

Responding to children in homelessness services

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The Australian Centre for Child Protection



The Australian Centre for Child Protection

- Conducts sound research to meet the needs of children and families at risk of maltreatment and/or out of home placement, and those who work with them.
- Provides knowledge and skills for workforce development with high risk communities.
- Focuses these research and workforce development efforts on building and sharing the evidence base.

Homeless Children

- Homelessness associated with men, youth...
- *The Road Home* national strategy
- "...tailored measures for different groups such as children, older people, young people and indigenous people (p.14)"
- What do we know about children in homelessness services?

What's the problem?

- Children in homelessness services:
 - >79,000 children aged 0-17 years
 - Of these, almost 75% under 10 years
 - Almost half under age 4

(AIHW, 2010)

25% of this population are indigenous children



(AIHW 2010)
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What's the problem?

- Homeless children:
 - Health problems
 - Educational issues
 - Emotional and behavioural issues
 - Trauma
 - Social isolation, grief and loss



Towards a solution?

- Policy recognition
- Greater understanding of the sector
- National focus



Method

- Stratified national sample taken from SAAP database, largely small services
- Resulted in 107 services, 96 interviews
- Semi structured interviews:
 - Main needs of children
 - How they respond
 - Barriers and opportunities



Children's needs

- **Physical needs and safety:**

'Children are at risk because often families are sleeping at other people's houses ...sometimes the environment isn't ideal, for example drug use and violence'



Children's needs

- **Developmental needs:**
 - Emotional
 - Cognitive/educational
 - Social



Children's needs

- **Developmental needs:**

- Emotional

'They often have serious disturbances because they've been in family violence a long time'

'Children need recognition ..as individuals and someone to spend time with them'




Children's needs

- **Developmental needs:**

- Cognitive/educational

'We see lots of boys with speech problems..I wonder about their intellectual development, if they've been delayed'

'They often come from chaos, multiple houses and schools. One 12 year old here has been to six different schools'




Children's needs

- **Developmental needs:**

- Social

'Children should be linked into extracurricular activities to help develop skills base, especially social skills'




Children's needs

- **How this is determined?**

- Confidence of workers

'Accompanying children are not the focus of the assessment..The focus is on the adult and understanding their needs'

'Most child needs are identified by a parent unless its an obvious need'



Responding to children's needs

- Direct service provision

- Accommodation

- Material aid

- Recreational activities

- Therapeutic assistance

- Educational support

- Parenting support


Responding to children's needs

- Working with other services

- Referral

- Co-facilitation

- Barriers and opportunities

- Resources

- Access to services

- Staff turnover

- Knowledge of others


Conclusion


- Wide variety of services

- Desire to support children:

....'a lot more could be done, but we do what we can'

- Need for accessible training, assessment tools and specialist children's workers

....'being available to spend time with children is the main thing'



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