

National Homelessness Research Agenda

Mapping and Reviewing Homelessness Programs

Flinders University of South Australia

Funded by the Australian Government, Department of Families, Housing, Community
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Summary

Year/ Project No: FP 2010-11/01

Project title: Mapping and Reviewing Homelessness Programs

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OBJECTIVES

The research set out to answer the following questions:

1. What programs exist to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness?
2. What does the evidence suggest works well for different groups and in what context(s)?

SUMMARY

OUTCOMES

Comprehensively mapping the service system proved surprisingly difficult, highlighting the multiplicity of funding sources and data systems. Synthesis of findings from 190 reports highlighted broad attributes of services and service systems that most usefully assist homeless people, and also identified limitations in approaches to evaluation. The findings confirm the view that long-term housing without long-term, flexible support and vice versa can limit the opportunities for people to permanently move on from homelessness. This report will assist policy development; sector planning and program design; and project funding decisions.

1 | Background

Non-government organisations across Australia work to assist homeless people in a myriad of ways and from time to time many of these programs and services are evaluated. Service review and evaluation reports may be used to justify funding requests, demonstrate accountability, improve service delivery or test the effectiveness of service models. However, because these reports are usually privately commissioned or relate to funding agreements, what they say about what services are doing well, and why, remains inaccessible to a wider audience. This project sought to explore the significant body of 'grey literature' in the form of evaluation reports which are rarely accessible outside of the commissioning agency. While individual evaluation reports usually draw on small data sets, the researchers felt that bringing together information from large numbers of reports could add to the evidence base on effective practice in homelessness service delivery.

2 | Method

In 2010, researchers contacted 635 agencies which provided accommodation and homelessness support services within Australia to request copies of evaluation and reports. Of these, 102 agencies provided 235 reports written within the last decade. As the nature of the material held

within an agency was unknown, the researchers did not place narrow parameters on the documents they accepted. In all, only 24 of the 235 reports were deemed unusable because they contained no qualitative information.

3 | Results

Researchers found it impossible to answer the first research question that asked: what programs exist to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness? The reasons for this were as follows:

- Participation in the research was voluntary which meant there were gaps in our knowledge about the range of programs in operation.
- Some reports were up to ten years old and some pilot programs had ceased or evolved into on-going support services funded under a different regime.
- Within reports and across service delivery activities, the terms ‘models,’ ‘services,’ ‘projects,’ and ‘programs’ were often used interchangeably and this made it impossible to document a clear listing of programs.

In answering the second research question researchers analysed a large number of reports but because of their disparate nature it was not possible to compare findings across population groups or service types. In response to the above difficulties, researchers instead explored all usable reports for broad themes that consistently appeared irrespective of any population grouping or service focus. As a result, five factors appeared to be consistently important in assisting homeless people. These were:

- i) **More than Bricks and Mortar** — the importance of securing access to housing to assist in longer-term recovery and prevention of homelessness.
- ii) **The Worker-Client Relationship** —the role of the pivotal client/worker relationship in recovering from and preventing, homelessness.
- iii) **Beyond Rapport — Practical Help** – the importance of being able to provide practical assistance as well as case management.
- iv) **Working with Others** — the long tradition and importance of service collaboration to build service capacity to help clients.
- v) **Sustaining Tenancies** — the importance of long-term flexible support to help prevent recurring bouts of homelessness.

CONCLUSIONS

The research confirms some general and important themes that are regarded as influential in assisting homeless people or those at risk of homelessness and that currently form part of the National Homelessness Agenda. These broad themes particularly appear in the newly devised Housing First and Assertive Outreach models but many are also strongly present in some housing and support models over the last decade. The findings confirm the view that long-term housing without long-term, flexible support and vice versa can limit the opportunities for people to permanently move on from homelessness. These are important considerations for public policy development.

NEED FOR FURTHER WORK

The reports offer the opportunity to explore the role of case management, planning and coordination and the role of goal-focused approaches. There are also opportunities to devise a consistent approach to terminology used with regard to 'projects', 'services', 'programs' and 'support'.

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The researchers also wish to thank the agencies that circulated information about the project to their contacts in Queensland and New South Wales and also to the many people in homelessness services across Australia who generously provided us with reports.

Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
NDCA	National Data Collection Agency
NGOs	Non-government agencies
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
TAS	Tasmania
WA	Western Australia
VIC	Victoria

Introduction

This study focused on critically appraising evaluation, service review and other 'internal' reports concerning programs and projects delivered to homeless people in Australia. Researchers were keen to explore what these types of reports might say about what aspects of services work well for which groups of homeless people; and why. Researchers wished to investigate these reports to see whether there was consistent evidence about the benefits of particular service approaches or methods of service delivery for various homeless population groups. If this were the case, then at an aggregate level this type of 'grey'¹ literature could make an important contribution to housing policy and practice and be of particular benefit to homelessness organisations in consolidating or re-visiting their service delivery approaches.

1 | Background

The need for evidence-based and more recently, evidenced-informed policy has been asserted by government ministers, officials and researchers (see Productivity Commission, 2009). In many policy domains the construction of studies to collect robust evidence is difficult because of cost, practicality or ethical considerations. Evaluation reports, although varied in scope and purpose, should be based on evidence. However, because these reports are usually privately commissioned or relate to funding agreements, what they say about what services are doing well, and why, remains inaccessible to a wider audience.

2 | Purpose

This project aimed to gather and review evaluation reports to determine whether a meta-analysis could assist in determining 'what works, for whom, and why' in homelessness interventions. This report describes the phases of data collection and methods of analysis, together with their limitations. It identifies some of the many interesting 'learnings' that occurred in the data collection process and identifies emerging themes from the data.

3 | Objectives

This report presents the findings of research into what aspects or service approaches work well with different groups of homeless people and why. The answers to these questions were to be based on findings written into evaluation or similar types of reports commenting on services delivered to homeless people in Australia. The objective of this work has been to assess the usefulness of grey literature to the development of homelessness policy and practice in contemporary times.

Programs and projects developed in response to homelessness are evaluated, as part of funder requirements or as component of internal agency accountability. As the findings of such

¹ Grey literature refers to studies with limited distribution (i.e., those not included in computerized bibliographic retrieval systems), unpublished reports, dissertations, articles in obscure journals, some online journals, conference abstracts, policy documents, reports to funding agencies, rejected or unpublished manuscripts, non-English language articles, and technical reports, (Conn 2003).

evaluations are generally only available to the funder and service delivery agency, they could be seen to form part of the body of 'grey literature' in the social sciences. Grey literature is often omitted from syntheses or meta-analyses because of difficulty in retrieval and in assessing quality. Despite this, the value of reviewing grey literature is increasingly recognised in the health sciences, with evidence that it helps overcome problems of publication bias (McAule, et al., 2000). Reviewing quantitative studies in nursing, Conn, et al. (2003) concluded that grey literature should be included in meta-analyses but that the impact of methodological variations should be assessed through analysis by a moderator. Researchers in this project applied techniques associated with meta-analysis to the reports they obtained, with a view to seeing how the literature could contribute to answering the research questions.

A critical contribution to policy development is the availability of data that is methodologically rigorous in order to gauge the potential impact of approaches under consideration. In this research we were interested in what could be said about the effectiveness or strengths of differing services delivery approaches, projects, programs and services to various homelessness population groups. One of our objectives was to draw on specific methodologies to assist in our meta-analysis of grey literature in order to help explore the literature in a structured way and to assess the usefulness of this approach to analysis of documents and ultimately, policy development.

4 | Methods

This research drew on ideas regarding methodological approaches to the systematic review of data from the Cochrane Collaborative Reviews (www.cochrane.org) (that are well known and used in reviews of health care interventions) and Campbell Reviews (www.campbellcollaboration.org/) that utilise a similar approach but that are more usually applied to other social policy fields. These scientifically focused approaches offer researchers an opportunity to clarify from the outset research project plans and parameters of their research and to adopt a highly structured approach to the research in hand. Whilst these approaches were generally useful to this research they were not wholly appropriate because the focus of this research was qualitative, often narrative data that required an approach that allowed some interpretation. Instead, a thematic synthesis which translates themes and concepts from one (in this case, a local service) situation into a broader scenario was used. The elements of Cochrane and Campbell reviews that this research drew upon were therefore as follows:

- Clear inclusion/ exclusion criteria
- An explicit search strategy
- Systematic coding and analysis of included studies.

5 | What counts as 'data'

Collection of data (reports) was dependent upon the goodwill of government and non-government service providers. In order to maximise the amount of material obtained it was decided not to be overly prescriptive about what kind of reports were acceptable but to canvas widely for documents and then sort through them. At the outset of this project, researchers agreed to include qualitative reports in which:

- analysis and commentary were present to some degree
- quantitative data may or may not appear
- narrative information was greater than quantitative
- there were no client interviews
- there could be data from a variety of homelessness population groups.

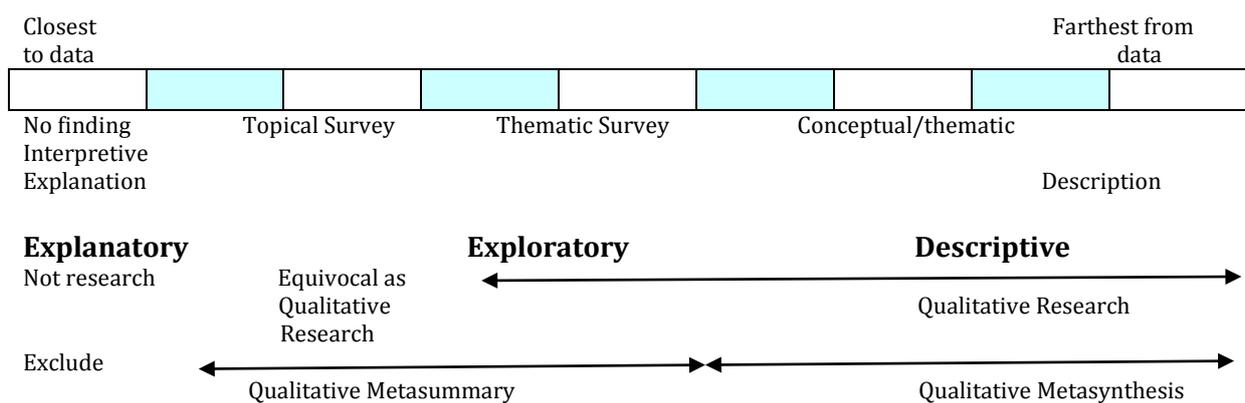
In addition, only those reports relating to homelessness services in Australia were accepted because this would enable a focus on a single national context.

The decision to use reports written within the last ten years (from July 2000) allowed a focus on more recent approaches to the service delivery. In recent years services have experienced a significant change in the way that national and state governments conceptualise and fund homelessness programs and services. Whilst the context of service delivery is not the focus of this report, it was important to researchers that the documents related as far as possible to contemporary times.

Reports were excluded if they provided only quantitative or NDCA data without interpretation; if they were without any investigation or if they were based on personal comments rather than analysis of data.

From the outset, it was clear that due to pressure of work, agency managers needed to be able to quickly identify reports that would best fit researchers' needs. For this reason, researchers accepted any report generously offered by a service with a view to reading and categorising it for its 'fit' with the data collection criteria on receipt. It was often only once the team read the report that its usefulness to the project could be gauged. In their work, Sandelowski and Barroso (2007, p134)² suggests a typology (Figure 1) to identify the different types of research reports. This was used to inform our approach to including or excluding reports.

Figure 1 | Types of report



Source: Sandelowski and Barroso (2007)

² Sandelowski, M & Barroso, J, 2007, *Handbook for Synthesizing Qualitative Research*, Springer Publishing Co. Inc. New York.

Sandelowski (2007) defines these types as:

- a) No finding – narrative reproductions without researcher interpretations
- b) Topical – reeling off facts – quantitative.
- c) Thematic – describe themes – more interpretation than topical research
- d) Conceptual/Thematic description – more interpretation with concepts/themes developed by the researcher on the basis of the data collected. Concepts etc are used to re-phrase phenomenon
- e) Interpretive Explanation – fully integrate explanations of phenomena, events or cases.

6 | Strategies for obtaining reports

The project aimed to identify a full list of agencies within each Australian state and territory jurisdiction that provided services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It was anticipated that government funding departments would hold information of funded services that would be able to be cross-referenced with information held by non-government organisations such as peak bodies (Councils of Social Services, Council for Homeless Persons) and advisory services (Citizen's Advice Bureau, Homelessness Information Services). In fact, there was little consistency between jurisdictions in the form, comprehensiveness and availability of such information and as a consequence the sources of agency data differed across them.

An initial search of websites of funding departments, peak bodies and advisory services identified some lists and databases of agencies providing support to homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. Where information was not provided on websites these organisations were contacted by phone to ask if service lists could be provided. Once contact details were obtained, phone calls were made to individual organisations requesting their involvement in the project, except in the case of Queensland, where the numbers of organisations identified and the limited time available meant that contact was made by email. An information sheet (Appendix 1) was provided to all email contacts and on request to those contacted by phone. Unfortunately some of the lists provided (whether via website or sent after a phone call) proved to be incomplete or contact details inaccurate.

Some peak bodies chose to forward information by email to relevant organisations, rather than providing contact details to the researchers. All of the large faith-based non-profit organisations delivering community services were contacted at both their national office and at state or territory offices, and all state and territory funding departments were directly contacted to ask for access to reports they had commissioned as well as for lists of agencies if not already accessed from their website. Telephone contacts were asked for suggestions for additional contacts or voluntarily provided suggestions about who else researchers should contact. This snowball approach proved effective in ensuring coverage of possible respondents, with substantial redundancy in suggestions. It also allowed researchers to access locally held information about other services that assisted homeless people but which fell outside of government funding or the mainstream agencies, or whose contact details were inaccurate in data available from websites and funders. The time period and intensity of follow up required was underestimated in the original plan for the project. In many instances repeated phone calls needed to be made to agencies before discussion of participation could even be initiated.

Table One shows the distribution of the 613 agencies that were directly contacted over a period of six weeks and the number of those agencies who forwarded documents and the number of items received.

As indicated researchers lacked time to directly contact the many agencies identified in Queensland and instead made email contact. The lack of direct, phone contact may have contributed to the small number of reports received in that state. However, direct and where necessary, repeated phone calls to agency managers did not result in a consistently high response rate. In some cases emails sent to local agencies or membership/contact groups produced an instant interest in the project. New South Wales was an example of this approach where two agencies forwarded the flyer to their contacts and many agencies responded positively. Thus, working through local coordinating agencies may have provided local credibility that assisted in eliciting reports. There was no one approach that produced the greatest number of reports and in some circumstances serendipity i.e. through good fortune contacting one person within an agency at the right time, was also critical in eliciting reports for this research.

Table One | Summary totals of documents received by jurisdiction

State	No. services/ agencies contacted	No. Agencies providing material (% of contacts)	No. Items Received (% of total reports)
SA	63	19 (19.0)	47 (20.0)
WA	93	12 (12.0)	52 (22.2)
Tas	26	4 (4.0)	11 (4.7)
NT	31	3 (3.0)	4 (1.7)
ACT	27	4 (4.0)	6 (2.6)
Queensland	259	10 (9.8)	11 (4.7)
NSW	57	21 (20.6)	46 (19.8)
Vic	57	22 (21.5)	47 (20.0)
National websites*	7	7 (7.0)	11 (4.7)
TOTALS	620	102	235

*downloaded from website

7 | Assessing the reports

Each report was read initially to identify its usefulness to the aim of the project using the criteria outlined in Section Five of this report. It was then allocated to one of four categories. Table Two shows the definition of categories and final allocation of reports.

Table Two | Report Categories, Definitions and Numbers

Report Category	Definition	No. Reports
Do Not Use	Statistical data without commentary or analysis; brief statements of services provided or other information with no commentary.	24
Background Information	General reports mentioning services or service philosophy in passing. These reports lacked in-depth information about services but often commented in passing about themes found in more	111

	in-depth reports.	
Service Comment	Reports that have data and analysis and are authored by a member of staff or someone inside the organisation to which the report relates.	61
Externally Written (Independent)	Reports that have been written by independent authors i.e. people external to organisations commissioning the work. Includes reports where there was a high degree of collaboration between author and commissioning organisation staff e.g. on steering committees.	39
TOTAL NUMBER OF REPORTS RECEIVED		235

Not all reports fitted easily into one category or another. Two members of the research team reviewed the reports included in 'background Information' group to ensure they had been appropriately categorised. As a result of a review of the categories and the reports allocated to each of these, there were some final minor adjustments to ensure consistency in the categorisation of similar report types. In addition, one duplicate report was removed. The large number of reports identified for Background Information use only was essentially the result of many reports being generously provided by services across Australia. These reports were retained for use because they often mentioned in passing themes that were explored in-depth in reports written by service personnel or external authors. Reports in this category included extracts from SAAP NDCA data reports and annual reports.

Reports identified as 'Service Comment' or 'Externally Written' (or 'Independent') Report were loaded into NVivo for analysis. A summary of information about each of the other reports was kept using the template at Appendix 2. Table Three shows the breakdown of categorisation of reports received by state or territory.

Table Three | Number of reports by jurisdiction and category

State	Don't use	Background Info only	Service Comment Use	Externally Written/Independent Report Use	TOTAL
SA	1	18	16	12	47
WA	5	33	11	3	52
Tas	2	2	0	7	11
NT	0	1	2	1	4
ACT	0	3	1	2	6
Qld*	0	9	1	1	11
NSW	13	14	16	3	46
Vic	2	29	11	5	47
National websites	1	2	3	5	11
TOTALS	24	111	61	39	235

The 100 reports that were most usable in this research project were those that are listed as 'service comments' (written by a member of staff) or 'externally written' or 'independent'. The

reports in these categories were diverse in scope, focus and methodologies adopted. Most emphasised effectiveness, whether that was at the level of an individual activity or across the full range of supports provided to clients. Fifty-eight incorporated client feedback (verbal or written) while others relied on worker judgements and observations. Many were completed as part of a funding requirement or primarily for external accountability while a smaller number were internal reviews. Table Four provides a breakdown of the types of reports received in the two categories of 'service comment' and 'externally written' (independent) reports.

Table 4 | Report focus as identified by authors

Report Focus	No. Service Comment Reports	No. Externally or Independently Written Reports
One-off Activities	3	0
Model or approaches to delivering supports	4	5
Funding Program	9	8
Research about accommodation and support	3	5
Services/Projects delivering support	41	20
Service System: the ways in which agencies collaborate and coordinate the delivery of support to specific client groups	1	1
TOTAL REPORTS	61	39

The researchers initially summarised each report and used this information for categorising and recording information about the research focus and independence/bias. Factors taken into account in identifying bias include the following:

- a) Report authors (the relationship between report authors and commissioning agency)
- b) Report steering groups/advisory panels
- c) Client involvement — methods and framework for client participation and data collection from clients

The report summaries also recorded review or evaluation approaches and findings. The first stage of NVivo analysis involved identifying key words and emerging themes that appeared in the reports. These themes were broad and appeared across client groups and also arose in different types of reports e.g. those focusing on evaluation of models or service reviews.

8 | Challenges and limitations

8.1 Language

Terms were used very inconsistently across reports, with the following particularly noted:

- 'service' was used to mean an organisation, a particular activity or set of activities, or all of the supports provided to clients
- 'project' was used to mean a pilot (of an activity or style of support delivery) or a one-off funded activity/ support or set of supports

- ‘model’ was used to describe broad approaches to service delivery although in evaluating these approaches, client data was collected about the range of supports they had received
- ‘program’ was used to generally describe a funding stream that facilitated ‘pilot projects’ or the delivery of on-going supports.

Ambiguity of language is less problematic if definitions are included in reports, however this tended not to be the case in the reports reviewed. Without them there is a risk of misinterpretation of findings and potentially challenges in replication.

For clarity and consistency we have defined and used the following terms throughout this report:

Activity	An organised event or recreational, educational, therapeutic, skills development session provided or facilitated by a government or non-government organisation. This may be one-off or part of a time-limited series.
Agency	An organisation which provides one or more types of support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
Program	A state/territory or national government system of funding projects or services intended to meet the needs of homeless people.
Support	One of a range of forms of assistance provided to clients. Used consistently with the NDCA data dictionary EXCEPT that accommodation is not included.
Service	The totality of supports actually provided to clients during their involvement with the agency. This may be unique to each client or there may be a consistent pattern within the agency. This includes pilots and projects which involved the provision of more than one type of support or activity.

8.2 Robustness of evaluation methods

Many reports failed to provide sufficient information about the data used or the basis of their findings to enable a judgement of generalisability or validity of findings. For example, where interviews were conducted with clients and/or workers some reports failed to identify the number of people interviewed; and most did not record the proportion of the total population represented, or the basis of selection. Many did not provide sufficient detail to help policy makers and practitioners translate findings to new situations. That is they had limited utility. Not surprisingly given the limited funding available for these evaluations, there were few comparative studies which directly compared the effect of provision of different kinds or style of support or comparisons of the provision of support versus no-support.

While recognising the challenge of attribution of outcomes to particular interventions in contexts where multiple supports are in place and often multiple agencies are offering support, the lack of attempts to explain the findings within reports and to articulate the ‘theory of change’ for the service provided limited their value in contributing to evidence-based policy. It must be recognised that the reports provided were written to meet a range of needs and were not intended for the purpose of this project. This finding does, however, highlight the importance of funding good quality evaluations if effective use is to be made of findings.

8.3 Limitations in reporting

Across reports there was an emphasis on the positive outcomes for clients with limited identification of unintended outcomes (positive or negative) or of analysis of reasons for less

positive outcomes. This is not surprising as many evaluations are undertaken with 'high stakes' consequences including renewal of funding, leading towards a bias to the positive. In many instances there were not clear criteria or standards for making value judgements.

These are not themes that are specific to one client group or type of service but are matters that have arisen in many of the service reviews and externally written documents provided to researchers. The themes cover a range of topics that are often associated with the environment in which homeless people are assisted or homelessness is averted or at least, delayed.

9 | Research results and discussion

This research identified five dominant themes that occurred across reports relating to all client groups. Each theme is identified and discussed below.

9.1 More than bricks and mortar

Twenty-nine of the 100 reports commented on the impact and importance of stable accommodation beyond 'bricks and mortar'. In particular, the acquisition of transitional or long-term independent, affordable housing was identified as a significant event in the lives of young people, single homeless men and women, people on parole and single parents. There were numerous comments from clients of all ages and circumstances that securing their own accommodation was a major achievement and brought with it something beyond physical shelter:

It has given me my independence, a place of being and belonging and something of my own (84).

When you have a house, you have something good instead of always having nothing. Not just a bag with your stuff. It gives you something to build on (96).

I got my kids back. I haven't had them in seven years. I've always lived on the streets. Now my kids can actually come and visit me, at my place. Getting the kids back means the world to me (96).

For men and women leaving prison, securing transitional or long-term housing made a considerable difference and helped to create the conditions in which a more positive future was possible (73,96). For some, it prevented speedy returns to prison:

If I can't get anywhere to live, I'm going back in (96).

Young people too, consistently highlighted the acquisition of affordable, secure housing as important to their broader well-being (2, 86). Although there were fewer comments, it was clear that certain aspects of stable housing were also important to some groups of single people and families. There were repeated comments regarding the quality of housing as being important to the well-being of previously homeless people (46). This related principally to the geographical location of housing i.e. in 'good' neighbourhoods (5, 19, 30, 35, 73, and 84) where single people and families felt safe.

To have such beautiful accommodation amongst lovely neighbours is a blessing. It's given me the opportunity to be independent, safe and secure (84).

Reports focusing on single women (30, 73), women with children (5, 30), families (35) and young people (5) suggested perceptions of safety were influenced by the *types* of neighbourhoods in which housing was located. There was little further detail provided but some young people in one study expressed concern about being allocated housing in close proximity to other young people because of their behaviour (5). However, being co-located appeared to work well for women leaving prison who lived independently but who were able also to reap the benefits of support provided by other women living nearby (73). Living in close proximity to other people using a similar service was also supported by single people (19, 84) who identified being known by their neighbours as a particular benefit.

The reports in this study also suggested that the physical environment was equally important to some groups of homeless people accessing emergency accommodation (18, 79, 85, 86, 108). Concerns about safety within a facility where 'lots of people with problems are together in the space' (79) and where there was some form of communal living were raised by young people (79, 86) and children (85). Factors contributing to feelings of safety were primarily the presence of staff on site (79) although having good relationships with other residents, being able to lock the door to your room (86) and placing security cameras on communal areas (79) were also mentioned as enhancing feelings of security. Externally, young people also mentioned that locating security cameras on entry points (79), constructing fencing (79, 108) or other forms of barriers to entry all improved their feelings of safety. However, whilst physical barriers and methods of surveillance could reassure young people it was human relationships with other clients, staff and neighbours and 'being known' to others living in close proximity to them that were mentioned most frequently as offering the greatest amount of comfort regarding their safety.

The benefits of acquiring stable, safe, secure accommodation are clearly articulated by clients interviewed in service review and evaluation reports in this study. However, it was notable that clients were clear the benefits of housing went beyond physical shelter and influenced feelings of well-being and when conditions were right, previously homeless people were able to re-build their lives as well as their futures.

9.2 The worker—client relationship

Twenty-nine of the 100 reports commented to varying degrees on the processes by which relationships between clients and agency staff were established, maintained and ended. Clients, staff and evaluators commented on the potential for quality relationships between staff and clients/customers to influence housing and homelessness outcomes and pathways.

It's all in the relationship (44)

Young people frequently reported that the relationships which they were able to form with youth homelessness support workers were paramount in their pathways out of homelessness (25).

Ensuring the continuity of quality relationships with [service] staff where they have already been built, will be crucial to achieving long-term outcomes for those who are most excluded (31).

How these relationships developed depended on the nature of the service being delivered and the time afforded staff to build rapport with prospective clients. Further, what comprised 'quality relationships' was at times clearly articulated in organisational service statements and also, was closely associated with documented service delivery values.

The process of engagement with clients was documented in detail in one independently written report (75) and mentioned to varying degrees in a further 28 of the 100 'usable' reports. It was clear from the perspective of service providers and evaluators, that building rapport with prospective and actual clients needed time (31, 46, 78, and 107) and was informed by the type of service being delivered. Time to build rapport was seen as important because it built a foundation upon which all client—worker interactions would occur.

In instances where reactive or crisis services were being provided there was little opportunity to develop rapport before providing assistance. Even in services that were less reactive or post-crisis, building rapport took staff time and added costs to agency budgets (108). Despite this, agencies that were able to devote worker time to this activity (31, 46, 96, 97, 99, and 107) noted the importance of creating 'windows of opportunity' (107) to develop positive relationships with potential clients. Examples of where this occurred included meal services that brought prospective clients into contact with support staff (31, 78). First contact was made casually over food and there was time for more general conversations that allowed people to get to know one another. Employing staff or training volunteers to welcome people and to initiate conversations with people eating the food was a deliberate strategy to build rapport and engage with potential clients/customers who may be seeking help. As one worker said:

We talk over breakfast-build rapport, before talking to people (78).

Sharing food is thus about more than addressing nutritional needs as these comments from food service providers suggest:

Providing meals is more than a means to addressing poverty and poor health; it can also be an opportunity to develop positive relationships between people who use services and those who work in them (31).

In order to achieve change and to provide pathways away from homelessness or disadvantage, the respectful and engaging provision of food can be an essential first step (31).

Offering healthy, nutritious food can provide an incentive to walk in the front door and to then access other support services (31).

Food services therefore are important in creating windows of opportunity to engage with potential clients and also offer opportunities to build rapport. Other activities that provide similar opportunities include art and craft workshops (58) and playgroups (85, 107).

As mentioned above post-crisis or referral-only accommodation and support workers were also able to build rapport with potential clients. For example two agencies providing accommodation and support to people on parole negotiated a six week referral process during which they were in phone contact with the potential client to discuss their services and options (96, 97).

According to the literature, rapport is able to be more easily built when relationships between workers and potential clients are non-judgemental (104) and develop on the basis of dignity (46, 80), mutual respect (2, 12, 25, 46, 58, 75), trust (46, 51), empathy (80) and adhere to agreements about confidentiality (79). Some agency workers commented on these component parts as informing the value base of the organisations in which they worked:

Respect is the cornerstone of practice – respect and empowerment should infuse everything we do (79).

Clients similarly indicated that empathy; non-judgemental approaches and making time to talk with clients (104) were components of respectful practices.

They don't judge (78)

Other places don't have the right attitude because they're judging rather than listening (78)

I feel much more comfortable here – everyone respects each other (78).

A service is good if they have respect for us. We want that.

This is the one place all street people are respectful (78)

When these foundations for engagement were in place clients generally felt more comfortable about seeking and accepting support. Whilst staff working in food and other non-emergency services had opportunities to establish some form of rapport prior to people becoming clients, the need to have time to build rapport was generally accepted as critical to achieving the best outcomes possible when a person sought help.

9.3 Beyond Rapport — Practical Help

Fifty reports highlighted the practical ways in which support workers, case managers or other members of staff assisted clients. Beyond having good rapport, clients were frequently dependent upon staff for many things but when they first accessed accommodation and support services, were often unaware of how precisely staff could help them (5, 9, 20). In contrast, by the end of their support experience with an agency many clients fully comprehended the support they had been provided with and the effect this had had on their lives. Hence reports often included comments such as:

She was not just doing things for me; she was helping change my life (90).

The worker was fantastic — I thank her from the bottom of my heart. Without her help I'm not sure what I would have done (59).

I want services to keep on doing what they are doing now for homeless young people because I saw everything they did for me which was worthwhile for my future (86)

In general, the literature suggested that staff worked with clients to identify what they wished to achieve during the time they were being provided with support. In drawing up a plan with the client, staff generally considered matters beyond accommodation. Across agencies there was frequent reference to holistic approaches that enabled a broad range of each client's needs and goals to be identified (51, 73, and 79). Reports suggested that the system for identifying needs and ways of addressing them is case planning — a process that culminates with a written document that is used as a monitoring tool by workers and clients. Some service review reports included comments about the use of case planning with a variety of client groups (8, 19, 38, 50, and 54). These included homeless men, single people, women using domestic violence services and homeless fathers with children. The case management plans were all differently focused for these clients. For instance in one service, as a part of their agreement with the accommodation and support service, homeless single people were compelled to identify ten activities or goals that were then monitored in weekly meetings with a case worker (19). Other approaches did not specify the number of goals that needed to be identified but worked with clients to set goals and devise a plan as to how to achieve the outcomes identified. It was not always the case that support workers took on the role of implementing the plan:

It is holistic in terms of the linkage, but not actually doing the work (79).

In these instances work was distributed across agencies depending on the nature of the outcomes to be achieved. However, some workers however bore the responsibility for implementing the plan in its entirety, if only for a short period of time after which assistance would begin to be tapered off. In the words of one worker, developing a holistic case plan meant that *'you do everything basically'* (79).

The development of holistic plans designed to meet diverse needs presents services with notable problems in how to access resources to ensure good outcomes (22, 25, 42, 51, 79, 92, and 96). The reports highlight the need for agency staff to focus outside of the organisation and to establish linkages with numerous agencies that are able to meet the identified need of clients and to build capacity within their services to assist clients in meeting their goals. The quote below is representative of the general views held about collaboration:

The only way to get good results is to ensure that agencies work in a co-ordinated manner, no one agency has all the resources required, you just have to (96).

For many services evaluated the following comments are also true:

Working with other services is central to achieving positive outcomes for clients (96).

Without this [linkages with other services] the program could not exist (42).

The reports suggested that the methods for linking with other services differed from area to area and collaborative networks could also be specific to client groups. In rural areas there was an impression that because 'everyone knows everyone' (2) linking in order to gain access to resources to assist clients was easier. However, this appeared to not always be the case (2).

Local network meetings were also highlighted as a way to develop linkages that would benefit clients (92) and that reciprocal arrangements whereby other services would cross-refer clients to each other were common. The evidence from the reports suggests that linkages made by staff members benefit all client groups (28, 33, 37, and 38). The literature suggests that establishing links within the homelessness and support systems not only helps the client but also builds the knowledge base of staff who are then better informed about other services and able to make more appropriate referrals (92). In general the literature suggests that for NGOs, establishing links with government agencies is more problematic than approaching organisations in the same sector (93) principally because of the different paradigms within which each operates. For instance one housing service encountered problems when working with a mental health agency that stopped supporting a client but did not tell anyone (93). The housing service became aware of the withdrawal when they visited their tenant who had begun to suffer as a result of the lack of support. The need to establish clear understandings between agencies that link to support a client is advocated in order that should help be withdrawn the client is not disadvantaged. The reports suggest therefore that the role of the worker is critical in facilitating linkages that will improve client outcomes.

Despite the important role staff play to maximise the benefits to clients, little was specifically said about their role in improving client outcomes. The service reports seen within this research project included quantifications of what services had been provided to clients; the number of different types of assistance they had been in receipt of; and a list of the number of outcomes that have been achieved. In these reports there is often little to explain how clients have secured those achievements. In some service reports, descriptions of worker contributions to client outcomes is almost absent although it is pivotal to facilitating the positive outcomes that are recorded for clients.

The flow-on effects of the linkages established between staff to assist clients are well documented in the literature. However what works for clients also is the positive relationship they have with a staff member who will help them or talk with them on a regular basis. Young people in particular liked workers to be 'hands-on' and providing direct help to them on a number of fronts (79). This comment was a particular plea from one young person:

Help me make decisions, things that mums and dads do but they are not around to do it, so support from a worker is the same thing (86).

What works for clients therefore is to have a good working relationship with a member of staff who will both provide advice and support and act entrepreneurially and develop external linkages that will contribute to the longer-term well-being and independence of the client.

9.4 Working with Others

Inter-agency collaboration or coordination is often identified as a means to achieving better client outcomes, and was a desired outcome in itself in a number of pilot project reports.

Thirty-six reports discussed some aspect of inter-agency collaboration with the majority (29) identifying the time and effort required to build and sustain relationships. One important aspect of relationship building was developing shared understanding (6,28,99,100,101,106), often developed through attendance at meetings including formal networks and individual agency visits (3,7,14,15,33,34,81,91,92,97,107). Two reports (82,101) identified the value of being able to build on previous history of working together which enabled building on previously established trust. Another two (2, 81) indicated that working in smaller or rural locations made it easier to develop effective collaborative practice. Tensions were identified where there were different priorities and/or agency practices in only three reports (58, 99,106), however as the focus of the reports tended to be on what worked well it is possible that this was a more common experience than it appears.

A number of structural arrangements were identified as supporting effective inter-agency work including:

- Memoranda of Understanding between agencies (58,71,92,94,96,97,99,106,107,108)
- Clearly defining roles (54,82,99,107)
- Documenting practice principles, including information sharing protocols (25,26,56,58,71)
- Designating responsibility for inter-agency relationships to a position (91,101)
- Co-locating services (either permanently or on a visiting basis) (31,58,71,72,78,81,82,100,104,107)

Twelve reports (7,13,25,26,33,74,85,92,96,97,99,108) identified the benefits from their inter-agency work as more efficient and effective service delivery with less duplication, and better, more sustainable outcomes for clients.

9.5 Sustaining Tenancies

A critical matter raised in 28 of the 100 documents was the extent to which agency workers could continue to support clients who resided in transitional or longer-term housing. In this area, support workers were keen to help clients sustain their tenancies and avoid returns to crisis accommodation facilities. It appeared that most approaches to support or case worker withdrawal were flexible and tailored according to individual needs (26). In some cases, formal exit planning (108) occurred and post-exit strategies (107) were developed by workers in collaboration with clients. In many cases exits were never scenarios in which a client/agency relationship completely ended as workers continued to be connected to clients, in some cases, for many years (30). Clients who had maintained contact with services over the years expressed appreciation for the support they had been given and valued workers for 'staying the journey' (3) with them. Where these types of relationship existed there were generally 'peaks and troughs' (93) in the patterns of contact which enabled workers to provide assistance as and when needed. In some instances, this long-term relationship that facilitated intermittent contact on an as-needed basis was viewed as preventing homelessness and provided workers with the opportunity to activate a range of supports as necessary (22). Long-term support of this type worked well for these clients.

Both independent evaluations and service reports repeatedly recorded the view that long-term support to varying degrees was needed for young people (12, 44, 75) women (52, 73, 92), single

people/homeless people generally (19, 23, 38, 70, 96, 99, 107) and some public housing tenants (33). The question for many services attempting to work with clients to sustain transitional or longer-term housing was how to resource this activity when particular programs provided only for shorter-term support periods. This dilemma was noted in detail in some service review reports. For instance one program working with young people requiring intensive support was funded to provide intensive outreach for six months, although the service report noted that 50 per cent of young people they assisted needed longer than six months support (12). For clients with many needs and poor track records of sustaining tenancies, the withdrawal of support at six months was seen to have resulted in a failure to sustain their tenancies and a return to homelessness. In other scenarios tenants were left unsupported (70) and their tenancies failed. Similarly, in women's services one agency noted that they were unable to deliver on-going support to many women because their funding was only sufficient to support a set number of people outside of their shelter service (52). In all, the literature strongly suggested that fixed-term support periods are unlikely to guarantee that tenancies will be sustained (19, 23, 26, 33, 38, 44, 52, 22, 12, 70, 75, 82, 93, 99, 107, and 108) due to the range of issues with which many previously homeless people are contending. The provision of flexible support over sometimes long periods of time was stressed as necessary to help people sustain their housing. One independent report commented:

[the] duration of support needs to be as long as necessary – not fixed term (82).

In at least two instances it was suggested that long-term support may need to be provided for more than one year (82, 99) and be tailored to individual needs. It is clear from the literature that many agencies currently lack the capacity to appropriately support clients in the medium to longer-term and at the same time provide support to clients accessing other aspects of their services. The inference is that many clients are at risk of repeated episodes of homelessness. Whilst homelessness may in any case recur for some of these clients (12, 19) the capacity of agency staff to prevent episodes of homelessness would appear to be constrained particularly where their funding arrangements specify time-limits on the support provided. In terms of what works well for homeless people, these reports would appear to suggest that the clients' capacity to sustain their tenancies is highly personalised and more flexibility with regard to the length of time over which support can be provided may assist in building their capacity to sustain their tenancies and also reduce some instances of repeated homelessness (12, 44, 33, 19, 75, 82, 92, 107). The literature also suggests discussing these areas is sometimes difficult because of their connection with notions of 'building dependency' (79). There were also instances where some services preferred to be able to draw the line and have clear boundaries about the length of time they would support a client (79). Despite this, the weight of opinion in the reports appeared to suggest that increased flexibility regarding the length of time a person is supported (where it was mutually agreed) would be beneficial to many clients in the longer-term. It is important to note also that long-term support may be less effective where it is imposed as a condition of tenancy, and that client and worker perceptions of the desirable frequency of contact may vary. In one report, weekly support sessions for young people appeared to be tolerated by some clients, rather than being perceived as useful.

It's too much for me.....Weekly – I don't have the time (75).

I get annoyed sometimes that we have to meet them [youth workers] every week. 'Cause I reckon we should only have to meet them if we have problems (75).

Where support is imposed therefore it may be of limited use unless a client requires highly specific assistance. However, services may derive more benefit by being able to maintain contact with the client and gain some indications of his or her general well-being. In general, it would appear from the literature (that includes many young people) that in many scenarios, ongoing support is valued and helpful particularly where it is designed to meet individual's needs and is mutually agreed upon.

10 | Policy and program implications

This project was exploratory in nature, seeking to identify whether evaluation reports would, if aggregated, provide evidence that would assist policy making. The data collected suggests that there is limited capacity to aggregate data to enable policy-relevant findings. The reports have, more positively, provided support for the importance of a number of aspects of practice through the regularity of their identification across different reports.

The findings are consistent with a 'housing first' approach in which homeless people are moved into secure accommodation as quickly as possible; with a case manager who can advocate for a range of support that is specific to the needs of individual clients; and for varying time periods. The reports suggest the location and quality of accommodation are particular concerns for vulnerable people who require a stable and secure base from which they can move forward. There is the need therefore, for governments to continue to work together in order to release resources that will enable agency workers to gain access to appropriate long-term accommodation that can assist homeless people in achieving stability and security in the longer-term. It appeared clear from the reports that the benefits of this approach to helping homeless people went far beyond the utility of providing a shelter. The shortage of public housing however presents dilemmas for homeless people who need secure accommodation so they can address other aspects of their lives.

The reports also affirm current practice implemented within many homelessness services. For example, the role of case managers in ensuring the delivery of targeted and highly individualised services to meet specific needs. The importance of rapport between client and workers; and the devising of processes of engagement that facilitate the offer of help in a way that allows potential clients to retain their dignity; are clearly important components of contemporary service delivery practice.

The reports also indicate that no service works in isolation; and that workers and agencies collaborate on many levels in order to help clients achieve their aims. The reports highlight the capacity that can be built within a service system that cooperates, but how working across organisational cultures and paradigms can be problematic and resource intensive. In particular, the government/non-government nexus remains complex terrain to traverse particularly for non-government services.

The last issue raised in the report is the need for flexible support; often over long periods of time. To a large extent these findings are consistent with current government approaches and investment in tenancy support approaches. However, the grey literature surveyed highlights resource limitations and the ongoing need to explore the development of new models to suit local circumstances.

A final word needs to be said about the literature and the role of grey literature in policy development at an aggregate level. It is clear the broad themes identified in the literature have resonance with current homelessness agendas. The limitations of evaluation reports as grey literature include the multiplicity of purposes for which the reports are written, the highly nuanced and tailored approach each evaluation or review takes, the emphasis on highlighting the positive findings with little or no exploration of less successful activity, and the lack of consistent terminology across the sector. The lack of reflection on the effectiveness of services or programs in the context of a broader homelessness services system limits the usefulness of these types of reports (at local and national level) both as feedback mechanisms to commissioning services as well as to policy-makers who may be uncertain in any case, as to what to expect from a report.

In this research, an exploration of grey literature has reinforced the importance of themes acknowledged as important aspects of the homelessness service delivery system and elements of good practice. Based on the literature included in this research however, the critical point in terms of adequately addressing homelessness remains access to secure, good quality accommodation and the provision of this remains an on-going challenge which will limit the extent of the reduction of homelessness.

11 | Conclusion

This report has highlighted selected findings from the grey literature held within and by organisations working in the homelessness sector. The reports provide an insight into the philosophies and values that underpin the delivery of accommodation and support to homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. In addition, the reports provide insights into the work agencies do to assist homeless people at various stages along the housing pathway. In some ways the language used to describe their aims in providing a range of supports is consistent. That is, irrespective of client group, workers aim to consider individual needs holistically, work collaboratively and flexibly with clients and other agencies as much as possible to generate good outcomes. How services do this varies, driven in part by resource considerations, at times location and the nature of the support they are delivering, and agency or individual values and philosophies. At a broad level, clients are for the most part satisfied with the assistance they are provided. What works well for them is for assistance to be provided while maintaining client dignity and respect, and for workers to take time to listen to clients, to help them explore what is possible in their future directions, to open doors for them and particularly to help them find secure, stable housing. With a focus on documenting and often quantifying client outcomes in reports written by services, there is less of a focus on what it is that workers have done or how support is provided. Few reports in this study drew out the pivotal role of the worker and detailed the activities associated with case work/management despite the inference that their involvement and the rapport they built with clients had the capacity to transform lives.

At the very least, what works best for clients is that staff don't give up on them when things go wrong and remember the things they have achieved despite the many difficulties they have previously encountered in their lives. What works best in these circumstances was encapsulated in the words of one client who said:

Even though we are not totally mended people we have come a long way...(19)

While the data obtained from evaluation reports did not support the original research questions it has highlighted the potential for the development of evaluation within the sector. The commitment of many agencies to improving their practice was evident in a number of internally commissioned reports. Better use of program theory to explain approaches and clarity of the values underpinning the evaluation activity is likely to lead to more useful reports, whether completed for service improvement or for accountability. There is an untapped source of evidence for determining good practice in the examination of negative cases – those instances where positive outcomes are not achieved – but little incentive for agencies to explore such cases where evaluation reports are aimed at sustaining program funding.

12 | References

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FLINDERS UNIVERSITY 2010 HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH PROJECT

The Flinders University of South Australia has been funded by the Commonwealth Government to carry out research into the delivery of services to homeless people. In brief, our research aims to identify what assistance works well for which homeless people and why. This Information Sheet outlines the project and provides contact details if you wish to know more about our work.

Services to Homeless People – What works, in what circumstances and why?

This research project seeks to gather information from service evaluation or assessment reports in order to draw out information about what aspects of service provision have worked well for homeless people, in what circumstances and why they are regarded as successful. Our qualitative work will be based on information (from the last five years or so) provided to us by organisations assisting homeless people with accommodation and/or social support services. We believe evaluation and similar types of reports may have the capacity to broadly contribute to sector knowledge about service models and approaches to preventing and responding to homelessness.

The research project team is hopeful that accommodation and social support services across Australia will help us in our work by providing us with a copy of their recent evaluation reports for inclusion in our project. We guarantee confidentiality to those who assist us as we are not concerned with identifying the names or locations of services. Rather, we are interested in analysing what evaluation reports might say about which aspects of service provision work and why they have worked well.

Our work will involve broadly categorising the different types of services and environments and also considering evaluation contexts, methodologies, findings and other qualitative factors. All of these elements and more will influence what is said in our final report.

As our analysis depends on gathering together as many reports as possible, we are keen to talk with accommodation and support providers across Australia about our project. If you have an evaluation report you can provide to us or know of someone else you think we should talk with please contact eleanor.button@flinders.edu.au or contact Eleanor by phone on 08 7221 8677.

We are also happy to keep you up-to-date with information about our project. If you would like to be added to our email list, please contact Eleanor (details above) and we will send occasional emails about our work. Many thanks for your help and interest.

Report Summary Sheet

REPORT SUMMARY						
<i>Report Title & year</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Commissioning agency</i>	<i>Report Type</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Client group</i>	<i>Findings</i>
Comments/Notes:						