

Accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children

Report number 2

Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity

August 2002

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory



Committee membership

Mr John Hargreaves MLA (Chair)

Ms Roslyn Dundas MLA (Deputy Chair)

Mrs Helen Cross MLA

Secretary: Ms Judith Henderson

Administration: Mrs Judy Moutia

Resolution of appointment

(1) The following general purpose standing committees be established and each committee to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community: ...

(e) a Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity to examine municipal, family and youth services, services for older persons, housing, poverty, children at risk and multicultural and indigenous affairs;¹ ...

Terms of reference

Inquire into and report on:

1. accommodation and support services for homeless men and their accompanying children; and
2. any other related matter.

¹ Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings, No 2*, Fifth Assembly, p 12.

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Summary of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

2.18. The committee recommends that the ACT Government draw to the attention of the relevant Commonwealth authority the inadequacy of the current SAAP definition of homelessness with a view to including in the definition people ‘sleeping rough’.

RECOMMENDATION 2

4.13. The committee recommends that the ACT Government provide additional crisis accommodation services for single men over 25 years of age and families.

RECOMMENDATION 3

4.14. The committee recommends that the Government continue to monitor the need for additional accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children together with the appropriateness of the funding available.

RECOMMENDATION 4

5.19. The committee recommends that the Government examine ways to provide more appropriately designed crisis accommodation facilities for families.

RECOMMENDATION 5

5.20. The committee recommends that the ACT Government implement as a matter of urgency the recommendations of the report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* in relation to support for children.

RECOMMENDATION 6

5.21. The committee recommends that the ACT Government provide ongoing funding for intervention programs for boys aimed at preventing the perpetuation of domestic violence.

1. Introduction

Background

1.1. On 13 December 2001, the Assembly referred the issue of accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children to the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity for inquiry and report.

Scope of the inquiry

1.2. The terms of reference of the inquiry charged the committee with inquiring into issues related to accommodation and support services for homeless men and their accompanying children. This group includes homeless:

- fathers with accompanying children
- fathers with regular access to children.

1.3. While at the end of 2001, some sections of the community expressed concern about the tendering process for the only publicly-funded service for this group, the matter of the tendering process is not within the scope of this inquiry.

Needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT

1.4. In October 2001, the then Department of Education and Community Services, which administered the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), commissioned the ACT Council of Social Services Inc to conduct a needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT. The report of the study *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* was released in July 2002.

1.5. It is a comprehensive report that provides much needed information and the committee commends ACTCOSS. Until the release of the report there was very little information on the nature and extent of homelessness in the ACT and appropriate responses to the problem.

1.6. While the terms of reference of this inquiry are limited to accommodation and support services for homeless men and their accompanying children and related matters, the issue needs to be examined in the broader context of homelessness in the ACT. In doing this the committee found the ACTCOSS study invaluable.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.7. The committee advertised the inquiry in *The Canberra Times* and *The Chronicle* in early February 2002. In addition, letters inviting input were sent to 32 organisations expected to have an interest in the inquiry.

1.8. A total of nine submissions were received. A list of submissions received is at Appendix 1.

1.9. The committee conducted public hearings on 20 June 2002 and 11 July 2002. Details of those who appeared are at Appendix 2.

1.10. The committee wishes to thank all who participated in this inquiry.

2. Homelessness in the ACT

2.1. The ACT Government and other participants in the inquiry stressed that homelessness is generally not a condition of itself but a result of other factors. These may include alcohol or drug addiction, mental health issues, education level, unemployment, gambling, family violence or the breakdown of stable relationships.²

2.2. Participants also stressed that the provision of immediate accommodation is the first priority for those who are temporarily or habitually homeless.

2.3. It must also be considered that for some people homelessness is a choice and that the provision of complementary support services might be the first priority.

Definitions of Homelessness

2.4. The report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* noted that it is now generally acknowledged in the literature that:

- there are different types of homelessness;
- there are different stages of homelessness - for some people homelessness is a short-term or temporary experience, for others it becomes a long-term or permanent state; and
- definitions and theories on homelessness must recognise cultural differences.³

2.5. There are a number of definitions of homelessness.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) definition

2.6. One definition of a homeless person is that used by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) as follows.

A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing.

A person is considered to not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access:

- damages, or is likely to damage their health; or
- threatens their safety; or
- marginalises them through failing to provide access to:
 - adequate personal amenities or

² Submission 8, ACT Government, Canberra Fathers and Children Service, Transcript, p 2.

³ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, Canberra, June 2002.

- the economic and social supports that home normally affords or places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affects the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or
- has no security of tenure - that is they have no legal right to continued occupation of their home.

A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.⁴

2.7. The committee notes that this definition does not include people who are 'sleeping rough', that is those with no shelter other than perhaps a clothes bin or public toilet. Such people could include men seeking accommodation in a service for homeless men and their children in order to have access to their child/children. The committee understands that this definition is included in the recently negotiated five year bilateral SAAP agreements with each jurisdiction.⁵

Definitions included in Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT

2.8. The report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, draws on two definitions of homelessness, namely, the generic description used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the indigenous description of homelessness.

Generic description of homelessness

2.9. The generic description of homelessness is as follows.

Primary homelessness (sleeping rough): When people are without conventional accommodation – living on the streets, in deserted buildings, in cars, under bridges, in improvised dwellings etc.

Secondary homelessness (stop gap accommodation): When people move between various forms of temporary shelter, including friends, relatives, emergency accommodation and boarding houses.

Tertiary homelessness (insecure tenure / marginally housed): When people are living in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards with no security of tenure or which is unsafe or harmful to their health.⁶

Indigenous description of homelessness

2.10. The indigenous description of homelessness is as follows.

Spiritual forms of homelessness: which relate to separation from traditional land or from family.

⁴ Submission 8, ACT Government, p 3.

⁵ Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, correspondence to the Chair of the Estimates Committee 2002-2003, dated 29 July 2002.

⁶ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. p 22.

Overcrowding: a hidden form of homelessness which is said to be causing considerable stress and distress to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Relocation and transient homelessness: which results in temporary, intermittent and often cyclical patterns of homelessness due to transient and mobile lifestyles, but also to the necessity of a large proportion of the indigenous population having to travel to obtain services.

Escaping an unsafe or unstable home: for their own safety or survival, particularly in relation to women escaping domestic violence or young people.

Lack of access to any stable shelter: accommodation or housing – regarded as the worst form of homelessness.⁷

Stages of homelessness

2.11. The report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* refers to the three stages of homelessness identified by Chamberlain and Johnson. They are as follows.

At risk: people who are in housing crisis. The crisis can be ongoing, lasting several months or short-term, and is experienced differently by young people and adults.

Homelessness: people experiencing primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness.

Chronic homelessness: people experiencing homelessness who have come to accept (or experience) homelessness as a way of life.⁸

The prevalence of homelessness in the ACT

2.12. In its submission, the Government advised that it had identified a lack of comprehensive and reliable data to support service planning and delivery in addressing homelessness in the ACT.⁹

2.13. However some research over the last few years has identified the provision of affordable housing as a critical issue for the ACT, for example recommendations of the Poverty Task Group. As a result of this research an Affordable Housing Task Force has been established to consider options for public and community housing and developing broad based strategies for increasing housing affordability. The Task Force is due to report in October 2002.

2.14. Since the receipt of the Government's submission in June 2002, the Government has released the report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*

⁷ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002 p 23.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Submission 8, ACT Government, p 3.

2.15. The report makes the following findings in relation to the prevalence of homelessness in the ACT.

- The number of people experiencing homelessness in the ACT at any one time is estimated to be 1,265 - 1,570.
- As many as 5,350 people may experience homelessness in the ACT each year.
- The number of people 'sleeping rough' each night is between 120 and 315.
- The number of people in stop-gap accommodation in the ACT at any one time is estimated to be 600.
- The number of people experiencing insecure tenure or marginal housing is at a minimum 500 households at any given time.¹⁰

Conclusion

2.16. Homelessness has been identified as a major issue of concern in the ACT by several recent studies. As many as 5,350 people in the ACT experience homelessness each year.

2.17. The committee is concerned that the SAAP definition of homelessness does not include those 'sleeping rough'. Surely such people are homeless. The committee considers that the definition needs changing and requests that the Government raise the matter with the Commonwealth.

Recommendation 1

2.18. The committee recommends that the ACT Government draw to the attention of the relevant Commonwealth authority the inadequacy of the current SAAP definition of homelessness with a view to including in the definition people 'sleeping rough'.

¹⁰ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. pp 7-9.

3. Current services for homeless men and their children

Canberra Fathers and Children Service

3.1. At the time of the inquiry (2002) there was only one specific crisis accommodation service for homeless men and their accompanying children in the ACT - Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) which commenced operation in February 2002 and is an auspice of Marymead in partnership with the Canberra Men's Reference Group.

3.2. This service replaced the Mens Accommodation and Crisis Service (MAACS) that was provided by the Lone Fathers Association.

3.3. CANFaCS is located on the north side of Canberra. The committee noted that there is no such facility on the south side of Canberra.

3.4. It provides crisis accommodation, case management and outreach support services to fathers with accompanying children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It also provides a service to at-risk or homeless fathers who need safe, secure housing to enable them to spend time with their children and from where they can move towards independent living in their own accommodation.

St Jude's

3.5. St Jude's is an accommodation service provided by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. It provides medium-term supported accommodation and other support services to couples or single parents, with legal custody of their children. The families must be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. In that context it can help fathers and children.¹¹ However it is not a crisis accommodation service.

YWCA

3.6. The YWCA also provides supported accommodation on a short-to medium-term basis for families. It has seven properties for this purpose.¹²

Other accommodation services

3.7. There is a range of other services that can be accessed by men and children. These include places such as Ainslie Village, Samaritan House, Emmaus Ministries Inc, services for men with alcohol and drug issues, and youth accommodation services. However none of these services is able to take men and their children together.

¹¹ Transcript, 20 June 2002, p 37.

¹² Minister for Disability, Housing, and Community Services, correspondence dated 29 July 2002.

The need for additional services

3.8. CANFaCS reported that even though it has achieved a 25 per cent increase in service delivery compared to the previous provider, it is still unable to meet the demand. In mid June 2002, CANFaCS accommodated five high needs families and was providing outreach support to a further 13 fathers.¹³

3.9. However at the same time there were 15 fathers with accompanying children awaiting accommodation and since commencing operation in February 2002, the service has received approximately five referrals a week.¹⁴

3.10. The options for those that are unable to be accommodated are limited. CANFaCS advised that some people passing through Canberra continue to move. Others will stay with a variety of friends and family until they are no longer welcome. Some live in cars with their children. Some live in accommodation that places both the father and children at risk of violence and abuse.¹⁵

3.11. The Government advised that the level of demand for this service has not been clear (due to performance issues and data collection discrepancies of the previous provider).¹⁶ It is expected that this issue will become clearer by the end of 2002.

The needs of fathers and children accommodated by CANFaCS

3.12. CANFaCS reported that many of the fathers who use the service have complex needs and require significant case management support, including counselling as well as assistance with dealing with a range of agencies.¹⁷

3.13. Funding of the service only allows for one worker to be on duty during the day and another until 10 pm in the evening. There is no funding to provide support at weekends.

3.14. During the day there are often two or three men queuing to see the worker. There are also demands placed on the service by those not able to be accommodated but who would benefit from an outreach service. The evening worker can be stretched to the limit providing counselling, assistance with parenting, cooking, domestic chores, administrative tasks and helping fathers with health and well-being issues. That worker also has to manage crisis admissions. At weekends when all families, including children on access visits with their father, are present and interacting with each other no support can be provided.¹⁸

3.15. Children also need specialised support.

¹³ Submission 9, Canberra Fathers and Children Service, p 7; Transcript, p 5.

¹⁴ Submission 9, Canberra Fathers and Children Service, p 7.

¹⁵ Transcript, p4, p5.

¹⁶ Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, correspondence dated 29 July 2002.

¹⁷ Submission 9, Canberra Fathers and Children Service, p 11.

¹⁸ Transcript, p 10.

3.16. CANFaCS reported that children accompanying their father to the service are often under enormous pressure and face complex challenges. CANFaCS does not have funds to employ a designated children's worker. CANFaCS considers that a skilled children's worker would greatly assist children who have experienced high levels of conflict, frequent changes of location and changes in family circumstances.¹⁹

3.17. Other witnesses also stressed the need to work with children as a preventative measure as well as assisting them to deal with the issues facing them at the time.²⁰

3.18. The issue of the appropriateness of girls accompanying their fathers to a refuge predominately for males was raised. This is a complex matter that has no easy answer. The importance of keeping the family together needs to be balanced with the potential risks faced by a girl/young woman in a predominately male refuge. The design of the facility is an important consideration, as are the policies in place to ensure the safety of all residents.²¹

Conclusion

3.19. As the only dedicated crisis accommodation service for homeless men and their children CANFaCS is unable to meet the demand and consequently has a waiting list.

3.20. The level of support able to be provided to fathers and children is limited by resource constraints. The committee is particularly concerned that the service is unable to provide support at weekends - a time when the house is often full and also a time when some fathers are accommodated to enable them to have access to their children.

3.21. A further concern of the committee is that as a service for homeless men *and* their children, funding limitations do not enable CANFaCS to employ a dedicated children's support worker.

3.22. These concerns will be discussed later in the report in the context of unmet need and support for children in crisis accommodation services in the ACT.

¹⁹ Submission 9, Canberra Fathers and Children Service, p 12.

²⁰ Transcript, p 27.

²¹ Transcript, p 4, 5, 19, 29.

4. Unmet need in crisis accommodation services in the ACT

Analysis of need

4.1. Anecdotal evidence provided to the committee suggests that there is a large number of men and women seeking crisis accommodation who are unable to be accommodated in existing services. For example:

- Toora Women Inc reported that in the first six months of 2002 it turned away 300 women - a 100 per cent increase in turnaways on the previous six months;²²
- Beryl Women's Refuge told the committee that in the week before the public hearing in June 2002 it turned away eight women and 17 children - two of the families were living in cars;²³
- the Domestic Violence Crisis Service reported that due largely to refuges being full, in 2000-01 it accommodated in motels 44 women accompanied by 90 children, one adult male accompanied by two children, 12 single adult women and one single adult male;²⁴
- Samaritan House reported that it can only accommodate 24 per cent of requests; it turned away about 1,845 men in 2001-2002 or on average 36 per week;²⁵
- Canberra Fathers and Children Service reported a waiting list of 15 fathers and children in mid June 2002; and
- the Lone Fathers Association (which no longer runs a crisis accommodation service) reported it receives two or three calls a night from men requiring crisis accommodation.²⁶

4.2. As part of the study *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, a study of unmet need for supported accommodation was conducted. During the two week unmet demand data collection period there were 380 valid unmet requests for SAAP assistance. These requests were from 341 people/couples with 218 accompanying children.²⁷

4.3. Although it was not possible to stratify the potential client group from the data, the results of the study indicate that unmet need seems to be particularly high among:

- single adults without accompanying children

²² Transcript, p 26.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Submission 7, Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc, p 2.

²⁵ St Vincent de Paul Society, correspondence dated 24 July 2002.

²⁶ Transcript p 44.

²⁷ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. p 39.

- couples and single adults with accompanying children
- young people (including those under 16 years of age), and
- indigenous people.²⁸

4.4. While it is accepted that there is a level of unmet need for men with accompanying children, the study did not identify this group as a priority need in comparison to other groups. In terms of the unmet need for men, the group most in need are single men over 25 - this group also represents the largest proportion of people experiencing homelessness who are 'sleeping rough'.

Specific areas of unmet need

Crisis accommodation for men

4.5. As noted earlier in this report, the crisis accommodation services for men that the committee heard from, all reported that they cannot accommodate the demand. Other witnesses reported difficulties in finding crisis accommodation to which clients could be referred.²⁹ The Society of St Vincent de Paul advocated for another men's service similar to Samaritan House to be established on the south side of Canberra.³⁰

Crisis accommodation for women

4.6. The situation is no better for women. According to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service there have been no new women's refuges funded since the mid 1980s, but demand has continued to grow.³¹

Services for families

4.7. The lack of crisis accommodation for families was raised by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and Beryl Women's Refuge. In this context families can include a woman and her sons over 12 years of age, a woman with children or a mother, father and children escaping domestic violence from another family member.³²

4.8. Since there is only one refuge that will accommodate male children up to 16 years, because they have separate family units, the options in these circumstances are usually to split the family - for example, the female members go to a female refuge and the male members to a different refuge, or to provide motel accommodation. Neither of these options is satisfactory. Motel accommodation can be very stressful for a woman with a number of children - the space is small and the woman and

²⁸ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. pp 7-9.

²⁹ Transcript, p 22; p 45.

³⁰ Transcript, p 36.

³¹ Transcript, p 18.

³² Submission 7, Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc; Submission 21 to the inquiry into the 2002-2003 Budget from the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

children can be severely traumatised needing on site support. Splitting the family at a time when they need each others' support also is most undesirable.

4.9. Another option for large families is the halfway house operated by Beryl Women's Refuge. However the committee was told that the service could be forced to close as an option for referral for people in crisis because it is not funded as a crisis service but only as a halfway house, for people in transition from crisis to more stable accommodation.³³

Services for older men perpetuating domestic violence

4.10. The difficulties facing older women escaping domestic violence were reported to be further compounded by issues such as the length the relationship, traditional values and lack of appropriate resources.³⁴

4.11. According to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service many older women in a violent relationship refuse to take any action against the person who has used violence against them typically a long term partner (husband or de facto), unless other accommodation and support is in place for that person as well. Situations like this often result in the woman remaining in the abusive environment, even after they have reached out for assistance, because of lack of options.³⁵

Conclusion

4.12. There is significant unmet need for crisis accommodation among single men over 25 years of age and families. The evidence before the committee did not indicate that additional services for homeless men and their accompanying children is a priority at this stage, however analysis of the information from CANFaCS in the future may show a different picture.

Recommendation 2

4.13. The committee recommends that the ACT Government provide additional crisis accommodation services for single men over 25 years of age and families.

Recommendation 3

4.14. The committee recommends that the Government continue to monitor the need for additional accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children together with the appropriateness of the funding available.

³³ Transcript, p 29.

³⁴ Submission 7, Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc.

³⁵ *ibid.*

5. The children

5.1. This inquiry is concerned specifically with accommodation and support services for homeless men and their children. The committee sees the children as a most important consideration.

Accommodation

5.2. The current crisis accommodation arrangements of, in most cases, several families sharing a small house pose many problems for adults and children. As the Co-ordinator of Beryl Women's Refuge told the committee:

We have houses that are smaller than my own three-bedroom house and three families live in those. There can be 12 or 13 little children in one small three-bedroom house at any given time. Get 12 or 13 little children in a house with three different mothers-one who loves to clean, one who never cleans and one who has specific cultural needs-and you have set up a bonfire.³⁶

5.3. As mentioned earlier, most women's refuges will not accommodate boys over 12 years of age and in these circumstances, families may be split with the older boy being accommodated at a different setting from the rest of the family. The issue of girls accompanying their fathers to CANFaCS was also raised.

5.4. Crisis accommodation services need to be better designed to meet the needs of children and families, so that children are in a safe, supportive and stress-free environment and families do not need to be split unnecessarily.

Support for children

5.5. *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* reported that a large proportion of children accommodated in crisis and medium term supported accommodation have experienced trauma such as witnessing domestic violence, coping with family separation, living in poverty or insecure housing or the effects of situational factors such as drug and alcohol issues, mental health issues, problem gambling and underlying factors such as systemic marginalisation or discrimination.³⁷

5.6. Further, the study reported that a substantial number of children accommodated in SAAP services have behavioural problems, low self esteem and difficulties at school.

5.7. Other research has found that children experiencing homelessness suffer serious disadvantage that can have a long-term effect on their development. Some of the immediate impacts include disrupted education, disrupted friendship networks and

³⁶ Transcript, p 30.

³⁷ ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. p 58.

lost contact with extended family.³⁸ They are more likely to experience poor health, poor educational outcomes, social isolation and behavioural problems.³⁹

5.8. The evidence received by the committee indicates that a large proportion of children in ACT SAAP services are experiencing similar difficulties.

5.9. A disturbing trend noted during the inquiry is the generational factor. Beryl Women's Refuge reported that they are now dealing with the fourth generation of some families. The Co-ordinator described one example of the generational factor at a public hearing.

Right now sitting in our refuge is a young woman who was there five years ago as a child client with her mother, whose mother was at our refuge also. So we had the grandmother, the mother, the daughter, and now the daughter's son with us. The woman who is with us with her child is escaping a boy who was also a child client of our service. They were not there together, at the same time. She went on to become a victim of domestic violence, he went on to become a perpetrator of domestic violence.⁴⁰

5.10. Also of concern is the increase in the number of new clients of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service who identified their son or stepson as the person who used violence against them. From January to June 2001, 3.99 per cent of new clients identified their son or stepson as the person who used violence against them. In the next six-month period this increased to 7.29 per cent and in the next three-month period it increased again to 9.99 per cent.

5.11. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Toora Women Inc, Beryl Women's Refuge and CANFaCS all stressed the need to support children and young people and to work with them to attempt to break the cycle of domestic violence.

5.12. While crisis accommodation services and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service do the best they can to support and counsel children involved in domestic violence within very limited resources, a more strategic approach is needed.

5.13. The report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, argues strongly for improving support for children experiencing homelessness. The report points out that based on the evidence of inter-generational homelessness and the impact of homelessness and the factors leading to homelessness on child development, children are a priority target groups for prevention. The report recommends that improvements be made to support children by:

- recognising children as clients of SAAP in their own right in planning and service purchase frameworks;

³⁸ Hanover Welfare Services and the Royal Children's Hospital, (1996) as reported in ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. P 59.

³⁹ Horn et al, (1996) as reported in ACT Council of Social Service Inc, *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*, June 2002. p 59.

⁴⁰ Transcript p 27.

- ensuring that all services accommodating children receive dedicated funds to maintain a regular capacity for providing support to children (eg with Children's Support Workers) and that services have access to additional or brokerage funds to respond to increased levels of need; and
- the development of an inter-agency response to working with children at risk to link the support provided within SAAP to the broader supports available to children in the community.

5.14. The committee considers such an approach is desperately needed.

Specific programs for boys

5.15. The inquiry identified a need for specific programs for boys who have experienced or perpetrated domestic violence to provide education and experiences to enable them to develop equal, respectful and non-violent relationships in their adulthood. It was suggested that this program focus on two main target groups namely:

- boys between the ages of eight and 12 who are subjected to and/or witness domestic violence; and
- boys and young men aged 12 to 18 years who are using violence in their family relationships.⁴¹

5.16. A primary intervention service for boys aged eight to 12 is needed because this age group is often involved in the violence by, for example, protecting the mother and other family members, through confronting the person using violence and placing themselves in danger, or through ringing the police or seeking help from neighbours or others.

5.17. A different approach is needed for boys and young men aged 12 to 18 years who are using violence in their family relationships. These young people may also have witnessed and/or been subjected to domestic violence, but because they are using violence in their relationships a different therapeutic intervention is needed.

Conclusion

5.18. The evidence before the committee strongly suggests that the support needs of children and young people experiencing homelessness are not being met. The design of crisis accommodation in most cases is not conducive to ensuring children and families can receive high levels of support. The cycle of domestic violence is not being broken. A much more strategic and co-ordinated approach is required to support children and to prevent the perpetuation of the cycle of domestic violence.

⁴¹ Submission 7, Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc, pp 4,5.

Recommendation 4

5.19. The committee recommends that the Government examine ways to provide more appropriately designed crisis accommodation facilities for families.

Recommendation 5

5.20. The committee recommends that the ACT Government implement as a matter of urgency the recommendations of the report *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT* in relation to support for children.

Recommendation 6

5.21. The committee recommends that the ACT Government provide ongoing funding for intervention programs for boys aimed at preventing the perpetuation of domestic violence.

John Hargreaves MLA
Chair
19 August 2002

Appendix 1 - Submissions received

1. Ms Ellen Mills
2. Young Men's Support Network
3. Society of St Vincent de Paul
4. Toora Women Inc
5. ACT Council of Social Service Inc
6. Lone Father's Association ACT Inc
7. Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc
8. ACT Government
9. Canberra Fathers and Children Service

Appendix 2 - Witnesses at public hearings

20 June 2002

For Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS)

Mr Anthony Rochester, Co-ordinator

Mr Gerry Orkin, Member Management Group

For the Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Ms Dennise Simpson, Manager

For the Young Men's Support Group

Mr Richard Shanahan, Manager

For Toora and Beryl Women's refuges

Ms Jacqui Pearce, Executive Director, Toora Women Inc

Ms Ara Cresswell, Co-ordinator, Beryl Women's Refuge

For St Vincent De Paul Society

Mr Russell Walls, President

Mr Michael Blyth, President Samaritan House Committee

For Lone Fathers Association (ACT)

Mr Barry Williams, President

11 July 2002

For the ACT Government

Mr Bill Wood MLA, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services

Ms Sue Birtles, Executive Director, Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau

Mr Alan Franklin, Manager Housing Policy and Planning

Ms Sarah King, Assistant Manager, Community Services

For the ACT Council of Social Service Inc

Mr Daniel Stubbs, Director

Ms Sam Page