able to play was cited as a positive of the service. This included playing with toys, play equipment and pets or computer games for older children. Having nothing to do was articulated as a negative where services didn't have play equipment, toys etc.
- Most children involved in this report spoke positively about the attitudes of staff, particularly where there was a specific child support worker. The role of the worker in explaining the service to the child was seen to be particularly positive.
- Where agencies organised recreational activities this was seen favourably.
- Assistance with forming links with new communities, friendships and schools was desirable.
- Loss of pets and personal items was seen negatively by children.

Another report to gather information from accompanying children was *Caught in the crossfire* (Jurak 2003). The report used art therapy sessions to gather qualitative data from children who had experienced domestic violence. The report outlined two particular findings: the importance of older children (8-11 and 12-15) having their own space in the refuge and having age appropriate activities for children. Based on the sessions conducted, the report argued that children need "to feel heard; listened to; cared for; have fun; meet friends; express feelings; have companionships; and to feel safe." (p5).

Another project that involved children, parents and workers directly was the *Children in Transition* project (Resolve Community Consulting 2004). This report looked directly at the interactions of family agencies in Victoria with children and found that agencies faced significant problems and barriers with identifying the needs of children. These problems included:

- Limitations in assessment conducted on the needs of children, which restricted the type and amount of information collected,
- Children's needs can be overlooked and seen as a "subset of the parent's needs" (p14)
- Sometimes parents don't understand or have the capacity to understand the needs of their children
- A hesitation on the part of parents and children to work with SAAP services due to a confusion between SAAP workers and child protection workers
- Children being at school or out during service operating hours impeding the ability of the agency to know how children were going

- Limited resources available in agencies to meet children’s needs
- Need for more specific training on working with children

In the context of these limitations, the report found that there was a strong emphasis on meeting the children’s physical needs as these are “easier to identify and less threatening for parents to accept help with.” Stress was also placed on the need for housing security in order for children and their needs to be stabilised, such as through making friends and settling in to a community. Consistently with other reports, educational and behavioral needs were identified in the accompanying children involved, notably Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Responses specifically from children indicated that they understood that the role of the SAAP worker was to find them a ‘permanent house’. However they reported that workers did not spend much time speaking to them or talking about their needs.

The 1994 SAAP-commissioned report *Needs of children in SAAP services*, was an early report to outline specifically the needs of children in SAAP services, as its title would suggest (Thomson Goodall Associates 1994). The report found that “Children within SAAP services have all experienced disruption, grief and trauma, to varying degrees.” Based on this commonality, the report looked at children as a general group, rather than distinguishing the needs of children into groups according to the main reason their family had sought assistance, or the type of agency they were supported by. Based on consultation with workers from a range of SAAP agencies, the report identified four main needs and a range of associated needs of children using SAAP services:

Table 6: Needs of accompanying children in SAAP services

Appropriate shelter and safety	Access to appropriate shelter – access includes timing; geographical appropriateness; other Safe, secure housing Adequate space, facilities Adequate nutrition Cultural relevance Safe, structured environment
Accurate needs assessment	Needs identification in relation to the immediate crisis (entry to the service) General needs assessment (psycho-social, health, education, emotional needs)
Range of supports	Crisis intervention Child protection Direct support by SAAP funded workers (includes individual and group work and childcare as appropriate) Links to appropriate community supports, services and resources
Holistic response	Meet the child’s needs in the context of the family Assist parents to be empowered to positively nurture their children and enhance their parenting practices.

This includes improved communication; increased understanding of children's needs; other
Provide opportunities for parenting support, parent education group work/peer support, role modelling, family therapy, respite care, formal and informal counselling opportunities, specialist support, individual counselling, recreational opportunities
Assist family to ensure the child is linked into mainstream services (generic and specialist)
Provide follow-up for continuity of support
Effective linkages to appropriate generic and specialist services

Source: Thomson Goodall Associates 1994:p20

In identifying these needs, the report concluded that it was the responsibility of services to provide support to children and families, arguing:

“The fact is, entry to the SAAP service provides a timely opportunity to have these needs identified and addressed. Failure to do so is a breach of duty of care on the part of the SAAP program, and the SAAP service itself. In the longer term, failure of a SAAP service to effectively address these needs will result in ongoing cycles of chaos, disruption and homelessness.” (p8).

Based on her experiences working with children, Bryant (2003) argues that the needs of children can be viewed through the framework of grief and loss. She argues that children's grief experiences are a result of a “sense of loss – loss of what they once had, loss of a ‘normal’ life.” (p2) She explains that:

“[Homeless children] may have had to change schools a lot, leave friends, and move to the suburbs or towns, just so the family can be housed. These are all losses encountered by children but one loss that children experience that is often forgotten is the loss of pets as they cannot be taken as many supported accommodation services do not allow pets...” (p2).

Children's health and well-being needs were also emphasised in a report by Efron, Horn and Jewell (1996). Through a range of questionnaires with parents the report identified a range of health issues affecting the 51 accompanying children:

- Over one-third of the children had “significant behavioural disturbances” (p7)
- The children had limited social interactions
- There was a major risk of educational disadvantage
- Children had “higher than average frequencies of asthma, ear infections, skin problems and developmental delays” (p7). There were also incomplete immunisation schedules.

The report argued that there was a “need for services, working with children in families who experience homelessness, to include health, in its broadest sense, as part of the casework intervention.” (p8)

Recommendation 18: That qualitative feedback from children, their parents or guardians and workers is recognised as an essential element in discussing the needs of children, and that this information be respected and included in reports and research.

Summary of needs of children

The quantitative data discussed in this chapter illustrates the difference in service requests by State and Territory, age, client group and whether the female client was escaping domestic violence. Whilst some aspects of the quantitative and qualitative data are similar (i.e. the recurrence of the health and educational needs of children), the information expressed by children, parents and workers was somewhat different in focus to the quantitative data. The qualitative data had a focus on the nature of service delivery, rather than specific services requested or needed – something that the quantitative analysis does not allow for. This highlights the importance of talking directly to children, parents and workers in agencies. Qualitative data appears to allow for an examination of how the agencies and broader system works, and not just the sorts of things SAAP agencies do or don't do and who it is and isn't done for.

Recommendation 19: That in examining the needs of accompanying children both qualitative and quantitative information should be collected and analysed.

Chapter 3: Good Practice principles for working with accompanying children and their application to SAAP

When discussing models of service delivery for accompanying children in SAAP it is important to clarify what good practice actually means. For the purposes of this report the term 'good practice' is preferred to the term 'best practice'. As was discussed by Greenhalgh et al (2004):

“‘Best Practice’ appears, on the surface, as a widely understood and unexceptional concept. This is, in fact, not the case. For some it is normative, describing the way that things *should* or *ought* to be done...For others, ‘best practice’ means identifying another location or another organisation where things are done in the best possible way in the real world environment. The first step in doing this is to find some way of defining what is ‘best’.” (p133)

Rather than seek to establish a uniform and stagnant understanding of ‘the best’ way to respond to accompanying children, the term ‘good practice’ is used. This term is intended to express the various ways that the needs of accompanying children can be effectively met under a variety of circumstances and at different times. Additionally, good practice is preferred “to recognise that some policy and programme responses cover certain aspects of ‘best practice’ but that few cover all aspects.” (p134)

There are a variety of documents that can be used to discuss good practice in working with accompanying children. These range from broad, guiding documents such as the UN convention on the rights of the child, to more specific documents such as the *Practice standards for working with children and young people who have lived with domestic violence* (Gevers 1999). However, information barriers again emerge in discussing good practice with accompanying children in family agencies. Consequently, this section discusses a range of documents that can inform concepts of good practice with accompanying children, including those in family agencies, but is not specific to this group

Good practice and the rights of the child

An important overarching document when discussing good practice principles for accompanying children in SAAP is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Australian Government became a signatory to this convention in 1990, and as a signatory is responsible for the implementation of the convention. There are some articles within the convention that are particularly relevant to homeless children. Central to the convention is the overarching concept that “In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Article 3). More specifically, this extends to the requirement that:

”State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services, and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.”

Another pertinent article within the convention is Article 27, which sets out the requirement of state parties to “recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the

child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development." This responsibility is seen to be primarily that of the parent(s) or others responsible for the child, "within their abilities and financial capacities". However, states are also cited as having responsibilities, particularly in relation to housing. The Article sets out that:

"States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing."

This part of the convention is particularly relevant to a discussion of accompanying children in SAAP, as it outlines the international obligations that Australian Federal and State Governments have to provide standards of care and ensure that these standards are met. Importantly, the inclusion of such a statement within a UN convention connects the issue of accompanying children in SAAP to a human rights framework; therefore any failure to establish standards of appropriate care for children and ensure they are met could be interpreted as a breach of human rights.

Recommendation 20: That good practice in relation to accompanying children in SAAP is understood within a human rights framework, and all services that work with children seek to implement and ensure consistency with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Good practice in delivery of services to homeless people

In 2004 Greenhalgh et al produced a report through AHURI that discussed good practice in the delivery of services to homeless people. Based on the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) the authors argue that criteria for identifying good practice in homelessness policies and programs are that:

1. They use a clear definition of 'homelessness', one that can easily be incorporated into legislation, and on-going statistics are available to enable on-going assessment and monitoring.
2. They rest on a solid regulatory basis to ensure the effectiveness of political measures and enable their operation to be monitored.
3. They particularly target the homeless in order to respond adequately to problems of the homeless (i.e. that they are not just adjuncts to other policies.)
4. They consider homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects

In an Australian context, many of these criteria are met on a broad, systematic level. For instance, a clear definition of homelessness is available through the SAAP Act 1994 (Section 4), that is:

"For the purposes of this Act, a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.
For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- (b) threatens the person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:

- (i) adequate personal amenities; or
 - (li) the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
- (d) Places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

Similarly, a “solid regulatory base” is available through the AIHW NDC, particularly the SAAP Annual Reports.

National, State and Territory Homelessness Strategies are available that “particularly target the homeless” (however, some states and territories do not have a homelessness strategy, as such). Of all of these points, however, the last one, that responses “consider homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects”, is perhaps the most salient in relation to accompanying children. This may be interpreted to suggest that in order to be ‘good practice’ homelessness strategies and data collection must recognise accompanying children as a specific ‘aspect’ of homelessness. Presumably this then allows for a full understanding of the issues related to children, their needs and service delivery. The following table provides a brief overview of the extent to which homelessness strategies specifically consider accompanying children.

Table 7: Accompanying children in homelessness strategies, Australia

State	Homelessness Strategy	Policies/Programs
National	National Homelessness Strategy	<p>‘Families with children’ are a recognised population group of the strategy (Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, 2001:p91)</p> <p>Under the strategy the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot was funded, this program is now called the ‘HOME Advice Program’ (Please see Chapter 4).</p>
NSW	No	<p>The <i>SAAP Service Framework</i> states that SAAP services should coordinate a range of support services including support, advocacy, and specific services for children (Department of Community Services, 2001:p6). The framework recognises that children are “clients in their own right and should be treated as such” (Department of Community Services, 2001:p8). However, the framework refers readers to the Case Management Resource Kit and the Women’s Refuge Access and Equity for further information (Department of Community Services, 2001:p8).</p>

		<p><i>NSW SAAP Standards</i></p> <p>Standard 2.4 “Support and protection of children accompanying adults” refers to the indicators of good practice when meeting the individual needs of accompanying children (Department of Community Services, 1998:p32)</p>
Victoria	Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS)	<p>Regional Children’s Resource Workers are employed (9 in total) (Resolve Community Consulting, 2004).</p>
		<p>As part of the VHS, Homelessness Service System Development Projects (HSSDPs) have been established to test service configurations and trial VHS initiatives. One HSSDP has been established in the Hume area to develop a children’s assessment tool and policies and procedures for children (Office of Housing, 2004:p24).</p>
QLD	No	<p>The major policy response from the Queensland Government for families and children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is SAAP and the delivery of prevention and early intervention services (State of Queensland, 2005:p1-6).</p>
		<p>Queensland Families: Future Directions policy statement was released in 2002 and signalled a shift to prevention and early intervention services (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2002). Four of the piloted services for ‘<i>Future Directions</i>’ focused on families with intensive support needs, including but not limited to homeless families (Queensland Government, 2003:p4). One of the programs run is ‘Save the Children’, which targets families living in caravan parks and refuges. Agencies engage with parents and children through counselling, parenting skills, skill building, engaging with other support services and addressing domestic violence and drug/alcohol issues (Queensland Government, 2003:p69-70).</p>

WA	Putting People First	<p>The Government supported the recommendation 2.4.3.2 of the Homelessness Taskforce which was for an “Increase in services working with the children of people who are homeless as a result of domestic violence and other crises” (Government of Western Australia, 2002:p27)</p>
SA	Everyone's Responsibility: Reducing Homelessness in South Australia	<p>Standard 4 of the <i>WA service standards</i> outlines “Service provision to children accompanying parents/carers” (Department for Community Development Western Australia et. al. 2002).</p> <p>In the ‘reducing homelessness’ plan, points 3 and 5 refer to children. Point 3 recommends the development of an early childhood and parenting framework (2003:p2). Point 5 recommends the development, integration and expansion of programs for families with children at risk of becoming homeless. Department of Human Services Metropolitan Division released ‘Family Homelessness Discussion Paper’ in March 2001. The report identified that children as a ‘special needs group’ and acknowledged the concerns of family accommodation services regarding how to best meet the needs of children and how to resource service provision to children (p25).</p>
Tasmania	No	<p><i>Integrated Continuum of Support Model for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness</i> Groups services into four different clusters based on service type, including access and support, immediate emergency accommodation, transitional support and service system development (Department of Health and Human Services 2000:p4). The continuum was intended to, allow for the “development of comprehensive responses to the diverse needs of homeless families and individuals at a local and regional level” (Department of Health and Human Services 2000:p4). The continuum of support document gives specific mention to children twice. On the first occasion it acknowledges that during the assessment and support stage children will need specialist assessment and support responses (Department of Health and Human Services 2000:p19). Services providing emergency accommodation must</p>

		also be able to provide linkages to specialist services for children and other special needs groups (Department of Health and Human Services 2000:p21).
ACT	Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness-Homelessness Strategy ACT 2003	<p>Accompanying children were identified as one of the groups that required specific attention in the strategy. From the first year of the strategy SAAP services were provided “discrete funds” to provide flexible responses to service user needs for children, for “professional interventions and programs and [to] provide practical assistance” (Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services 2003:p14).</p> <p>In addition action 2.4.5 establishes that there is to be a review of protocols between SAAP agencies and DEYFS in relation to accompanying children and young people to ensure that responses are timely and premised on individual need (Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services 2003:p34). Further to this, action 4.2.6 is related to ensuring data collection strategies take into account accompanying children (Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services 2003:p44).</p> <p>A report on the implementation of the strategy identifies that family services have been established in West Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong each of these services have child support workers (Hargreaves 2005: p9)</p>
NT	No	<p>The Northern Territory Department of Health and Community website identified “client-focused service delivery that strengthens linkages and facilitates early intervention into homelessness and outreach support services for SAAP clients.” as a priority under SAAP IV (Northern Territory Department of Health and Community, 2002). The identified target group for this priority was accompanying children and the anticipated roll out was between 2001 and 2003 (Northern Territory Department of Health and Community, 2002). <i>Further information on action taken by the Department to meet this priority was not found</i></p>

The need for a developed understanding of the full range of issues and circumstances facing accompanying children can therefore be understood as an issue of good practice, something that it appears needs to be further developed in Australia.

Recommendation 21: That all state responses to homelessness specifically cite and consider accompanying children as an element of good practice.

Good practice for accompanying children

As part of the SAAP Case Management Guidelines, a supplementary section on *Practice principles for working with children in a family oriented approach* details the 'practice principles' and 'indicators' of good practice in case management for children accompanying adults. This document is very straightforward. In summary, the good practice elements of this include:

- Entry/Screening: child's details are recorded on initial form and their immediate needs are met.
- Assessment: children are encouraged to take part in this process and their needs assessed, including cultural, immediate needs, health, education, social skills, cultural needs, emotional needs, social needs, and child's needs within the family. This includes reporting any concerns of abuse on the child
- Planning: the needs identified in assessment are addressed in the support plan, preferably children have their own attached to their parents.
- Direct service: age appropriate facilities and activities are provided, activities to assist children are planned and children are enrolled in school.
- Coordination: children and parents are encouraged to use mainstream services, the SAAP agency keeps a directory of these services and protocols related to referrals are clear.
- Monitoring and Review: Children's plans are reviewed, changes can be made and staff are aware of any changes that take place.
- Exit planning follow up and case closure: these exist, children are assisted to deal with any negative issues associated with leaving the service, other services involved are aware of support ending and case notes are completed.
- Evaluation: children and parents are encouraged to provide feedback

This document proves a very practical, service level overview of good practice in relation to accompanying children. The *Case management for children in SAAP – a family oriented approach* (Strategic Partners 1997) report argues that on a broader level good practice involved not approaching children as 'accompanying children', but instead ensuring that there was "a commitment from all staff in an agency to take responsibility for including children as clients in an equal manner with adults" (p31). It was therefore seen to be better to focus on 'working with children in a family oriented approach'.

Recommendation 22: That good practice principles in working with children involve recognising children as clients.

A particular role of the Strategic Partners report was to outline some of the key features of good practice in working with children. Through site visits with a diverse range of services, the report identified the following “common ways of working which seem to suggest that there are features which are key to working effectively with children in addressing their needs and providing them with appropriate support.” (p35). These were:

- Children’s needs are a priority for the service
- There is an integrated approach to working with children, children’s workers do not work in isolation, but as part of a team
- All recruitment involves screening to assess whether the person has a child-focused approach
- This includes specific and more intense training for child support workers and also training for working with children for general workers
- There are clear rules and protocols on how the service works, particularly in relation to children
- That the agency undertakes effective and appropriate assessment, both initial and ongoing assessment
- That a separate space for children is available and that it is equipped properly for them
- The agency has a commitment to a developmental approach, that is, recognising where the child is at developmentally and working in an appropriate way

In addition these elements ‘good practice’ services often have similar processes, including:

- Flexibility
- The agency works with parents to affirm their skills and capacities
- Education, advocacy and resourcing as core part of work with children
- The agency has culturally and linguistically diverse employees as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander employees.
- There is a commitment to follow up work with children

Another report that looked generically at good practice in relation to accompanying children was the Thomson Goodall Associates (1994) report. It argues that support to children should be:

- Transitional “aimed at empowering and linking child service users into appropriate supports.” (p44)
- Support should be “targeted to meet the needs of children within the context of their family” (p44)
- Workers should be skilled in identifying the needs of and working with children
- SAAP should cover a range of models. “This is a critical issue, requiring further research and discussion. Worker skills and training need to be considered within this context.” (p44)
- In short term services workers must be able to link children in to other appropriate services
- Support should include follow-up as appropriate

The key point made in this report is that a holistic approach is needed towards accompanying children:

“A holistic approach is ideal, with strategies which may include family therapy, specialist support, role modelling, group work, individual counselling, parent education, empowerment of children, and the creation of a positive environment for interaction and communication between the parent and child(ren) in the SAAP service. A key worker advocating for the needs of the child, and assisting the child to name, and begin to have his/her needs met, is essential.” (p45)

Recommendation 23: That good practice is holistic, flexible and dedicated to the needs of children and their families.

In specific relation to children escaping domestic violence, there are *practice standards for working with children and young people who have lived with domestic violence* (Gevers 1999). These standards stress the need for an individual response to children rather than a standard or homogenized response:

“The practice standards stress the importance of services developing individualised responses to the needs of each child/young person depending upon the particular issues, family circumstances and developmental level of the child/young person.” (p5)

However, Gevers also argues that “specific consideration needs to be given to the particular needs of some groups” and he highlights people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, people of non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, people with mental health issues, people in rural and remote locations, and perpetrators of domestic violence. (The good practice points that Gevers identifies in relation to these groups are included in Appendix A.)

However, he also outlines 10 principles that drive the practice standards. These are:

1. Service providers work within a framework of domestic violence which acknowledges power and gender issues
2. Services are culturally relevant
3. Services are accessible
4. Services have a child-centered focus
5. Service providers ensure the safety of children/young people
6. Service providers respect client’s rights
7. service providers coordinate with other relevant agencies
8. Services are effectively managed
9. Services have effective staff
10. Services are continually improving

This practice framework provides an excellent broad context for understanding and guiding work with children who have been affected by domestic violence. Similar practice standards are lacking in relation to homeless children.

Also in relation to working with children in a domestic violence context, the recently published *Shaping the Future* practice framework outlines the advantages of working with children through a 'strengths-based framework'. It explains that:

"A strengths-based approach is built on the principles of respect, the sharing of power, social justice, belief in people's strengths and capacities, inclusion, collaboration, transparency and self-determination...a strengths-based framework for working with children uses the strengths that already exist in the child and her context to foster resilience" (O'Neil 2005:p7)

The framework also illustrates the importance of a 'child-centred' approach that "acknowledges the primacy of children's rights and needs' – which is also consistent with the sentiments expressed in the UN convention on the rights of the child. (p7) Again, this is an excellent example of a framework developed to guide work with children who are living with or require support in relation to domestic violence. These sorts of frameworks would be equally useful to guide work with accompanying children in the context of homelessness.

Recommendation 24: That good practice frameworks and practice standards be developed to guide work with homeless children.

Summary of good practice working in relation to accompanying children

This chapter has discussed good practice in relation to accompanying children in SAAP services. As has been the trend throughout this report, however, there was a lack of information available specifically on good practice in SAAP family agencies. In looking at information available on good practice with children affected by domestic violence, this lack became particularly glaring, and it is strongly recommended that similar practice standards and frameworks be established for work with homeless children.

Chapter 4: Models of service delivery for accompanying children

There has been no comprehensive analysis or outline of the way that services are delivered to children throughout SAAP. It is, therefore, difficult to examine good practice service models for accompanying children in family agencies. This finding is consistent with the finding of *The needs of children in SAAP services* report published over 10 years ago, which identified “limited models of service delivery - lack of range of options” as a service gap in the provision of services to children (Thomson Goodall Associates 1994:p7).

There is some generic information available on models in SAAP, as well as information that cites models of service delivery in reports on children. However there is a general lack of consistency between these reports, preventing a comprehensive analysis of different types of service models. Consequently the initial part of this chapter provides a general outline of models of service delivery in SAAP and the second section provides an outline of some of the various models documented in respect to children, including some analysis

Recommendation 25: That a comprehensive analysis of service delivery models for children in SAAP be undertaken. This should examine current models within SAAP as well as international and other good practice models. It should also give consideration to the diversity of children, children's needs, and service types.

Models of service delivery in SAAP

General information on service models in SAAP has been documented in a variety of reports, including by Bisset et al (1999), Beer et al (2003) and Thomson Goodall Associates (2001). Briefly summarised, these models are detailed as:

Outreach models: are aimed at identifying the needs and risk of homelessness of individuals and populations (Beer et al 2003:p12). When used as early intervention, outreach is aimed at preventing homelessness. Bisset et al (1999) identify flexibility, proactivity, capacity for crisis intervention, ongoing support, follow up and the use of brokerage money to purchase services as elements of outreach models (p137).

Intensive Support Models: provide a combination of support and accommodation and are aimed at people who have high or complex needs. These models work with clients “to address ‘problem’ behaviour rather than simply defining it as deviant and unacceptable” (Beer et al 2003:p13). Bisset et al (1999) identify elements of this model as: ongoing and intensive support on a “daily life/survival” basis, relationships established between a key worker and client, flexibility, continuity and extended availability of support (p138).

Co-ordination models: are based on a continuum of care approach to “strengthen links between services and programmes that reduce the risk of homelessness or address its occurrence, providing an integrated program response to clients needs.” (Beer et al 2003:p13). These models recognise the multiplicity and diversity of needs clients can have and therefore involve several agencies in supporting the client. Bisset et al (1999) identify the following elements associated with these models: ongoing assertive and comprehensive outreach, assessment and referral, negotiation and links with a range of

agencies, regular review of client needs and structural advocacy (reporting on gaps in system for the client). (p138)

Generic models: focus on client needs in relation to accommodation focusing on large groups of homeless clients “aim[ing] at moving people from short term, crisis accommodation into medium and long-term housing and independent living.” (Beer et al 2003:p13). Bisset et al (1999) point out the following features: flexibility in accommodation provision and support, negotiation with other support services for involvement, balancing needs of clients in the service. (p138)

Crisis Models: are targeted at immediate response for people with acute needs but “are reactive and do not address the underlying structural causes of homelessness” (Beer et al 2003:p14) Bisset et al (1999) point out that elements of crisis models include: extended access hours, range of service provision, team work, links to community resources and involvement in community development, use of specialist support agencies and use of brokerage funds. (p14)

Whilst this documentation is useful in providing an overview of models utilised in response to homeless clients, discussion rarely cites the suitability of these models to children or children’s needs. A comprehensive analysis of major models of service delivery in relation to support and outcomes from the position of homeless children is lacking.

Recommendation 26: That an analysis of SAAP service models be undertaken in relation to accompanying children, covering a range of SAAP agencies and service types.

Accompanying children and service delivery models

This discussion reflects information that has been documented in a range of reports, and as such does not comprehensively cover the entire range of models agencies utilise in relation to accompanying children. It also must be stressed that discussion of these models is not based on an analysis of any particular agency or the outcomes achieved by that agency. This is a significant limitation which prevents a thorough analysis of any ‘good practice’ elements of these agencies. As Greenhalgh et al (2004) have pointed out, in analysing good practice in service models “A more rigorous assessment would judge each policy against the outcomes it produced on the ground rather than through using secondary sources.”(p134).

Recommendation 27: That any identification of ‘good practice’ service models involve a critical analysis of the operation, outcomes and experiences of clients, including children.

The Thomson Goodall Associates report *needs of accompanying children in SAAP* has been cited above as one of the first reports to examine the issue of accompanying children in SAAP services. It analysed two models of service delivery, communal housing models and cluster and detached housing models, for the advantages and disadvantages of these models in relation to accompanying children.

Communal housing models are multiple occupancy buildings where clients share some of the facilities, such as the living areas, kitchen, bathroom and laundry. The advantages of this model for children are cited as safety and security, socialising and knowledge of the similarity of their situation with other children, access to workers, particularly child workers, and other facilities are also available on site. There is also an argument that this model provides an economy of scale, as the resources and facilities are available in one place to multiple families/clients. However, disadvantages of this model were also articulated including that children may be removed from familiar environments and networks and that vulnerable families and children may be exposed to risk through close interaction with other families through communal arrangements. There was also an argument that this “model excludes some service users, and is inappropriate for others” (p43).

Cluster and detached housing model provides individual accommodation to families with either multiple sites on one property (clustered) or single sites (detached). The advantages of this model include continuity of location, more space, more privacy and less intrusion, and an increased ability to function under conditions the family may have been accustomed to, calling in support when needed or required. Conversely, disadvantages are lower levels of security, potentially less immediate access to staff and support, less cost-effective, and children may still need to move if there is a limit on the time-frame of the housing.

The central model for support throughout SAAP is case management. Case management models for working with children are outlined in the report *Case management with children in SAAP services: a family oriented approach*, and for SAAP workers, the subsequent *Practice principles for working with children in a family oriented way*. The SAAP case management resource kit explains that case management is:

“...an approach to service delivery which emphasises working with clients in a way which respects them as individuals and in a way which ensures their particular needs are being met. Case management is a process of working with clients which focuses on their needs and goals, and developing flexible strategies to assist them to achieve their goals.” (Gevers 1997:pnt1.1)

Broadly speaking, the benefits of case management are cited as improved outcomes, increased access to appropriate services, client empowerment and increased involvement in decision making (p1.1). Particular considerations are highlighted in relation to case management with children, in short that “children need to be considered within the context of a family oriented approach” (sect 13.3) meaning that all family members be taken into account in working with accompanying children. Problems articulated in relation to case management with children focus on resource constraints and the potential conflict of interest between members of the family. In the final report by Strategic Partners (1997), it was reported that consultations with service providers indicated that:

“There was considerable comment as to how realistic it is to expect agencies to adopt a child-oriented and/or family oriented focus, given their current responsibilities and skills. This response from agencies saw additional resources being required before such a shift can take place, and some additional staffing may be required for a number of agencies to ensure their viability, quite separate from their work with accompanying children.” (p.vi)

This is something that can be considered to affect family agencies, particularly given that they are less likely to have specific child workers than agencies for women escaping domestic violence.

A more specific example of a case-management model is outlined in a report produced by the Canberra Fathers and Children Service Inc. The report explains that the service utilises a 'narrative' and 'solution focused' approach. It is argued that through a narrative approach "CANFaCS workers are respectful of the service users' experiences of their lives, and of their unique differences" (p87). The 'solution-focused' approach is argued to allow for concentration "on finding solutions for problems/issues in the present and the future, rather than looking for causes in the past." The service provides priority accommodation to men with children in their full-time care, and also has some capacity to provide outreach. The report outlines that deficits of the model include the lack of a dedicated children's worker and a lack of medium term housing for the families to exit to after the crisis period. (p100). As has been cited in relation to case management, it is difficult to ascertain how this model works in relation to accompanying children when case management is examined in the context of the parent/s and not the child.

Terry Bartholomew's seminal report on homeless families *A Long way from home* (1999) identified significant problems with brokerage models in relation to families. In interviews conducted with homeless families and workers in homelessness services the report found that hotels, motels and caravan parks were being increasingly used as 'stop-gap' emergency accommodation to house homeless families. The report argued that this was "patently unsuitable and in some cases potentially harmful" (p25). It identified considerable negative ramifications for families as a result of this type of accommodation, stating that:

"Staying in this form of accommodation placed families under increased pressure, and had negative effects on their health, economic situation, stability, personal safety, access to services, feelings of isolation, and capacity to recover from residential instability." (p139)

The report also argued that this type of accommodation "affected children in other more specific and potentially enduring ways." (p139) For instance, the report outlined that there were significant concerns amongst parents for the health of their children:

"Issues such as the physical conditions of the hotels, fear of developmental delays and long-term changes in children's social skills, hygiene concerns, psychosocial burdens, lapses in children's immunisations due to isolation from resources to maintain preventative care, respiratory disorders, skin ailments, malnutrition, fear of exposure to infectious diseases, and the presence of dangerous substances (such as drugs), objects (such as syringes), or people, were all commonly reported concerns of the families." (p89)

There were also changes in children's behaviour and interruptions to schooling, both of which effected friendship circles.

A report produced by a women's domestic violence refuge in the Northern Territory *Service access and pathways of accompanied children at Dawn House Women's Shelter* (Edwards 2003) used a Vignette method (story telling that gauges children's reactions) with accompanying children in domestic violence refuges to explore their feelings and experiences. Throughout this process the children expressed a desire for workers to be

available for them to talk to. The report suggests this should be conducted as outreach with an early-intervention focus. However, this desire appeared to be tied to the children's experiences of keeping the violence secret and it is therefore unclear how similar this would be for children at risk of homelessness.

Early-intervention as a preventative for family homelessness was also the basis for the Australian Government's Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP), which has now become the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program. Through the FHPP, Centrelink and community agencies were funded to work together in an early-intervention context to prevent family homelessness. Centrelink workers identified families 'at risk' and ensured they were receiving the appropriate income support. The family was then linked in with a community agency that provided support to stabilise their housing, economic, social and community circumstances (RPR consulting 2003). The final evaluation report outlined that the focus of the model was on the adult members of the families, and as such "Children were linked in to support and provided with assistance as part of a broader case plan; as a result, only a minority of case plan goals related directly to children." (RPR consulting 2005:p70) It was argued that this resulted in good outcomes for the children as "outcomes for children are directly linked to outcomes for the family as a whole." (p70). Aspects of the FHPP early-intervention model included flexibility in relation to time-frames of support and delivery of support, a capacity to provide brokerage support, a strengths-based approach, partnerships, particularly with Centrelink, and action research and stakeholder involvement used to refine the model. The limitations of this model in relation to children are that it does not appear to be tailored to or specifically encompassing of their needs, rather seeing the children's needs as being resolved along with the parents, something that is incongruous with the good practice principles discussed in the previous chapter. There are also restrictions on the accessibility of the program, as it only operates out of one location in each State and Territory.

Conclusion

This report has focused on exploring the needs of accompanying children in SAAP family agencies and 'good practice' service models for meeting the needs of these children.

Despite an increase in awareness and information on accompanying children in SAAP services in the last decade, there is a significant and glaring lack of information available on accompanying children in family agencies.

This report has utilised general information as well as more targeted information available on children accompanying women escaping domestic violence to allow for a discussion of the general needs of accompanying children. This discussion has focused on developing recommendations in relation to further work that should be undertaken in order to gain an insight into the needs of accompanying children in SAAP family agencies.

A factual and rigorous understanding of accompanying children in family agencies in relation to their needs and any strengths or deficiencies in the delivery of services to this group is an urgent task for the SAAP service system.

Appendix A

The following standards for good practice have been duplicated from “Practice Standards for working with children and Young People who have lived with domestic violence” which was developed by Leslie Gevers (1999).

Good practice in working with people from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds may include (p7):

- including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the staff and management of the service;
- providing a culturally appropriate environment;
- having culturally appropriate resources and materials;
- having an awareness of cultural issues and skills in cross-cultural communication;
- working from a framework of family violence rather than domestic violence;
- having linkages with relevant Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander groups (including men’s groups) and individuals that can provide advice or expertise.

Good practice in working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may include (p8):

- making sure the staff and management committee of a service reflects the cultural diversity of the community;
- staff training in cultural awareness and communication (including identifying individual values, assumptions and prejudices and knowledge of parenting practices and attitudes to violence in different cultures).
- policy and training in the use of interpreters and interpreter services, including the Commonwealth government’s Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) and on-site interpreters;
- networking and coordination with ethno-specific services; availability of information in different languages;
- linking the client with culturally appropriate services;
- making sure the client can access community resources and relevant government benefits;
- making sure that the services provided are relevant to clients, and respect their cultural and religious beliefs.

Good practice in working with people with a disability may include (p9):

- having an awareness of the barriers to accessing services for people with a disability;
- making the building and amenities physically accessible to people in a wheelchair or to people with poor mobility;
- having an understanding of the additional stresses that children of a parent with a disability may be under;
- knowing how to access and use AUSLAN and language interpreters including the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS), which provides telephone and on-site interpreting services;

- providing information in appropriate formats;
- having good linkages with relevant services for people with disabilities;
- promoting the service using mediums accessible to people with disabilities.

Good practice in working with people with mental health issues may include (p10):

- carrying out a full assessment for all relevant clients;
- having good linkages, effective case management procedures and referral protocols with mental health services;
- staff training in working with people with mental health issues;
- clarifying the range of conditions and symptoms that can be met within the service, and those for which more specialised services are needed;
- having mechanisms for joint case management or joint assessment with mental health service providers.

Good practice in working with people from rural and remote locations may include (p11):

- being part of a network of services that can be called upon to provide advice and support when needed;
- being part of a mentor scheme with better resourced services with experienced staff;
- developing strong working relationships and protocols with other local or regional services;
- acknowledging the impact of isolation on families. For example, the difficulty of maintaining anonymity regarding the domestic violence when living in a rural community.

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