

## Children and Homelessness Factsheet

### Joe's Story

My name is Joe I am 6 years old. I have one big brother and a little brother. My older brother has problems, Mum says its called disabilities. We all had to move from another part of Australia. We stayed with some friends of Mum's to start with but that didn't last long so Mum took us to a caravan park and we stayed in a tent. I got to go to school there but then we moved to another caravan park in a different town. Then Mum got some help from a worker and we got to stay in a house for 6 weeks, it was at Christmas time. Then we moved into another house and I got to start at a new school. I like my school and they got me someone to talk to and that helped me think about my brother with his disabilities. Mum still drives me to my school because I really like this school but we have got a different house now where we can stay but it's not near my school so I might have to move again. Mum just had another baby so I've got a new baby brother.



### Sarah's Story

Hi I'm Sarah and I'm 11, I have a little brother Adam who is 9. We used to be a happy family ..... before my dad started using drugs. He started to hit my mum, it was so scary for Adam and me all we wanted to do was to protect mum but we were so scared that we were going to get hurt too.

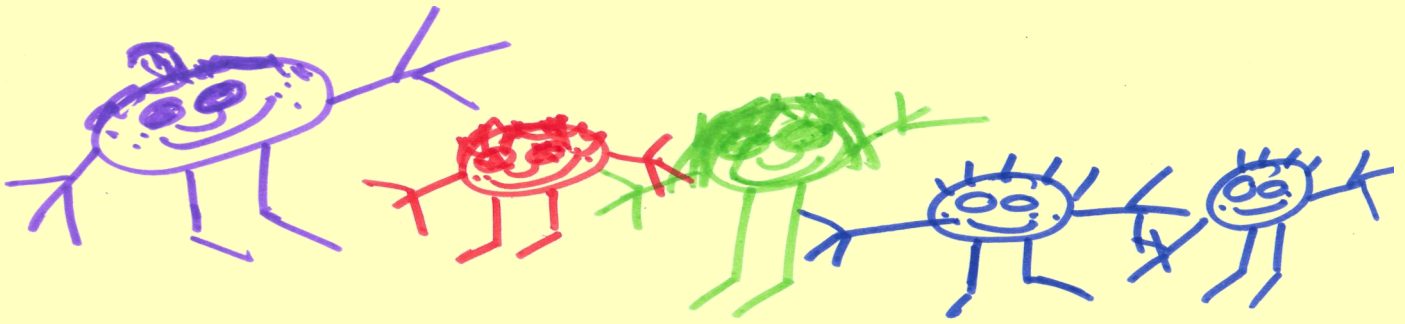
Mum told us that we had to leave our home, which was good because we were so scared of dad, but bad too because we had to leave everything behind and we couldn't see dad anymore. We wanted to go and stay with my grandparents, but they told my mum that if she left my dad that she would bring shame to our family, so we ended up living in the car. It was hard to go to school because we were so tired from not sleeping well in the car. Some of mum's friends let us use their shower and laundry to wash our clothes a few times a week, but I felt really embarrassed when I didn't get to have a shower or have clean clothes on. Sometimes I would sit in the sick bay at lunch time because I was worried my friends would think I was smelly.

We lived in the car for five months before they gave us a house. Now that we have a house we are much happier and the best thing is that we can invite our friends over for a play! We don't feel embarrassed anymore that we live in the car or that we can't have a shower every day.

Our worker sent us to a group where we got to meet other kids who are just like us. It makes us feel so much better to know that there are other kids who have gone through the same thing as us, and that we shouldn't feel embarrassed or guilty because it's not our fault.

Thank you to the children and families who have shared their stories

A resource developed by the Statewide Children's Resource Program



## Statistics .....

On any given day across Australia 13,500 children and their families are being supported by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS)

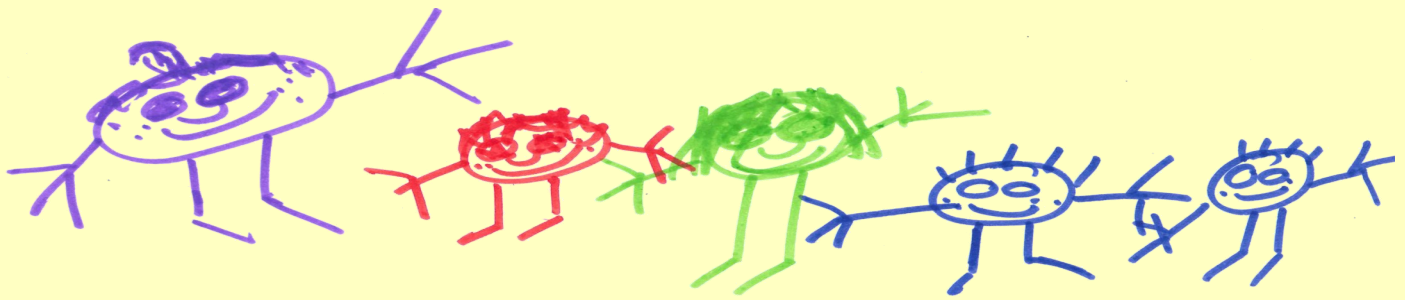
In 2013-2014, just over 25% (70,000) of SHS clients were under 18 years. 41,000 or 58 % of those children were under 10 .

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3% of Australia's population, they account for 23% of those accessing homelessness support. 1in 4 were children aged between 0— 9 years .

An estimated 84,774 adults and children (33% of all clients) sought assistance as a result of experiencing family or domestic violence. This was an increase of 9% from 2012–13, including an increase of 14% in the number of children experiencing family or domestic violence.

(AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services 2013-14)





## The impact on children .....

The impacts of homelessness on children can be acute and chronic, immediate and cumulative, direct and indirect, seen and unseen. How children cope with their homelessness experience will be determined by the support they receive from adults in their lives, their own coping skills, their previous experiences and their ability to make meaning within the situation.

The experience of homelessness is not a one off event that children easily bounce back from and can become a defining event that shapes their lives. It can adversely affect many aspects of a child's life, including their sense of connectedness to their culture and community, their ability to interact and form relationships with others, their physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional health and impact on their educational outcomes.

Many children might not understand that they are in fact homeless. Their concern is not necessarily the absence of a permanent house, they may be staying with relatives or friends or in temporary accommodation. For children their distress is more about their sense of security, connection with their family unit and freedom from fear.

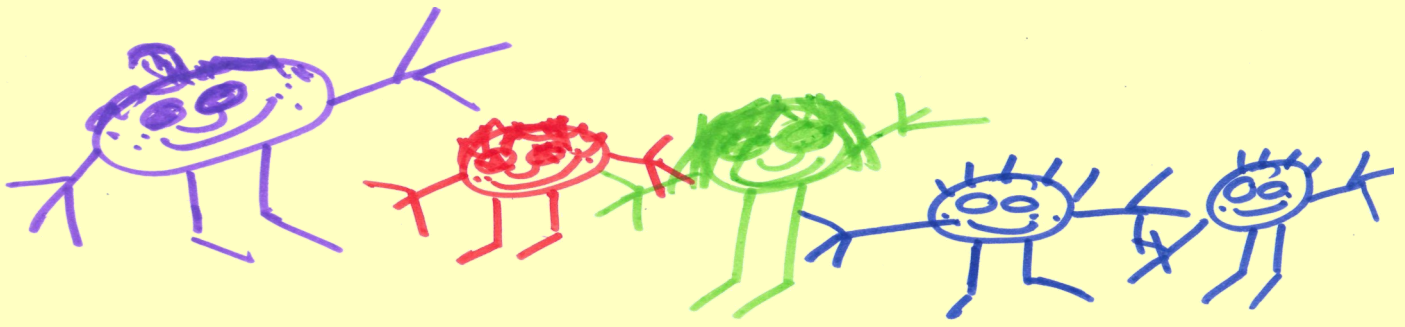
Homelessness affects children across all developmental domains but can be especially problematic for babies. Babies react to and learn from their parents or caregivers and their environment. Along with physical and emotional development, the instability and stresses that homelessness creates can affect healthy attachments between baby and parent.

Studies into neuroplasticity and the growing brain have shown us that with the right support children can begin to process and heal from their experiences of homelessness.

It is particularly important for children to form a strong attachment to an emotionally available primary caregiver. This relationship can be a buffer between them and the trauma of homelessness. In the absence of an emotionally available parent another significant adult in the child's life can have a positive impact and provide opportunities to thrive and achieve.

The impacts of homelessness can be particularly traumatic for children if their experiences are not acknowledged, responded to and validated. It can leave children with long lasting unresolved trauma responses and potentially affect their life trajectory.





### Children Need .....

- To feel safe and secure
- To feel important and visible
- To be able to tell their story and to feel heard
- To know what is happening in sensitive and age appropriate language
- To be respected and not judged
- To be children

### Children need .....

*Professionals to recognize and understand the impact of homelessness for children and their families.*

Adults to acknowledge their immediate experience and support and respond to them in age appropriate ways.

*Their own assessment and case plan .*

Adults around them that they can trust and talk with.

*To be included and involved in the plans about their life.*

Support to have experiences and opportunities that other children have. The correct uniform, school books, the chance to join in with a sporting activity or go to the school camp.

*They need a timely and at times specialised response to their needs as an individual.*

### Children's Resource Program Contacts

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Brimbank Melton & Western Melbourne Areas

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Inner/Outer Eastern Melbourne Areas

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Goulburn & Ovens Murray Areas

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Loddon and Mallee Areas

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