

## FACT SHEET

### SOCIAL JUSTICE UNIT



UNITINGCARE BURNSIDE CENTENARY CAMPAIGN – FACT SHEET #3

# Young family homelessness

- There is limited Australian data on homelessness among young families. This data gap needs to be addressed in order to guide our understanding of demand for services which meet the needs of young families who are sleeping rough, staying with relatives or friends, accessing specialist homelessness services, or in other forms of insecure accommodation.
- On Census night 2006, 104,656 people in Australia were homeless. Young people aged 12-18 years were the largest group (21,940) comprising 21% of the homeless. Over 42 per cent of the homeless were aged under 25 years including 12,133 children under 12.<sup>i</sup>
- Homeless families with children accounted for 10% of the homeless population on Census night 2006. Between 2001 and 2006, there was an 11% rise in the number of families (couple only families and families with children) that were homeless.<sup>ii</sup>
- National Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data for 2009-10 showed that 84,100 children aged 0-17 years (including 37,100 children aged 0-4 years) accompanied clients accessing government-funded specialist homelessness services.<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2009-10, women with children accessing government-funded specialist homeless services most commonly sought assistance due to interpersonal relationship issues (64%), in particular domestic or family violence (48%). The most common reasons for men with children seeking assistance was for accommodation issues (32%) such as being evicted or interpersonal relationship issues (29%). For couples, with and without children, accommodation issues and financial issues were the most common reasons for seeking assistance.<sup>iv</sup>
- A US study by Swick (2008) shows that “violence is one of the most prevalent elements in the lives of homeless families with young children”. Violence disrupts the normal bonding between parent and child and isolates and degrades families.<sup>v</sup>
- Homelessness services are highly cost effective. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) found potential savings to government of more than double the cost of providing homelessness assistance.<sup>vi</sup>
- A study of child and family sensitive practices within homelessness services found that services often:
  - lacked the resources to conduct proper assessments and to develop case plans
  - required a specialist Children’s Worker
  - required additional staff training in child protection, child development and safety, working with children, and managing trauma arising from abuse.<sup>vii</sup>
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing in Australia remains central to reducing homeless among young families. Using 2006 Census data and taking into account the number of low-income houses occupied by higher income families, there was a shortfall of 251,000 affordable and available dwellings in 2009.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *2006 Census Data* cited in FaHCSIA (2008) *The Road Home - The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness*, Australian Government: December, Table 2.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Social Inclusion Board (2009) *A Compendium of Social Inclusion Indicators: How's Australia Faring?* Australian Government: May,

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) *Government-Funded Specialist Homelessness Services – SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2009-10*. AIHW: Canberra, p. v.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>v</sup> Swick, K.J. (2008) 'The Dynamics of Violence and Homelessness Among Young Families', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36, 81-85.

<sup>vi</sup> Flatau, P., Zaretsky, K., Brady, M., Haigh, Y. and Martin, R. (2008) *The Cost-Effectiveness of Homelessness Programs: A First Assessment, Volume 1 - Main Report*, AHURI Final Report No.119, AHURI, Melbourne.

<sup>vii</sup> Eardley, T. (2010) 'Child and Family Sensitive Practices within Homelessness Services: Results from a Preliminary Study. Paper presented to the *Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference*, July.

<sup>viii</sup> National Housing Supply Council (2009: 97) cited in UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (2010) *Homelessness Background Paper*, December, p.6.