

“ Dad, where are we going to live now? ... ”

A report on sole father families who are homeless,
or at risk of homelessness.

Canberra Fathers and Children Service Inc.

'We're in a homeless situation, so we don't know where we're going, we don't know what direction. I know a direction that I want. I know I want to get a home and make it into a nice home and it will be our home ...'

One sole father's reflections

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Family and Community Services.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i>	5
<i>SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS</i>	5
<i>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	8
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	10
<i>DEFINITIONS</i>	12
<i>ACRONYMS</i>	15
1. INTRODUCTION	16
2. RESEARCH STRATEGY	17
2.1 <i>PRINCIPLES</i>	17
2.2 <i>TASKS</i>	17
2.3. <i>ETHICS APPROVAL</i>	19
3 LITERATURE REVIEW	20
3.1 <i>INTRODUCTION</i>	20
3.2 <i>PROFILE OF SOLE FATHER FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS</i>	20
3.3 <i>PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS</i>	23
3.4 <i>SERVICE MODEL</i>	29
3.5 <i>SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	35
4 NATIONAL SAAP DATA	37
4.1 <i>INTRODUCTION</i>	37
4.2 <i>THE FATHERS</i>	38
4.3 <i>PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSESS</i>	42
4.4 <i>THE CHILDREN</i>	48
4.5 <i>SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION</i>	50
5. PROFILE OF CANFaCS FATHERS	53
5.1 <i>INTRODUCTION</i>	53
5.2 <i>THE FATHERS</i>	55
5.3 <i>PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS</i>	60
5.4 <i>THE CHILDREN</i>	67
5.5 <i>LEGAL CONTEXT</i>	70
5.6 <i>DISCUSSION</i>	71
6 CANFaCS MODEL	75
6.1 <i>HISTORY</i>	75
6.2 <i>VALUES AND PRINCIPLES</i>	79
6.3 <i>KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE</i>	84
6.4 <i>SERVICE DELIVERY</i>	90
6.5. <i>ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE</i>	97
6.6 <i>SUMMARY OF THE CANFaCS MODEL</i>	98
6.7 <i>DEFICITS OF THE MODEL</i>	100
7. TRANSFERABILITY OF THE CANFaCS MODEL TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS	103
8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	106
8.1 <i>THE FATHERS</i>	106
8.2 <i>PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS</i>	108

8.3	<i>FURTHER ISSUES</i>	<i>110</i>
8.4	<i>THE SERVICE MODEL</i>	<i>111</i>
	<i>REFERENCES</i>	<i>113</i>
	<i>APPENDIX A: SPECIAL QUERY TO NDCA</i>	<i>121</i>
	<i>APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR FATHERS</i>	<i>122</i>
	<i>APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS</i>	<i>124</i>
	<i>APPENDIX D: THE GUIDING VALUES OF THE CANFaCS TEAMWORK</i> <i>AGREEMENT</i>	<i>128</i>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This exploratory study describes emerging work with sole parent families headed by a father, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It profiles these fathers and their children, describes their pathways into homelessness, and documents the development and operation of Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) - an accommodation service model dedicated to this family group. It is expected that this information will be of interest to State and Territory policy-makers, services providers, and other community organisations, who are interested in establishing services for sole father families experiencing - or at risk of experiencing - homelessness.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

In Australia, the extent of homelessness of sole father families is unknown. Current trends related to increasing family homelessness, a significant rise in the number of sole father families in Australia, and a substantial increase (58%) in support periods provided to sole father families by Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) agencies over the past three years, suggest an ongoing need for services to this family demographic.

Based on what we know from the literature about the negative impacts of relationship breakdown on men, a more focused approach to understanding these impacts, as they relate to housing stability, is essential. Despite there being only small numbers available, and other data collection issues surrounding the National SAAP data and CANFaCS data, analyses indicate that relationship breakdown serves as the main pathway into homelessness for sole father families. The analysis of this data also indicates that eviction, unavailability of usual accommodation, and financial difficulties, were major factors in seeking SAAP assistance. These reasons all add weight to the structural explanations for homelessness, and provide key insights into early intervention points.

CANFaCS data - in contrast to the National data - recorded a sizeable proportion of fathers attending CANFaCS who identified family violence or conflict as the main reason for seeking help. This may be affected by CANFaCS' emphasis on *safety for all*, making disclosure of such detail more acceptable. The interaction of family violence with homelessness needs further exploration for the purposes of identifying future possibilities for early intervention.

The fathers' individual stories represented in this report highlight the complexity of sole fathers' experiences of homelessness. They illustrate the interaction of some of the structural, social and personal factors forming pathways into homelessness.

CANFaCS commenced service in 2002, in Canberra, ACT. Its model has developed in response to the complex needs of this client group, and to its inherent social and political contexts. The service is driven by a statement of values and principles founded on the basis of current knowledge about men, children, families and relationships. These values and principles are:

- *fathers matter*
- *clients are not just individual service users - the 'client' at CANFaCS is the relationship between fathers and their children*
- *first call for children*
- *safety for all*
- *homelessness is a social justice issue; and*
- *community is important*

This report contends that the transferability of the model rests, not with the details of organisation and practice, which have developed in response to the ACT's particular environment, but, with the values and principles outlined above, which could then be applied to the local context and the particular service needs of a given community.

This report argues that some value bases do not provide an effective foundation for overall family, and community, safety and well being; in particular, those value bases that prioritise men's rights, or assume that fathers' needs - and those of their children - are always one and the same. In the current debate about men's services it is necessary to, not only rigorously assess the underpinning values and principles base of CANFaCS, but also, to compare and contrast these values to other services for men.

This report highlights the problematic and limited data about sole fathers and their children who are homeless. This documentation of the CANFaCS' experience is a first step in providing part of the picture. Further research into the experiences of sole fathers and their children who are homeless is urgently required to ensure proper services are developed.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are numbered according to the sections of the report in which they are recommended. They are divided into two sections: policy and planning; research and data collection.

Policy and planning recommendations

Recommendation 3.1

It is recommended, in line with Carberry (1998), that: policy across government portfolios should be consistent and should support shared care; both separated parents, when sharing care, should have this recognised. If parents share care equally, they should receive equal treatment through tax and income support arrangements.

Recommendation 4.3

That funding is provided to better support children who are experiencing homelessness, including the provision of services and resources, such as children's workers located in SAAP services.

Research and data collection recommendations

Recommendation 3.2

Research is funded and carried out to understand the homelessness experiences of sole fathers and their children, including an assessment of the impact of relationship separation, and family violence, as pathways to homelessness. This will identify key intervention points ensuring the development of appropriate services.

Recommendation 4.1

In response to Question 2 on the SAAP Client Form, when the category '*alone*' is chosen on the Client Details screen, a Child Details screen should be accessible to record details of children who come later into the parent's care as a result of the parent securing SAAP accommodation. On the Child Details screen, insert the option of recording the number of nights the children are in each parent's care.

Research and data collection recommendations (continued from previous page)

Recommendation 4.2

Question 18 of the Client Form to include response boxes for children's orders and criminal matters.

Recommendation 5.1

In order to better understand the relationship between sole father families, homelessness, and domestic violence, the '*domestic violence*' option in Question 12 of the Client Form be enhanced to record whether the client used, or was subjected to, violence.

Recommendation 7.1

Scope the different models in Australia which provide services for sole fathers and their children experiencing homelessness. This will identify the range of service models in order to determine how the National Homelessness Strategy is meeting the needs of sole father families experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 7.2

Research funding is made available to assess the effectiveness of the impact of CANFaCS' values and principles on service outcomes, as compared to other organisations servicing sole father families.

Recommendation 8.1

Research funding be made available to explore the relationship between homelessness and sole fathers who have increased residence of children, with a view to identifying possible points of early intervention and prevention.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was developed through the collaborative assistance of a research team comprising Morag McArthur, and Joanna Zubrzycki, from the School of Social Work, Australian Catholic University; the CANFaCS Coordinator, Anthony Rochester; and our extraordinary researcher, Lorraine Thomson.

The research team would like to extend special thanks to the following people:

- Our respect and appreciation to the five fathers who shared their stories in the case studies. These men have shown their commitment to fathering under difficult circumstances, and demonstrated a generosity to help other fathers across Australia who are in similar situations
- Morag McArthur and Joanna Zubrzycki, for their commitment to collaborative research and co-authorship. Their practical support and guidance has been invaluable
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- The National Data Collection Agency for their attention and patience to our Special Query, with particular thanks to Qasim Shah.
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CANFaCS REPORT JULY 2004

- The CANFaCS staff team, Kate de Brito and Cornelius Weber for their untiring commitment to homeless fathers and their children; with particular thanks to Christopher Cole for completing the tedious and unenviable task of updating the CANFaCS data base, as well as for proofing the Mastercopy of this report; and to Anthony Rochester for his vision and leadership in delivering services to support homeless sole father families

The Research Team

DEFINITIONS

Children

In this report, children are people under 18 years of age. However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publications sometimes uses 'child' to refer to a child in a child-parent relationship, regardless of the age of the child, particularly when categorising households (ABS: 2003a).

Fathers

SAAP data collection forms appear to be insensitive to the diversity of family relationships in our society, as they do not record the status of the relationship between adults and the children they have in their care when supported (referring to 'adult, 'women, 'men' and 'parent/guardian' only). As a result, there is no way of knowing whether accommodated men with children in their care, within SAAP services, are the biological, or legally recognised, fathers of those children.

It is recognised that in Indigenous and some other communities it is not uncommon for persons other than biological parents to give long-term physical care to children. In all communities, it sometimes happens that step-parents and grandparents provide care for children when biological parents are not able to provide this care.

For the purposes of this report, whilst not diminishing the importance of culturally and context-sensitive support for all homeless adults with children in their care (given the likely small number of such cases), it is assumed, for the purposes of reporting the data, that the National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) data refer to biological or legally recognised fathers who have children in their care when receiving support from SAAP.

Homelessness

There are two main definitions of *homelessness* used in Australia to two different ends. One is the cultural definition used by the ABS, with the purpose of counting those who are homeless (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003: 19). This cultural definition recognises that *homelessness* is a socially constructed concept involving the classifications of: *primary homelessness* (without a roof over one's head); *secondary homelessness* (moving from one temporary accommodation to another, including SAAP accommodation); and *tertiary homelessness* (living in boarding houses without security of tenure) (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003: 19-20).

The second definition is the SAAP definition, the purpose of which is to define *who* is eligible for support. The effect is to be inclusive of people who are at risk of homelessness to receive service, as well as to allow for people's *own* assessment of the safety of their housing situation:

A person is homeless ... if the only housing to which the person has access:

- a. damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or*
- b. threatens the person's safety; or*
- c. marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:*
 - i. adequate personal amenities; or*
 - ii. the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or*
- d. places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.*

(Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act, 1994: 3,859)

In this report, both definitions of homelessness are used.

'In their care' and 'accompanying'

CANFaCS prefers the term *'sole fathers with children in their care'* to the term typically used in the literature and by services, *'homeless males with accompanying children'*. *'Sole fathers with children in their care'* emphasises the relationship between the father and his child(ren). The term *'in their care'* is intended to be inclusive of concepts such as responsibility, nurture, emotional involvement, and the many dimensions of practical work that parenting involves.

Poverty

This report recognises that the measurement of poverty is contentious, and does not attempt to discuss the issues around the use of a poverty line. Instead, we use the broad definition of poverty proposed by Mack and Lansley: 'an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities' (1985: 39). This takes into account the restrictions of poverty, the social context, and the expectations of the community (Saunders, 2002: 147).

Sole father

The term *'sole father'* focuses attention on a father's relationship with his child, and is preferred to the term *'single father'* (Wilson, 1990), which focuses attention on the father's relationship status with another *adult*. Families solely headed by a father are also the focus of the CANFaCS service. However, it needs to be noted that ABS publications sometimes use the term *'lone parent'* to refer to a parent who forms a household with a child, or children, whatever the child's age or level of dependency (ABS, 2003a; ABS, 2004a). The term, *'lone parent'*, or *'lone father'*, will be used when referring to ABS statistics using this definition.

Support period

A support period begins when a client begins to receive accommodation or other support from a SAAP agency. Closed support periods are support periods that finish before the end of the reporting period covered in the NDCA reports - 30 June.

ACRONYMS

ACOSS	<i>Australian Council of Social Service</i>
ACT	<i>Australian Capital Territory</i>
ACU	<i>Australian Catholic University</i>
AIHW	<i>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</i>
CANFaCS	<i>Canberra Fathers and Children Service Inc.</i>
CAP	<i>Crisis Accommodation Program</i>
CEAS	<i>Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service</i>
FACS	<i>Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services</i>
FHPP	<i>Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot</i>
LFA	<i>Lone Fathers Association of Australia</i>
MAACS	<i>Men's Accommodation And Crisis Service</i>
NDC	<i>National Data Collection. (SAAP data collection undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)</i>
NDCA	<i>National Data Collection Agency. (SAAP data collection agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)</i>
SAAP	<i>Supported Accommodation Assistance Program</i>
SMART	<i>SAAP Management and Reporting Tool</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

The Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) was launched on 1 February 2002 amid public controversy. The Canberra Men's Reference Group, under the auspice of Marymead Child & Family Centre, had successfully tendered to run the only crisis accommodation service in Australia, solely for fathers with children in their care. The awarding of the contract to the Canberra Men's Reference Group replaced a service that had been run by the ACT branch of the Lone Fathers Association of Australia.

CANFaCS remains the only accommodation service in Australia exclusively supporting sole father families who are homeless. This research explores the development of CANFaCS and its service methods within the current and changing contexts of homelessness and fatherhood. It also considers the transferability of the model to other jurisdictions. The research has been funded under the SAAP Service and Regional Research Program, Small Research Projects, for 2003-2004.

The objectives of the research were to:

- 1. Document the client profile of homeless fathers and children, including their demographic background.*
- 2. Document the pathways of sole father families into homelessness.*
- 3. Document the service model developed in response to sole father families.*
- 4. Comment on the transferability of the model to other jurisdictions.*

This report documents the findings of the research in eight sections.

The project was collaborative, involving five fathers supported by CANFaCS, CANFaCS staff and Management Group, the service Coordinator Anthony Rochester, Dr Morag McArthur and Dr Joanna Zubrzycki from the School of

Social Work of Australian Catholic University (ACU National), and two project officers, Gerry Orkin and Lorraine Thomson, sequentially.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

2.1 PRINCIPLES

This small, descriptive, and exploratory study was underpinned by the following principles:

- *an understanding of the experience of fathers who are homeless*
- *the importance of a collaborative research partnership between CANFaCS and the Australian Catholic University (ACU)*
- *the adoption of ethical research practices to allow, where possible, the emergence of fathers' voices within the research*

The project was carried out between September 2003 and June 2004.

2.2 TASKS

The following is a summary of the specific tasks undertaken within the scope of the project.

- The establishment of a Project Steering Committee comprising a CANFaCS staff member, a CANFaCS Management Group member, a project officer, and two researchers from the School of Social Work at Australian Catholic University, Canberra Campus. The project steering committee met regularly to discuss the direction of the project.
- Literature Review and Analysis.
This involved a wide-ranging search and analysis of national and international literature on fathering, family homelessness, and fathers and their children who are homeless. The literature review

was conducted with consideration to factors impacting on homeless fathers and service responses.

- A special query to the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was requested. Using these data a profile was developed of fathers and their children. Data were compared with data in the *Homeless people in SAAP, 2002–03* report (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare). The content of the special query to the NDCA can be found at **Appendix A**.
- A profile of CANFaCS clients was developed. Data from CANFaCS files were entered onto the SAAP Management and Reporting Tool (SMART) system, and variables were analysed to develop a picture of the men, their pathways into homelessness, their children, and the legal contexts of their lives.
- Case studies of sole fathers were also developed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 fathers who were current or past clients of CANFaCS. With the permission of the participants, these interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. The interview schedule can be found at **Appendix B**. The case studies were developed and discussed with the men for comment and verification.
- The history of CANFaCS and its service model was documented. Interviews were conducted with the service Coordinator and Chair of the Management Group in order to identify the essential elements of the CANFaCS service model. A media analysis was carried out to document the history of the service. CANFaCS' records, including policies and procedures, public submissions etc. were analysed to assist in the documentation of the model.

2.3. ETHICS APPROVAL

As the research involved interviewing human respondents, approval was sought and received from the ACU's Human Research Ethics Committee.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As early as 1991, Hanover Welfare Services in Victoria highlighted the increasing rates of homelessness in families with children in Australia (McCaughey, 1991). This trend has also been noted in the United States of America, and in some European countries (RPR Consulting 2003: 8). In 2000 the Australian Government responded to the increasing problem by announcing the National Homelessness Strategy, which included the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP), aimed at preventing homelessness in families with children. Earlier this year, in the Australian Capital Territory, the ACT Government released the Territory's homelessness strategy, *Breaking the Cycle - The ACT Homelessness Strategy* (ACT Government, 2004).

It has been known for some time that the pathways into homelessness for families involve complex intersections of social factors, structural conditions, and personal events (McCaughey, 1991). However as there is little available literature identifying how these structural conditions, social changes and personal events impact specifically upon sole father families who become homeless, we are reliant on the general family homelessness literature to build the picture of sole father families who are homeless. However, it is recognised there may be significant differences in the experiences of fathers generally, and between fathers, more specifically.

3.2 PROFILE OF SOLE FATHER FAMILIES WHO ARE HOMELESS

Homeless families

Whilst reliable statistical evidence is not available, due to both historical and methodological factors, the homeless population is considered to have increased since the 1960s, and families are thought to have increased as a proportion of the homeless population in Australia over the past four decades (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003: 8).

In the 2001 census count of homeless households, families accounted for 9% of homeless households. This comprised 23% of the homeless population, and included 9,543 parents, and 13,401 children (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003: 3). The large number of children is important for many reasons, not the least being the risk of intergenerational homelessness (ACTCOSS & Morgan Disney & Associates, 2002: 59).

Number of sole father families

Many changes have occurred in family formation and structures in the past decades (Kinneer, 2002). The number of lone parent families with children of any age (see *Definitions*) increased in Australia by 53% from 1986 to 2001 (ABS, 2003a). This represents an absolute increase of 263,300 (from 499,300 in 1986, to 762,600 in 2001) (ABS, 2003a).

The main contributing factor has been an increase in the number of separated and divorced people (ABS, 2003a). Lone mothers comprised 83% of lone parents in both 1986 and 2001, and tended to have younger children with them than lone fathers (ABS 2003a). In 2001, 17% of lone parents were male (ABS, 2003c), and this proportion had not changed since 1986. In the ACT, 18% of all lone parents were fathers, the highest proportion being in the Northern Territory - at 21%, the smallest being Victoria - with 16% (ABS 2003b: 4).

ABS data indicate that lone parent families are the fastest growing family group in Australia (ABS, 2004a: 53). Projections indicate that the proportion of lone father families will remain constant as a proportion of all lone parent families (17%). However, it is important to note that actual numbers of lone father families will accordingly increase (ABS, 2004b).

Sole father families with children under 15 have increased from 1.5% of the *whole* population of families with children under 15 in 1992, to 2.5% in 2003 (ABS 2003e; ABS, 2004a: 28). This percentage is higher in the ACT, where sole father families with children under 15 comprise 3.7% of all families with children under 15 years. South Australia is the next highest rating jurisdiction

with 3% (ABS, 2004a: 30). There are approximately 55,100 sole fathers with children under 15 years old in Australia (ABS, 2003d), up from approximately 30,700 in 1992 (ABS, 2003e). Fathers now head 11% of all sole-parent families with children under 15 (ABS, 2003d).

These figures only represent fathers with primary care of their children - they do not include fathers with shared care. Due to the variety of residency arrangements parents adopt after separation, it is difficult to accurately assess the number of sole fathers who have child care responsibilities. Estimates, however, suggest that about 66% of children of divorced or separated parents who see their fathers, stay overnight with them on a regular basis (Smyth & Ferro, 2002).

Further, Smyth and Parkinson (2003: 17) suggest that financial factors may sometimes make it difficult for children to stay overnight with non-resident fathers. Although it is estimated that 88% of children live with their mothers after separation (ABS, 1999), it is more likely that children will live with their father than live in a 'shared care' arrangement after separation (Qu, 2004). Qu also found that changes in residence can occur in the years following separation (particularly for older children), and that it is more likely for older children to live with their father than younger children. That is, following separation, 8.8% of children aged 0-4 will live with their father, increasing to 21.7% of children aged 15-17 (Qu, 2004: 7).

Number of sole father families who are homeless

Chamberlain and MacKenzie's *Counting the Homeless* (2003: 34), which utilised the 2001 Census data and SAAP data, did not identify sole fathers with children in their care as a group to be counted separately. They did, however, show that on census night, 41% of homeless families counted were accommodated in SAAP agencies (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003: 35). They postulated that homeless families would have been underestimated, due to families splitting up as a result of homelessness, with children being possibly accommodated temporarily with friends and relatives (Chamberlain &

MacKenzie 2003: 35). It should also be noted that single males who are homeless may also be fathers, but unable to have care of their children *due* to their homelessness (Chamberlain, 2004, personal communication, 28 June). There were 6,750 families counted as homeless on census night, with 41% having two parents, and 59% with one parent, although the gender of the sole parent was not recorded (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003: 36).

Data specific to homeless fathers with children in their care is very limited, with the most detailed being available from the SAAP data collection (NDC); yet even this information is scant as the gender of parents with accompanying children was not reported prior to 1999. In 2002-2003, males with children in their care accounted for 1.1% of all support periods in SAAP services (AIHW, 2003: 24), an increase from 0.8% of all support periods in 1999-2000 (AIHW, 2003: 15).

However, the major gap in the SAAP data on numbers of homeless fathers is that they are based on utilisation of SAAP services, and therefore, not reflective of need or incidence. The Census procedure for counting those who are homeless does not easily identify sole father families as a distinct group in the homeless population. There are few services for homeless sole father families across Australia, and of those existing services, priority is given to fathers who have children in their *full-time* care. Thus, accurate information about the number of fathers who would live with their children, if they had appropriate accommodation, is unknown (Anthony Rochester; 2004, personal communication, 30 June). The needs of these fathers are currently rendered invisible.

3.3 PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

Pathways into homelessness remain 'many and varied' (McCaughey, 1991). The term 'complexity' is often part of homelessness discourse. The most recent survey of ACOSS's Housing Services reports that 76% of respondents indicated that clients have more complex problems than previously reported

(ACOSS, 2004: 6). A number of researchers have developed models which attempt to describe the complexity of factors involved in homelessness (Neil and Fopp, 1992; Buckle, 1998, quoted in Bisset, Campbell & Goodall, 1999; MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2003).

The conceptual framework proposed by MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) consists of a typology of pathways, focused on processes, rather than causes. This typology of pathways aims to indicate possible points for early intervention. In adults, they have identified three pathways:

- a housing crisis pathway, underpinned by poverty
- a family breakdown pathway, often involving domestic violence;
and
- a transition from youth homelessness pathway

(MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 1993)

They promote the concept of 'homeless careers', which 'draws attention to the process of becoming homeless as people pass through the various phases before they develop an identity as a homeless person' (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003: iii).

Given some international evidence that family homelessness, in particular, is a temporary state rather than a permanent trait (Shinn, 1997), it is unclear how useful or relevant the concept of 'homeless career' is to understanding sole father families experiencing homelessness. However, the delineation of a typology of pathways provides a possible framework useful in relating the myriad of ways sole father families become homeless

Other models are focused on identifying three factors leading to homelessness. These are underlying factors (cultural, historical, social and political circumstances); situational factors; and precipitating causes (ACTCOSS & Morgan Disney & Associates, 2002: 34). For the purposes of this report the following factors have been used to provide a framework for the discussion of the literature on sole fathers who are homeless:

structural factors, such as high unemployment, and lack of low cost housing, social factors, including social trend factors such as family separation; and personal factors, including substance abuse, and disabilities

Structural Factors

There is general agreement that structural factors underpin the increase in homelessness that has been witnessed in Australia over the past two decades (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003: 64). In particular, the increase in low-income households is fundamental, affected as it has been by the high unemployment rates of the 1980s and 1990s (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2003: 64). The widening gap between those in the top income percentiles, and those at the bottom, is a related structural dynamic with a clear relationship to the growth of jobless households (Dawkins and Kelly, 2002: 16-19).

Whilst acknowledging that poverty is a contestable concept, and that researchers do not agree on definitions (see *Definitions*), an analysis by Saunders (2002: 167) confirms that amongst the non-aged population, poverty is highest in sole-parent families. Of sole-parent families in Australia with children under 15 years in 2002, 29.8% of fathers, and 47% of mothers, were not in the workforce (ABS, 2003f). Adult lone parents (with children of any age) are more likely (52%) to rely on government allowances as their main income source than all adults (22%), and are over-represented in low income groups (ABS, 2004a: 53).

A further fundamental structural factor is currently referred to as the 'national housing crisis' across all sectors of housing. Across Australia, housing affordability has decreased enormously since 1986, negatively affecting low income families, leading to after-housing poverty (Bell, 2002: 1). Nationally, house prices have trebled since 1970 (Productivity Commission, 2004: 16). In the ACT, in 2003, housing prices increased by 39% (REIACT, 2004, personal

communication, 29 June), and the median weekly rental for a private 3-bedroom house is \$300.00 per week (REIACT, 2004, personal communication, 29 June). The ACT also currently has a 3.6% vacancy rate across all rental properties (REIACT, 2004, personal communication, 29 June) resulting in high competition for scarce vacant rental accommodation. These trends have tended to push low-income earners (including the working poor) out of the private market (Ministerial Task Force on Affordable Housing, 2002: 24).

Community housing is also unavailable in the ACT for sole father families, and shared or group house living invariably breaks down - most frequently in response to conflict regarding the father's children (Anthony Rochester, 2004, personal communication, 15 June). Currently, the waiting period for public housing in the ACT is 6-12 months for families on ACT Housing's Early Allocation List (ACT Housing, 2004, personal communication, 28 June). This can result in 'bottle necks' occurring in many SAAP services (ACTCOSS; Morgan, Disney & Associates, 2002:125).

Burt (2001) has shown in a US study that families moved out of homelessness at a rate relational to availability of affordable housing. The ACT's *Homelessness Strategy* has recognised the critical importance of increasing the stock of affordable housing in order to reduce homelessness in the Territory (ACT Government, 2004: 20), yet gains are not expected for several years due to building lag times (ACT Government, 2004: 33).

Social factors

Family separation

Family separation can lead to one significant pathway into homelessness, as described by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003: 60). For sole fathers this appears to be particularly important, with 17.7% of sole fathers reporting family breakdown as the primary and immediate cause of their request for SAAP accommodation - compared to 7.1% of sole mothers (AIHW, 2003: 26).

For some men and their families the outcomes of separation are particularly poor. Jordan (1996) has found that men continue to experience anger, grief and a range of other poor health and wellbeing outcomes for up to 10 years following separation. Problems include, but may not be limited to, depression, drug and alcohol use, gambling, sleeplessness, poor health, and other stress-related symptoms (Jordan, 1996). Cantor and Slater (1995) reported that separated men have a suicide rate about 6.2 times that of married men, and about 12 times that of separated women. Separated men are also at heightened risk of substance abuse and mental health problems. Additionally, they have a high rate of failure in their subsequent relationships.

Family separation and domestic violence

The difficulties that some men experience in coping with relationship breakdown can also have serious consequences for women and children. There is evidence that women are as likely to experience violence by previous partners as by current partners (ABS, 1996). American data suggests that three-quarters of spouse-on-spouse assaults occur after separation or divorce (Department of Justice, 1994). Boyle has noted the heightened level of risk of violence against women partners in the period *after* men who have used violence have been removed from the home (in this case single men without children, removed either voluntarily or by legal measures), and who are experiencing homelessness and separation (Boyle, 2001).

It is well known that homelessness and the need to seek safe refuge is part of the experience of many women who are victims of domestic violence (Alexander 2002: 12; Bell, 2002; Boyle, 2001; AIHW, 2003; Mc.Innes, 2001). For sole father families, however, the relationship between situations of domestic violence and sole fathers' homelessness is less well understood.

The research indicates that the dislocation and stress experienced by many men at separation can harm the men, their (former) partners, and their children. Therefore, a response to the needs of homeless men, should, in part, address the needs of separated fathers, and the impact of domestic violence post-separation (Boyle, 2001).

Programs to both treat and prevent violent behaviour in men towards women have developed over the past two decades (Pence & Paymar, 1986). The programs for men using violence in intimate relationships are difficult to evaluate, and possibilities for prevention are affected by the wider social, structural and cultural conditions (Flood, 2001: 11). Research undertaken for the West Australian Government's campaign used marketing research to identify factors that could influence men currently using, or at risk of using, violent behaviour towards women, as a means of seeking change in their violent behaviours.

This research found that the most likely factor to influence behavioural change was the impact of violence on children (WA Government, 2004). Concern for children, therefore, may be a powerful motivating force for change in fathers who behave, or may behave, in violent ways, and could present an intervention opportunity in response to domestic violence during, and after, family separation.

Personal factors

Shinn, in an American study of 564 families in New York City, found that homelessness was largely a temporary condition ameliorated by the provision of affordable housing (Shinn 1997: 755-769), rather than a personal trait, even for people with serious psychiatric problems. This demonstrates two important points: that not everyone with a psychiatric disability is homeless, and those who do have unmanageable psychoses, often end up on the street in response to the lack of appropriate services to meet their needs. Homelessness is, therefore, not an individual pathology, but a social problem influenced by individual circumstance(s).

Whilst, in general, personal factors affecting homelessness are noted to include disability, mental health, substance abuse and gambling issues (Neil & Fopp, 1992), the literature accessed does not reveal material specifically related to homeless sole fathers with children in their care.

The report prepared for the Department of Family and Community Services, *Appropriate responses for homeless people whose needs require a high level and complexity of service provision* (Bisset, Campbell & Goodall, 1999), identified some families, including some families headed by males, as evidencing high and complex needs. A need was described as 'high and complex' if there were not adequate services in the community to assist the person in managing a particular aspect of their life. Such needs include those of children who have suffered dislocation, and other effects of complex family situations, including psychiatric disability, substance abuse, and child protection issues, when services have not been available to meet the specific need (Bisset, Campbell & Goodall, 1999: 102).

Particular life events interact with other factors to precipitate homelessness, acting as trigger factors (Bartholomew, 1999: 51-52). For homeless families in general, Bartholomew noted that in the event of an addition of a family member change in accommodation arrangements may eventuate. For example: staying with friends or relatives may no longer be viable (Bartholomew 1999: 50), and families may seek alternative arrangements. Other precipitating personal factors include, substance abuse and illness.

Perhaps because of the greater numbers of women heading sole parent families, the literature has tended to focus on *their* circumstances and needs when discussing homeless sole parent families (for example, Bell, 2002). Whilst there may be similarities between sole mother, and sole father families, there appear to be some differences, as revealed by the SAAP data analysed in Section 4.

3.4 SERVICE MODEL

Fathering and children's residency

Michael Flood (2003) considers that this is a critical time for fathers in Australian society. He calls it the 'best and worst of times' for fathers (Flood, 2003: 3). There is a greater interest in policy issues affecting men and a greater awareness of the positive potential of fathers' involvement in their

children's lives. The 2003 inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation (conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs) both reflected and intensified interest in fathering after separation.

There is an apparent contradiction in that, although greater numbers of fathers are becoming more involved in the day-to-day care of their children, more fathers are also *losing* this involvement (Flood, 2003: 3). The movement to more involvement reflects the modern and postmodern questioning of traditional gender roles and power relationships, and greater participation of women in the workforce (Flood, 2003). The trend towards loss of involvement may be related to factors such as the effects of increased rates of couple separation, the demands of long working hours, and increased proportions of children born outside marriage, together with lowered rates of fertility (Kinnear 2002: 6). Related factors are the lack of flexible working arrangements for many men (Flood, 2003: 50), and the operation of policy disincentives to shared care, such as Family Tax Benefit and Parenting Payment Single (Flood, 2003: 54-55).

These factors particularly affect people in the lower income percentiles. When separated, and claiming income support, only one parent is able to claim the pension - Parenting Payment Single, which has associated benefits (travel concession, telephone allowance, and pharmaceutical allowance), and is without job search and participation requirements. The other parent can only claim Newstart Allowance, which is a lower fortnightly payment, without the benefits of the pension, and the added burden of compliance with job search requirements whilst caring equally for the children. Beyond this immediate inequality, the lack of available and affordable childcare is also a very real structural issue prohibiting fathers from complying with job search obligations, resulting in breaching in some cases.

In order to deal with inequities and disincentives to shared care, Carberry (1988) recommends that:

- policy across government portfolios should be consistent and should support shared care
- both separated parents, when sharing care, should have this recognised
- if parents share care equally, they should receive equal treatment through tax and income support arrangements
- these arrangements should seek to minimise conflict between parents for the benefit of the children by enabling continuity of income support when a minor or temporary change of care arrangements occurs
- there be recognition of the real costs of maintaining two households
- participation requirements should be equal when there is equal shared care; and
- income tests should be equal for both parents who are sharing care

To be more supportive of shared parenting, both parents would be able to claim a parenting payment (Flood, 2003: 55).

Service responses to men and fathers

Whilst much of the research examining fathers in intact families, and during separation and divorce, has tended to focus on men's deficits (Jordan 1996, Cantor & Slater, 1995), and their reluctance to access support services (Mahalik, Cournoyer, DeFranc, Cherry, & Napolitano, 1998), scholars have more recently proposed alternative systematic frameworks designed to contribute to a more positive, strengths-based model of fathering. Two frameworks of note are the models of '*responsible fathering*,' developed by Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1996) and Levine & Pitt (1995), and the '*generative fathering*' model proposed by Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson (1997).

The notion of '*responsible fathering*' arose in response to evidence of the financial and social impacts on children of absent, uninvolved fathers, and is an attempt to define the dimensions of responsible, and ongoing fathering relationships (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1996). The *generative* approach emphasises the positive outcomes fathers want for their children,

the strengths and capabilities they bring to their parenting, and the ethical responsibilities they must assume in order to care for the next generation. The conceptual ethic of *generative fathering* is expressed through fathering *work*, rather than as a fixed, or passive social role, or cultural identity (Dollahite et al, 1997).

There exists an enormous variety of perspectives on masculinity, and these perspectives inform fathering debates, as well as policy and service responses to men. Pease and Camilleri (2001: 3-7) describe four such perspectives:

- *men's rights*
- *mythopoetics*
- *men's liberation; and*
- *profeminisim*

The men's rights perspective interprets men as victims of a system which now privileges women, particularly in child custody matters. Mythopoetics, refers to ancient archetypes for masculine images, and sees biological differences as the basis of gender differences. This perspective tends to reinforce a patriarchal orientation. The men's liberation perspective looks to personal transformation and growth to overcome inner hurts which affect men's relationships, whereas profeminism acknowledges the oppression of women and violence against women. Profeminism aligns itself against such oppression, recognising that this has negative effects on men (Pease and Camilleri, 2001: 6-7).

Since 1998, the federal government has been eager to fund a variety of services and programs for men, fathers and boys, with a range of groups responding. Service agencies in Australia and overseas have begun to develop and deliver programs orientated to men (for example, King, 2002). Camilleri and Jones (2001: 31) remark that such services reflect 'contradictory forces'. Some can be seen as a 'backlash against the threat of feminism', and

others may be undertaken in partnership with feminists and feminist thought (Camilleri & Jones 2001: 31).

For example, father's rights groups such as the Men's Rights Agency and the Lone Fathers' Association have highlighted the experiences of some men who have been dislocated by family separation, and aggrieved by family law and child support processes. Flood remarks that, whilst shared parenting provides a goal that many would agree with, the tendency of the fathers' rights groups has been to assume that the interests of children and fathers are the same - ignoring the real possibility of danger to children in some situations (Flood, 2003: 41). Further, he adds:

Attacking existing services for female survivors (or feminism in general) does male survivors of violence a disservice. It is an attack on the very people who brought the issue of interpersonal violence to public attention in the first place and who have been leaders in this field. It unnecessarily antagonises the women (and men) who could be usefully involved in responding to male survivors. And it taints as 'backlash' the call for recognition of violence experienced by men (Flood, 1999: 5).

Engaging fathers

Research undertaken by The Engaging Fathers Project at the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, found that there were significant barriers to fathers' access to family related services, and that in order to engage fathers it is important to recognise that there is diversity in fathers' needs and approaches to service delivery (Fletcher, Silberberg & Baxter, 2001). The Engaging Fathers Project promotes programs which take account of these needs and differences in an effort to provide father-friendly family services with the 'bottom line' being the promotion of children's well-being (Engaging Father's Project, 2004). The Commonwealth Government's Men and Family Relationships Program was announced in 1997 as part of the Australian Government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. The services funded under this program, many of which are relationship and parenting services, are designed to take into account the 'help seeking and problem solving strategies' which men utilise (Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, 2004). Mensline Australia is one of the services funded

under this program, and acknowledges the particular approaches to problem solving (more instrumental), and help seeking (reluctance) demonstrated by many men (Mensline, 2004).

Boyle has described the brief lifespan of two specialist accommodation services in Victoria for men who had used violence against family members. He highlights a critical 'window period' of crisis, when services have an opportunity to both confront the violence, and support a change process (Boyle, 2001). Such services raise the issues of: the necessity for adequate services for both women and children who have been subjected to violence; and, services to assist men in ending their violence (Boyle, 2001). Agencies and services may position themselves explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously, in relation to the discourse around men and fathering. Part 6 will outline how CANFaCS has positioned itself in relation to these issues.

3.5 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the rising numbers of homeless people over the past decades in Australia, and the increasing proportion of homeless families within the homeless population, there is little available literature about sole father families and homelessness. No studies have been identified which directly address numbers of sole father families, or the patterns of their pathways into homelessness, as distinct from the pathways of families in general.

It is considered that the number of homeless families in Australia has been underestimated, and with particular interest to sole father families, it is very likely that some homeless males who are reported as single, are, in fact, fathers separated from their children by homelessness. Most of the 6,750 families who were counted as homeless on Census night in 2001 were one-parent families - the gender of the parent was not identified under current reporting methods (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003: 36).

One-parent families, affected by rising rates of separation and divorce, are the most rapidly growing type of family in Australia (ABS, 2004a: 53), and fathers now head 11% of all sole-parent families with children under 15 (ABS, 2003d). Projections indicate that the number of one-parent families is likely to increase, and that the proportion of sole fathers amongst them will remain at least the same, meaning an increase in absolute numbers (ABS, 2004b).

Based on the above trends, as well as the increasing emphasis in Family Law and within the community on the importance to children of positive fathering, the number of sole fathers caring for their children is likely to increase. The number of sole fathers who become homeless is also likely to increase. There has already been a significant rise in support periods provided by SAAP services to sole father families over the past three years.

This review has shown that the main pathway into homelessness for sole father families involves family separation. Structural factors, including the national housing crisis and the overrepresentation of sole parents in low

income quintiles, suggest the likelihood that many separating couples will have insufficient funds after separation to provide two fully functioning households to care for their children.

A service model developed in response to sole father families, given their pathways into homelessness, would need to understand fathers' and children's experiences of separation, and the impact of domestic violence on families.

The following section of the report documents national SAAP data relevant to this understudied group.

Recommendation 3.1

It is recommended in line with Carberry (1998) that: policy across government portfolios should be consistent and should support shared care; both separated parents, when sharing care, should have this recognised; if parents share care equally, they should receive equal treatment through tax and income support arrangements.

Recommendation 3.2

Research is funded and carried out to understand the homelessness experiences of sole fathers and their children, including an assessment of the impact of relationship separation, and family violence, as pathways to homelessness. This will identify key intervention points ensuring the development of appropriate services.

4 NATIONAL SAAP DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a profile of homeless fathers using SAAP services. The profile draws on data supplied by the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA), and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in response to a special query (*Appendix A*)¹. This profile also utilises the annual reports of the SAAP National Data Collection (NDC). The discussion and analysis of the data and case studies is informed by the literature review, and the experiences of SAAP family services that work with sole father families.

Notes on the data

Due to the complex nature of the SAAP data collection process (the basis of which is the Client Form), the CANFaCS research team was unable to fully answer the questions posed in the initial query to NDCA. In particular, answers could not be provided to the following queries:

- A percentile breakdown, according to State, of the location of sole father families before the period of unsafe, insecure, or inadequate housing
- Some legal matters often faced by homeless fathers. Question 18 of the Client Forms does not specify in detail some of the legal issues often faced by homeless fathers - such as family court matters, children's orders and criminal matters, although it does cover domestic violence orders. Given these limitations and the small numbers involved it was decided not to pursue this query
- A percentile breakdown of the number of homes in which a child had lived in the past year, according to sole father families.

¹Raw data supplied by SAAP National Data Collection Agency Ad hoc request in 2003

The CANFaCS research project team compared the data supplied by NDCA about single males with 'accompanying children' (in CANFaCS' analysis, these men are termed '*sole fathers*') to the data supplied for single females with 'accompanying children' (in CANFaCS's analysis these women are termed '*sole mothers*'). Where relevant, data from SAAP NDC annual reports have been utilised.

NDCA undertakes rounding of figures where there is a high level of error in the data, or missing data against particular fields, and also weights figures to adjust for agency non-participation and client non-consent (AIHW 2003: 79-84). This means that columns and rows do not always add up to the total, and there may be differences in support period totals between tables. Further information regarding the interpretation of SAAP data can be found in the annual reports of the NDC (AIHW, 2003).

Apparent trends and differences between homeless fathers with children in their care and other client groups should be treated with caution, because of the small sample size, the effect of data collection errors, and missing data. However, there are data that are consistent with anecdotal evidence, with observed patterns in men's life stage experiences, and service utilisation.

4.2 THE FATHERS

Numbers of sole father families and children

Since 1999, support from SAAP agencies for homeless sole fathers with children in their care has increased by 58%, with 1,900 support periods in 2002-2003, and 1200 in 1999-2000 (AIHW 2000: 16). On the basis of the figures in *Table 1* below, this assistance now comprises 4.3% of all support periods for families with children accessing homeless services.

Fathers with children in their care accounted for 1.1% of all support periods provided to SAAP clients in 2002-03 (AIHW 2003: 24), up from 0.8% in 1999-2000 (AIHW 2000: 16), as already mentioned in the literature review.

Table 2 shows the total number of SAAP clients who were adults (assumed to be mothers and fathers), with children in their care during the reporting year 2002-2003. On the basis of this number and the total number of SAAP clients for 2002-2003, 96,900 (AIHW 2003: 16), sole fathers with children in their care currently make up approximately 1.6% of SAAP clients.

The 1,510 fathers were accompanied by 2,010 children (1.3 per father), and the 24,370 mothers were accompanied by 45,510 children (1.8 per mother).

Table 1: SAAP support periods by client group 2002 – 2003. This is table 5.1 from SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2002-2003 (AIHW 2003: 24)

5.1 Tables

Table 5.1: SAAP support periods: client group by state and territory, Australia, 2002-03 (per cent)

Client group	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	
									%	Number
Male alone, under 25	13.8	12.9	13.0	11.2	13.4	14.9	17.7	7.3	13.0	22,300
Male alone, 25+	44.5	18.9	37.3	24.8	18.7	27.0	22.0	26.5	30.7	52,600
Female alone, under 25	11.9	13.6	11.3	11.3	14.1	13.8	23.6	12.6	12.6	21,600
Female alone, 25+	11.4	14.2	16.2	21.9	15.2	11.9	10.1	21.8	14.6	25,100
Couple, no children	1.2	4.7	2.4	1.7	1.3	3.2	1.0	1.7	2.6	4,400
Couple with children	1.3	5.0	2.7	2.2	2.8	3.4	4.0	2.1	3.0	5,100
Male with children	0.6	1.9	0.8	0.7	1.0	1.4	1.8	0.5	1.1	1,900
Female with children	14.6	26.9	15.9	25.4	32.7	23.3	17.6	26.3	21.3	36,600
Other	0.7	1.9	0.4	0.8	0.7	1.0	2.2	1.1	1.0	1,700
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>..</i>
Total (%)	26.8	27.7	21.2	8.5	8.1	3.7	1.4	2.6	100.0	..
Total (number)	46,000	47,400	36,400	14,500	13,900	6,400	2,400	4,400	..	171,400

Notes

1. Number excluded due to errors and omissions (weighted): 4,902.
2. Figures have been weighted to adjust for client non-consent and agency non-participation.

Sources: SAAP Client and Administrative Data Collections.

Age of sole fathers

Table 2 below also reveals a difference in age distribution between mothers and fathers with children in their care. There is a much higher proportion of younger mothers with children than younger fathers, and higher percentages of older (35-54 years) homeless fathers.

Table 2: Sole parents using SAAP services 2002 – 2003
 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)

Age	% Fathers	% Mothers
18 - 24 years	9.6	22.8
25 - 34 years	34.5	42.9
35 - 44 years	37.8	27.8
45 - 54 years	15.3	5.7
55 years and over	2.9	0.8
Total number	1,510	24,370

Cultural Background

Table 3: Cultural background of fathers with children in their care 2002 – 2003
 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)

Ethnicity	Fathers %	Mothers %
Indigenous	15.2	22.3
Non-indigenous	73.9	61.1
English Proficiency (EP) group 1	4.4	4
Other EP groups	6.5	12.5
Total	100.0	100.0
Total number	1,470	23,640

Table 3 shows that Indigenous parents with children in their care are over-represented as clients (15.2% for fathers, 22.3% for mothers), compared with the 2 % of the Australian population who identified as Indigenous in the 2001 census (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2003: 5). Overall, Indigenous clients represent 18% of all SAAP clients. EP1 refers to English Proficiency group 1 countries Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. English Proficiency 2 group refers to all other countries, excluding Australia.

Income source before and after support***Table 4: Sole parents with children in their care: income before and after each support period 2002 - 2003 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)***

Income Status	Fathers Before	Fathers After	Mothers Before	Mothers After
No income	2.0	1.3	2.7	1.6
No income, awaiting pension/benefit	1.4	0.7	0.6	0.4
Government pension/benefit	89.6	89.3	88.7	91.6
Other	7.0	8.7	8	6.4
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Very few sole parents with children in SAAP services were not in receipt of an income or benefit, compared to 9% for all SAAP clients (AIHW 2003: 45) at the start of a support period. Overall, 84% of SAAP clients were recipients of a government benefit before support periods commenced (AIHW 2003: 45). By comparison, 89.6% of sole fathers and 88.7% of sole mothers were recipients of benefits.

4.3 PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

Type of housing before and after support

Table 5: Sole parents' type of housing before and after each closed support period 2002 - 2003 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)

Type of housing	Fathers Before	Fathers After	Mothers Before	Mothers After
SAAP or other emergency housing	16.4	14.0	18.9	22.1
Living rent-free in house or flat	10.9	6.9	8.7	6.4
Private rental	20.4	24.1	24.7	24.6
Public or Community housing	9.8	24.2	18.4	25.1
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	11.7	10.5	4.3	3.4
Boarding in a private home	18.7	13.9	13.8	10.7
Own home	2.1	2.2	8.5	6.3
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	8.5	2.4	1.7	0.4
Institutional	1.5	1.8	0.9	0.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Overall, there are relatively small changes in the types of housing mothers occupy before and after support periods. The biggest change is an increase in the percentage of mothers who are in public housing.

For fathers, there are changes of note in three areas: a reduction in the percentage of fathers who are living in a car, on the street, or in a park; and an increase in the percentage of fathers living in public housing; there is also a reduction in the percentage living in rent-free accommodation with friends or family.

Time in unsafe housing***Table 6: Time in unsafe housing before support period 2002 – 2003
(Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)***

Unsafe housing	Sole fathers with children	Sole mothers with children
less than one week	12.0	9.4
1 week - 1 month	21.3	13.5
1 - 3 months	11.9	8.9
3 - 6 months	7.4	6.2
6 - 12 months	5.6	6.2
1 - 2 years	3.7	5.8
2 - 5 years	2.3	5.5
More than 5 years	1.7	5.0
At imminent risk	34.0	39.4
Total %	100.0	100.0

Fathers tend to have spent less time in unsafe housing before support periods, compared to mothers. Mothers are about twice as likely as fathers to have been in unsafe accommodation for periods longer than 2 years. Substantial percentages of both groups were at imminent risk of unsafe housing at the time support was requested.

Repeat support periods and length of SAAP accommodation

By dividing the number of support periods in *Table 1* by the number of clients in *Table 2*, the data show that homeless fathers with children in their care averaged 1.2 support periods, compared with an average 1.8 support periods for all SAAP clients in this period (AIHW 2003: 36), and approximately 1.5 for homeless mothers with children in their care.

SAAP clients with children have relatively long stays compared with other client groups. Couples with children, and fathers with children had median lengths of accommodation of 73, and 30 days, respectively (excluding same-day accommodation). Mothers with children had a median stay of 10 days (AIHW 2003: 35). Length of closed support periods varied considerably between States. Whilst the average length of support nationally for all groups

was 46 days, in the ACT the average was 81 days, and in the Northern Territory, 27 days (AIHW 2003: 29).

Type of housing before and after support

Table 7: Sole parents' type of housing before and after each closed support period 2002 - 2003 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)

Type of housing	Fathers Before	Fathers After	Mothers Before	Mothers After
SAAP or other emergency housing	16.4	14.0	18.9	22.1
Living rent-free in house or flat	10.9	6.9	8.7	6.4
Private rental	20.4	24.1	24.7	24.6
Public or Community housing	9.8	24.2	18.4	25.1
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	11.7	10.5	4.3	3.4
Boarding in a private home	18.7	13.9	13.8	10.7
Own home	2.1	2.2	8.5	6.3
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	8.5	2.4	1.7	0.4
Institutional	1.5	1.8	0.9	0.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fathers were more likely to have been living in private rental properties and short-term accommodation (such as caravan parks, hotels, or boarding with friends, relatives etc), and were less likely to have been living in public or community housing or in their own home than were mothers before support periods. Fathers were also far more likely to have been living in unsafe situations, in cars, parks or on the street, for example, compared to mothers.

Overall, there are relatively small changes in the types of housing mothers occupy before and after support periods. The biggest change is an increase in the percentage of mothers who are in public housing.

For fathers, there are changes of note in three areas: a big reduction in the percentage of fathers who are living in a car, on the street, or in a park, and a big increase in the percentage of fathers living in public housing. There is a small reduction in the percentage living in rent-free accommodation with friends or family.

Living situation before and after support**Table 8: Living situation before and after support periods, sole parents 2002 - 2003 (Source: Synthesis of data from NDCA special query for CANFaCS)**

Living situation before support	% Fathers Before	% Fathers After	% Mothers Before	% Mothers After
Both parents	2.7	1.2	1.7	1.1
One parent and parent's spouse/partner	0.5	1.0	1.3	0.5
One parent	2.2	1.8	2.3	1.6
Relative(s)-temporary	12.0	6.2	10.1	8.9
Relative(s)-long term	2.3	1.7	2.0	2.4
Spouse/partner	2.2	1.3	3.6	1.6
Spouse/partner and child(ren)	13.7	12.1	31.2	14.5
Alone with child(ren)	40.3	56.5	34.6	55.7
Alone	9.2	8.6	1.7	2.1
Friend(s)-temporary	9.5	5.1	6.0	4.3
Friend(s)-long term	0.5	0.8	0.3	0.5
Living with other unrelated persons	4.0	3.1	3.8	4.1
Other	0.7	0.5	1.4	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Fathers are more likely to have been living on their own before support periods, compared to mothers, and more likely to have been living alone with children prior to entering SAAP.

Overall, there are relatively small changes in the living situations of parents before and after support periods, with two exceptions. Mothers are much less likely to be living with a spouse, and much more likely to be living just with their children after support periods end. For fathers and mothers, there is an increased likelihood they will be living alone with their children after support periods end. The data does not specify whether '*alone with children*' means that children are in the sole care of that parent.

Reason for seeking assistance**Table 9: Main reason for seeking assistance. 2002 – 2003. This is Table 5.3 of the SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2002-2003 (AIHW 2003: 26)****Table 5.3: SAAP support periods: main reason for seeking assistance by client group, Australia, 2002–03 (per cent)**

Main reason for seeking assistance	Male alone under 25	Male alone 25+	Female alone under 25	Female alone 25+	Couple no children	Couple with children		Female with children	Other	Total
Usual accommodation unavailable	16.7	14.9	11.3	5.3	16.8	14.1		5.8	16.0	10.9
Time out from family/other situation	8.5	4.9	9.3	4.3	4.5	4.2		3.4	7.2	5.6
Relationship/family breakdown	16.5	6.8	21.5	5.6	8.3	5.6		7.1	12.9	10.5
Interpersonal conflict	4.5	2.3	4.4	2.3	2.2	2.9		1.7	2.9	2.8
Physical/emotional abuse	1.4	0.7	4.2	4.9	1.5	1.1		4.5	3.7	3.0
Domestic violence	1.2	0.7	12.3	43.9	2.0	3.1		51.8	10.9	22.1
Sexual abuse	0.3	0.1	2.1	1.4	0.2	0.5		0.8	0.8	0.8
Financial difficulty	9.8	15.4	6.0	5.3	16.3	13.8		5.1	8.4	8.9
Gambling	0.1	0.9	—	0.1	0.2	0.1		0.1	0.1	0.3
Eviction/previous accommodation ended	15.0	9.9	11.6	5.6	22.2	26.7		9.1	12.7	11.2
Drug/alcohol/substance abuse	4.5	13.1	2.6	4.8	3.0	1.3		0.8	2.7	5.0
Emergency accommodation ended	2.2	1.4	1.9	0.9	1.4	2.5		1.0	1.3	1.4
Recently left institution	2.9	3.3	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.7		0.3	0.3	1.6
Psychiatric illness	1.3	3.7	1.1	2.0	0.4	0.2		0.3	2.1	1.6
Recent arrival to area with no means of support	5.3	10.9	3.1	3.4	7.4	11.7		2.4	6.7	5.5
Itinerant	3.9	4.7	2.9	2.6	4.8	2.8		1.2	3.5	3.0
Other	6.0	6.3	4.9	6.1	7.9	8.6		4.8	7.9	5.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>		<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>
Total (%)	14.5	21.7	14.7	15.1	2.8	3.7		25.1	1.2	100.0
Total (number)	18,900	28,300	19,100	19,700	3,600	4,800		32,700	1,600	130,400

The main reason fathers with children sought assistance was loss of previous accommodation through eviction, or accommodation ending (20.9%), followed by relationship breakdown (17.7%), unavailability of usual accommodation

(13.8%), and financial difficulties (11%). Men gave each of these reasons more than twice as often as did women with children.

Couples with children presented a somewhat similar profile of reasons in seeking assistance to sole fathers with children; the main difference, expectably, being that relationship breakdown was named less frequently by couples with children.

The most dramatic difference in reasons for seeking assistance was with respect to domestic violence. In about 52% of support periods, the main reason identified by women with children in their care for seeking assistance was domestic violence, compared to just 5.2% of fathers. However, the data does not record the gender of the person using violence, or the gender of the person subjected to, or witnessing, violence.

Unmet need

Table 10: Unmet need for requested services 2002 – 2003 This is Table 7.3 from the SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2002-2003 (AIHW 2003: 44)

Table 7.3: SAAP services requested by the client in closed support periods that were neither provided nor referred: broad type of service by client group, Australia, 2002–03

Broad type of service	Male alone under 25	Male alone 25+	Female alone under 25	Female alone 25+	Couple no children	Couple with children		Female with children	Other	Total	
										%	Number
	% unmet needs										
Housing/ accommodation	27.1	30.9	24.9	29.9	35.1	38.1		29.7	45.5	29.8	20,100
Financial/ employment	20.7	24.2	19.2	23.5	25.2	17.4		15.4	14.2	21.5	14,400
Counselling	10.7	3.1	15.7	7.4	4.3	13.9		17.2	8.9	8.9	6,000
General support/ advocacy	18.6	24.9	18.1	24.2	24.3	12.1		16.9	10.5	21.4	14,400
Specialist services	14.1	12.0	12.4	10.8	7.5	12.9		14.5	15.3	12.3	8,300
Basic support and services n.e.s.	8.9	5.0	9.8	4.1	3.6	5.6		6.3	5.5	6.2	4,100
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>		<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>67,300</i>

Fathers with children and couples with children both have relatively high levels of unmet need in the area of housing and accommodation (40% and 38% respectively).

4.4 THE CHILDREN

Age of children in care of fathers

Table 11: Age distribution of children in the care of fathers and mothers in SAAP services 2002-2003 (source- special query to NDCA for CANFaCS)

Child age	With fathers		With mothers	
	Total (%)	Total number	Total (%)	Total number
0-4 years	31.4	630	44.1	20,060
5-12 years	48.1	970	44.0	20,010
13-15 years	14.7	290	8.8	4,000
16-17 years	5.8	120	3.2	1,440
Total	100.0	-	100.0	-
Total (%)	100.0	-	100.0	-
Total number		2,010	-	45,510

Of the 2,010 children in the care of fathers in SAAP in the year 2002-2003, 80% are aged between 0 and 12 years old, with almost 50% between 5 and 12. There is a smaller percentage of children under 4 years of age in the care of their fathers, compared to mothers. The SAAP data also shows that 44.4% of the children in the care of homeless fathers are female, and 55.6% are male.

Services provided to children in the care of fathers**Table 12: Services provided to children. This is Table 9.4 of the SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2002-2003 (AIHW 2003: 60)**

Type of service	Couple with children	Male with children	Female with children	Other with children	Total	
Accompanying child support periods			(%)		%	Number
Accommodation	64.5	56.9	74.1	63.6	73.0	30,900
SAAP/CAP accommodation	64.5	56.9	74.1	63.6	73.0	30,900
School liaison/child care	19.1	20.4	31.2	20.3	30.1	12,700
School liaison	11.7	14.5	14.2	9.9	14.0	5,900
Child care	9.4	8.2	22.7	12.8	21.4	9,100
Counselling	15.3	19.7	28.7	20.6	27.6	11,700
Help with behavioural problems	6.7	7.3	12.2	10.7	11.7	4,900
Sexual/physical abuse counselling/support	1.3	2.1	3.2	5.9	3.0	1,300
Skills education	2.6	2.3	3.5	5.0	3.4	1,500
General counselling/support	10.5	13.6	19.7	13.3	18.9	8,000
General support/advocacy	29.0	37.3	31.8	46.3	31.7	13,400
Access arrangements	1.4	2.9	3.4	3.2	3.3	1,400
Advice/information	15.3	21.5	20.7	21.4	20.3	8,600
Brokerage services	6.5	6.9	3.7	7.6	4.0	1,700
Advocacy	15.8	17.3	17.8	22.2	17.7	7,500
Specialist services	11.5	7.9	16.2	10.7	15.6	6,600
Culturally sensitive services	4.8	2.1	9.7	8.2	9.2	3,900
Health/medical services	8.0	6.0	8.6	3.2	8.5	3,600
Basic support and other services n.e.s.	44.3	47.8	71.7	53.9	69.2	29,300
Meals	16.4	19.9	51.0	20.9	47.8	20,200
Showers/hygiene	8.4	14.0	44.0	10.3	40.8	17,300
Recreation	13.8	15.3	36.7	10.4	34.6	14,600
Transport	22.2	26.9	49.2	37.5	46.8	19,800
Other	14.6	15.3	13.7	23.8	13.9	5,900
No services provided directly by agency	7.4	7.1	4.0	6.5	4.3	1,800
Total accompanying child support periods (%)	6.8	2.4	90.4	0.3	100.0	..
Total accompanying child support periods (number)	2,900	1,000	38,300	100	..	42,300
Support periods for SAAP clients with accompanying children requiring assistance						
Total support periods (%)	6.2	2.9	90.4	0.4	100.0	..
Total support periods (number)	1,300	600	19,000	100	..	21,000
Mean number accompanying children requiring assistance	2.21	1.67	2.02	1.56	..	2.02

Children of sole mothers are more likely than the children of sole fathers to:

- be accommodated during support periods
- be supported with schooling or child care
- be supported with counselling, especially around behavioural issues
- be given basic supports, eg: meals, recreation, hygiene

Children of sole fathers are more likely than children of sole mothers to have no services provided. They share this characteristic with children of couples.

4.5 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the presentation of NDCA data that was gathered as a result of an *ad hoc* query in late 2003. The data tell a somewhat limited story of sole fathers' pathways into homelessness in Australia, and how they utilise existing SAAP services. The analysis does, however, suggest a number of issues that need to be considered in order to better understand the needs of sole fathers who are homeless.

Our data analysis suggests that homeless sole fathers tend to be older than sole mothers, and, on the whole, have older children in their care. This is consistent with the demographic pattern for sole fathers in general (ABS, 2003a; ABS, 1994). The high proportion of Indigenous homeless fathers also reflects the overall disadvantage suffered by Indigenous people in Australian society.

Homeless sole father families tend to have been homeless for a shorter period than sole mothers at the time they make contact with a SAAP service. The data also indicate that, whilst support periods to homeless sole fathers with children in their care are small as a percentage of the total support periods, they have increased dramatically since 1999-2000.

A striking aspect of the data is the distinct pattern of reasons given for seeking assistance by sole fathers: eviction; relationship breakdown; usual

accommodation unavailable; and financial difficulty. There is a dramatic difference between sole fathers and sole mothers, in relation to domestic violence, and a relative similarity of pattern to couples with children who name (in similar proportions) eviction, usual accommodation unavailable, and financial difficulty, but not relationship breakdown.

Children with sole fathers also appear to have more unmet needs at the conclusion of support periods than children of homeless sole mothers, but less unmet needs than children of homeless couples. This may reflect service delivery and staffing where services are available to sole fathers and couples with children. The unmet needs of sole fathers and couples with children for housing and accommodation may reflect levels of service provision to these groups, and the complexities of accommodating children in SAAP accommodation services. There is only one SAAP service (CANFaCS itself) specifically funded to support sole fathers with children in their care, and this may be a factor affecting the national profile.

Needs assessment for this group could be enhanced by some additional data collection. At present this need is not fully documented, and therefore policy makers, and service delivery agencies, do not have required information to maximise service and policy responses. For example: at present, if a father presents alone to an agency, there is no way to record parental care responsibilities. A possible electronic system enhancement would allow an option of a Child Details screen to be activated when the category '*alone*' is chosen on the Client Details screen in response to Question 2 ('with whom the client is presenting'). On the Child Details screen it would be important to record the number of nights the children are in the each parent's care. This would give some indication of the dynamic nature of parenting and homelessness.

Some additional data collection would also enable the policy complexities confronting this group (for example: around legal issues) to be more fully understood, thereby facilitating more appropriate service delivery, and case

management responses. More substantial legal data on children's orders and criminal matters is required for the purposes of case management. In answer to Question 18 on the Client Form, it would be helpful to include boxes for children's orders and criminal matters.

The SAAP data collection process provides a unique resource for understanding this group nationally. It has facilitated the beginning of the development of a profile of the fathers as outlined above, and the identification of some data gaps, which would further assist policy and service delivery.

Recommendation 4.1

In response to Question 2 on the SAAP Client Form, when the category 'alone' is chosen on the Client Details screen, a Child Details screen should be accessible to record details of children who come later into the parent's care as a result of the parent securing SAAP accommodation. On the Child Details screen, insert the option of recording the number of nights the children are in the each parent's care.

Recommendation 4.2

Question 18 of the Client Form to include response boxes for children's orders and criminal matters.

Recommendation 4.3

That funding is provided to better support children who are experiencing homelessness, including the provision of services and resources such as children's workers located in SAAP services.

5. PROFILE OF CANFaCS FATHERS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Capturing a picture of the experiences of fathers who are homeless is a central feature of this project. The literature review identified the complex nature of homelessness, and also identified that there has been very little research conducted about the experiences of fathers who are homeless.

This section develops a more detailed profile of the fathers and children who use CANFaCS. This profile will be presented in two distinct ways. First, a summary of profile data (presenting the experiences of 159 men who have used CANFaCS from February 1st 2002 to May 30th 2004) will be presented, drawn from the CANFaCS database. Of the 159 fathers supported by CANFaCS, 39 sole father families received crisis supported accommodation, and 120 sole father families received outreach support services. Key aspects of this profile have been chosen in order to broaden knowledge about the characteristics of sole father families experiencing homelessness. The CANFaCS data have been analysed by:

- documenting the fathers' backgrounds, including their age, cultural background, income status
- their pathways into homelessness
- their children; and
- their relationship with the legal system

Interspersed with this quantitative data will be the stories of five clients of CANFaCS with key features of their stories highlighted. These five case studies illustrate key features of the profile data, thus illuminating the complex nature of homelessness.

This section will conclude with a discussion of both the profile and qualitative data in order to identify what this data tells us about the experiences of fathers

who are homeless. Selected quotes from the qualitative data will be chosen to facilitate a greater understanding of the meaning of these experiences for the men and their families (all names and other identifying details have been changed).

Finally, it is important to state that we need to be cautious about these data, given gaps in the collection of particular variables, and the anomalies that are present in the data collection tool. For example, fathers whose contact with their children is solely dependent on accessing safe accommodation are recorded as presenting '*alone*' under the table '*Living situation before support*' in the SAAP data. Even though they may gain contact with their children as a result of being accommodated in a SAAP service, SMART does not generate the 'Child Details' screen. The father's children cannot, therefore, be recorded on his client record, nor can any support provided to the children by the SAAP service be recorded.

The other issue is the nature of self-reported data. For example: a father may nominate '*Asked to leave accommodation*' as his main reason for seeking assistance. The service, however, could be addressing issues of safety with the father's former partner in response to the father's expulsion from the family home as a result of his use of domestic violence. This table is used to describe the client's main pathway into homelessness, yet this information does not capture the degree of complexity the SAAP service may be dealing with, as well as the father's response not necessarily being the most accurate indicator of his pathway into homelessness.

5.2 THE FATHERS

Age of fathers

Table 13: Age of fathers at CANFaCS

Age of Fathers	Number	%
Younger than 20 years	0	0
20-25 years	7	6
26-30 years	17	14
31-35 years	25	21
36-40 years	34	29
41-45 years	23	19
45-50 years	9	8
Older than 50 years	4	3
	119	100
Missing data	40	
	159	

The total number of men whose age has been recorded was 119. As can be seen from the table above 59% of fathers are older than 35 years.

Cultural background

The fathers at CANFaCS mainly identified as Australian with only 12 men (7.5%) being born in non-English speaking countries, and 6 men nominating a range of cultural identities, such as Serbian, Vietnamese, Iranian, Latin American and Polynesian.

As indicated by the national data, Indigenous Australians are over-represented as clients, and this is reflected in the 12 (7.5%) CANFaCS fathers who identified as Aboriginal.

Jay is one Indigenous man who has sought assistance from CANFaCS:

Jay's story:

Jay, an Indigenous man in his mid thirties moved to Canberra from Sydney, 2 years ago, after receiving custody, through DOCS and the police, of his two preschool boys. He left his own home in Sydney in order to prevent conflict with the children's mother from whom he had separated four months previously. He lived with his foster parents for two months in Canberra, after which there was conflict about belief systems and he was asked to leave their house. He made several inquiries, and an acquaintance told him about CANFaCS. They were able to accommodate him immediately.

During his stay in CANFaCS, Jay identifies the main area of assistance given to him and his children as safe and secure short-term accommodation. Jay pursued permanent housing very actively, whilst accommodated in CANFaCS and was given an ACT Housing home, within 7 weeks, where he remains two years later. He is very pleased to be able to provide a stable, secure environment for his two children, who previously had experienced trauma. After many hearings in the Family Court, Jay has sole custody of his children (now aged 4 and 5 years).

During the interview, Jay identified his current challenges as: finding suitable employment, enabling him to fulfil his parenting commitments; managing financial constraints; making social connections; assisting his children with their education; and resolving access issues of safety with the children's mother. Jay has connections with the community through children's sport, and utilises a non-government service to access regular respite care for his children.

Jay is particularly concerned that his children complete their education, thus breaking the cycle of disadvantage he sees affecting many Indigenous families, and he has organised additional tuition for his school-aged child.

Jay feels that the needs of men who have care of their children are not addressed by society in general, and that there is suspicion towards sole fathers. He considers that there are financial disincentives to working, and that agencies such as child protection agencies, the police and the Family Court need to be aware that men can be victims of domestic violence, and they need to extend their services to include these men.

Income status**Table 14: Fathers with children in their care: income before and after each support period**

Income status	Fathers before		Fathers after	
	No	%	No	%
Waged	23	20	20	20
Parenting Pension (SPP or PPP)	40	34	35	36
Newstart	35	30	24	25
Disability Pension	13	11	15	15
Compensation	6	5	4	4
Total Number of Fathers	117	100	98	100
No information	37		45	

Seventy-five percent of CANFaCS fathers were on a government pension or benefit before contact with the service. This remained at the same level after contact. This appears to be slightly lower than the figures reported to the NDCA, which were around 90%.

Jonathan's story captures the financial complexities confronting many homeless fathers as they try to maintain a secure income. Financial difficulties are often compounded by shared custody arrangements and insecure employment:

Jonathan's story:

Jonathan, aged in his early 30s, happily shares the care of his daughter, Sabrina, aged 3, with his ex-wife, Dianne, on a 50/50 basis, mutually agreed, and has done so since the separation from Dianne, when Sabrina was 9 months old. At the time of interview he was employed in information technology.

He became homeless following eviction from his privately rented house after the Canberra bushfires, when accommodation in Canberra was more than usually scarce. Although he had worked hard all his life as a private consultant, at that time he had little work and was 'living poor'. His eviction also coincided with a period of depression.

Following his eviction he stayed with several friends over a two month period, but this was not sustainable. He was unable to have Sabrina in his care for the usual amounts of time, during this period. During the process of seeking low cost accommodation, he was referred by other services to CANFaCS. At CANFaCS he was able have Sabrina in his care as usual. He also received assistance with: goal setting; support to promote the achievement of those goals; budgeting; and household routines.

Jonathan stayed at CANFaCS for 6 months until allocated an ACT Housing flat, where he remains still.

At the time of the interview, he had been working for 6 months after 18 months on Newstart Allowance. He expressed gratitude for the ACT Housing flat, but was very troubled about safety in ACT Housing, especially for children, particularly with respect to what he has experienced as the dangerous behaviour of other residents.

Jonathan feels very positive about 50/50 shared care and his relationship with his daughter. However, he is most concerned about some of the policy disincentives to fathers taking an active role in parenting their children when there has been a family separation. These include: only one parent able to claim parenting payment, even though both may be without work; only one parent being able to claim child care benefit, even though the parent working or on Newstart Allowance may need child care to look for work or participate in the work force.

Disability

The literature discussed earlier in the report identified general personal factors affecting homelessness including disability, mental health and substance abuse issues. The table below indicates the major disability the fathers identified to the CANFaCS worker.

Table 15: Disability of the Father- CANFaCS data

Type of Disability	Number	%
Psychiatric	19	12
Physical	6	4
Learning	3	2
Neuro	2	1
Total	30	19

The largest category of disability is that of a psychiatric disability (12%), compared to approximately 4.1% of people in the general population experiencing a psychiatric disability (AIHW, 2004: 30). However these figures do not indicate how much of a factor disability plays in the outcome of homelessness.

5.3 PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

This research project provides important information about where the fathers were living prior to coming to CANFaCS. The table below indicates that these fathers come from a variety of places with the largest percentage (27%) of fathers living in the private rental market before accessing CANFaCS. This is similar to the national picture.

Table 16: Type of Accommodation before CANFaCS

Type of accommodation	Number	%
Private rent	28	27
Institutional/prison/detox	14	14
Rent free	14	14
Public housing	13	13
Sleeping rough (tent, car)	11	11
Rooming house/hostel/Caravan/motel	7	7
From SAAP	6	6
Private board	6	6
Own home	2	2
	101	100
No information	58	

What is quite different in the CANFaCS data is the category of 'Institution' which includes gaol, detox or other institutions. In the CANFaCS population 14% of fathers stated that they were living in an institution prior to contact with CANFaCS, compared to only 1.5% recorded by the NDCA.

In addition, over 11% of CANFaCS fathers said they had been '*living rough*' compared to 8.5% from the national data.

Elvis's story presents the experiences of a father who accessed CANFaCS when the private rental market became unaffordable. Living on a disability pension was not sufficient to meet the costs of private rental. Elvis's story also highlights another common pathway to homelessness, the unexpected responsibility of becoming the main carer for his child:

Elvis' story:

Elvis is a 40-year-old man, who suffered a serious industrial accident over 10 years ago, whilst employed in a trade. The injury required Elvis to be hospitalised for 8 months. His injury left him with several medical conditions, including constant pain, anxiety and mobility limitations. He is now unable to work.

Elvis became homeless after his son, now aged 15, entered his care three years ago. Elvis received a phone call from his son's mother saying that unless Elvis could take him, she would have to put their son into care. Elvis had separated from his partner when his son was 3 years old, and he had not had any contact with his son following separation.

For two months Elvis and his son lived in a group house, which Elvis had been sharing prior to gaining the care of his son. However, Elvis was concerned that it was not a suitable environment for his son, and they left to find more appropriate housing. Elvis then stayed for five weeks in hotels and a caravan park, which he could not afford.

During this time, a town centre community service referred him to CANFaCS. Although reluctant to stay there initially, Elvis eventually did so, as the costs of hotels and caravan parks were unsustainable on a disability support pension. After 8 weeks at CANFaCS he was allocated an ACT Housing house where he and his son remain to this day.

Elvis considers that CANFaCS provided him with invaluable support, without diminishing his sense of autonomy. He felt very concerned during the early days of parenting that his disabilities might affect his ability to parent, and considers that CANFaCS assisted him to develop confidence in his fathering. He now feels secure in his relationship with his son, and they have many connections with friends and the community. His relationships with his daughter (who is an adult) and with his son's mother have improved since he took over the care of his son.

Elvis states that, whilst money is a constant constraint, his biggest challenge is to develop patience to effectively parent his teenage son. He is attending some fathering groups and values the support from ongoing self-initiated contact with CANFaCS.

Table 17: Period of unsafe housing

Length of time in unsafe housing	Number	%
less than one week	10	8
1 week - 1 month	18	14
1 - 3 months	9	7
3 - 6 months	4	3
6 - 12 months	5	4
1 - 2 years	2	1
2 - 5 years	0	0
More than 5 years	1	1
At imminent risk	82	62
	131	100
No information	27	

The national picture show that fathers tend to have spent less time in unsafe housing before support periods, compared to mothers. This picture is reflected in the CANFaCS population with almost a third of the fathers being homeless for less than three months. Two thirds of fathers were regarded as being at *imminent risk of homelessness*.

The table below lays out with whom the father lived prior to the support period at CANFaCS.

Table 18 *Living situation before support*

Living situation before support	Number	%
Both parents	6	4
One parent and parent's spouse/partner	1	1
One parent	11	8
Relative(s)-temporary	9	6
Relative(s)-long term	6	4
Spouse/partner	3	2
Spouse/partner and child(ren)	32	23
Alone with child(ren)	29	21
Alone	8	6
Friend(s)-temporary	12	9
Friend(s)-long term	3	2
Living with other unrelated persons	18	14
Total	138	100
No information	21	

Almost one quarter of the fathers indicated that before their contact with CANFaCS, they had been living with their spouse/partner and children, with a further 21% living only with their children. This is different to the national picture, with 40% of fathers before the support period living alone with their children. One way of interpreting this data is that service availability (in this case CANFaCS in the ACT) provides 'local' fathers with greater options to live with their children after separation

State/Territory before CANFaCS

Given the national crisis in homelessness, it is interesting to note where fathers were located prior to support. The table below indicates the State/Territory from which the father resided prior to support from CANFaCS.

Table 19: State/Territory before CANFaCS

State/Territory	Number	%
ACT	130	82
NSW	22	14
NT	2	1
QLD	2	1
TAS	1	1
WA	2	1
Total	159	100

The larger proportion of fathers living in NSW before support at CANFaCS in comparison to other jurisdictions could be related to the close geographical proximities of the Yass, Goulburn and Queanbeyan regions to the ACT. What is unclear from this data is whether sole father families in other jurisdictions found out about CANFaCS, specifically relocating to the ACT for accommodation support, or whether these families were mostly itinerant, settling in the ACT in response to services being available for them.

Table 20 *Father's main reason for seeking assistance*

Father's main reason for seeking assistance	Number	%
Domestic Violence (22), Abuse (7) conflicts (12)	41	29
Relationship/Family breakdown, death	35	25
Recently arrived in the ACT	8	6
Evicted from previous accommodation/or accommodation ending	8	6
Asked to leave accommodation	16	11
Psychiatric illness	2	1
Recently left institution	5	3.5
Itinerant	1	1
Drug and alcohol	5	3
Financial difficulty	7	5
Emergency accommodation ended/unavailable	7	5
Time out from family/situation	5	3.5
Gambling	1	1
Total	141	100
No information	18	

According to the national data the main reason assistance was sought by sole father families was loss of previous accommodation through eviction or accommodation ending (20.9%), followed by relationship breakdown (17.7%), unavailability of usual accommodation (13.8%) and financial difficulties (11%). In the CANFaCS population the most commonly stated reason was conflict or domestic violence (29%). As the CANFaCS model is underpinned by a priority of 'safety for all' it is possible that this high figure is a response to the particular focus the CANFaCS workers have in talking to fathers about the effects of violence in their lives. Unfortunately, we cannot tell from this data what proportion of the men *used* violence, or were *subjected* to violence.

Relationship breakdown accounted for 25% of the reasons given for seeking access to CANFaCS. This is also in higher proportion to the national data recording this as the main reason for seeking assistance.

Brad's story describes the impact of domestic violence on homelessness and fathering:

Brad's story:

Brad is in his mid 30s, and has the care of his three children - two boys aged 13 and 11, and a girl, aged 8. The children's mother now has overnight access of one weekend in two, and for half of the school holidays. Brad became homeless after removing the children from their mother, his ex-partner, following a long series of incidents during which he became aware that his children were suffering abuse whilst in the care of their mother and her partner.

Brad left his employment and rental home in a country town after removing his children to ensure their safety. He then moved to Canberra and lived with a relative. Following threats from the children's mother and her boyfriend, Brad could no longer safely stay with the relative, and was referred by Lifeline to CANFaCS.

Brad was accommodated at CANFaCS for a 5 month period. During this time, he resolved the custody issues through a difficult Family Court process. In CANFaCS he received support and assistance with complex Family Court and Child Support Agency issues, resolution of a large outstanding debt with ACT Housing, parenting skills and self-confidence.

Brad now lives in ACT Housing accommodation, and he is focused on providing continuity of care for his children.

Brad has not been in employment for some months and considers that family commitments can make employment hard for sole fathers - an issue he feels is not widely understood by employers. The main issues that Brad now confronts include: juggling work and family commitments; assisting his children with their relationships, and their schooling; and ensuring the safety of his children when they are on access visits with their mother.

5.4 THE CHILDREN

The SAAP data indicate that only a small percentage of children under 4 years of age are in the care of their fathers. However, over a third of the CANFaCS client group have children in their care aged between 0-4 years, and a further 42% of the children in their father's care are aged between 5 and 12 years. Without knowing how many of the 328 children were in their father's care 14/14 nights, comparisons cannot be made with Qu's (2004) research, which found 8.8% of children aged 0-4 lived with their father. That is, it is not clear whether a greater proportion of homeless fathers (33.5%) care for children aged 0-4 than fathers who are not homeless.

However, it is clear that it is a great deal more difficult to obtain or maintain employment when caring for children aged 0-4. The expense and unavailability of childcare make employment practically impossible for this group of homeless sole fathers.

The gender of the children supported by CANFaCS show very similar proportions to that of the SAAP data - 44.4% being female, and 55.6% being male.

Table 21: Ages of the children

Age	Number	%
0-4 years	109	33.5
5-12 years	138	42
13-15 years	41	12.5
16-17 years	21	6
Age unknown	19	6
Total	328	99.5

Table 22: Number of Homes in the past year

Number of homes	Number	%
1 (siblings staying with others)	60	18
2	103	31
3	71	22
4	19	6
5	9	3
6	8	2
7	1	<1
8	12	5
10	2	<1
20	4	1
Blank	39	11
Total	328	100

Table 22 represents the number of homes children accessing CANFaCS have lived in over the past 12 months. The data indicates that 51% of these children had lived in more than three houses in the year prior to their contact with CANFaCS. The most extreme examples of housing instability were the experiences of 2 groups of children. One group lived in more than 10 houses prior to their contact with CANFaCS, while another group of children lived in 20 homes over a 12-month period. This table indicates substantial instability in housing for these children.

John's experiences as a homeless father are compounded by the uncertainty of securing stable accommodation. He recognises the impact of this uncertainty on his young children. His children, aged 3 and 12, have already experienced significant housing disruption:

John's story:

John is 40 years old, and at the time of interview was a resident in CANFaCS. He is the father of two children, a girl, Rose, aged 3 and a boy, Steve, aged 12. He has full-time care of his son, and shares the care of his daughter with his ex-partner.

He became homeless following an argument with his then partner of five years, the mother of Rose, for which he was charged with domestic violence. John disputes this charge, but he could not afford the legal representation required to challenge the charge. John received a good behaviour bond, and lost access to the rental home he had shared with Rose's mother. John considers his ex-partner's mental health problems were a major source of conflict in their relationship prior to separation.

Following his separation John lived with friends. During this time, Steve, with whom John had a long-term continuous relationship, including a period of resident parenting, came to live with him. This occurred as a result of problems with Steve's mother's partner. After about two months, the accommodation with friends became overcrowded.

As a tradesperson, John's income could not cover private rental. He contacted a town centre Community Service and was referred to CANFaCS. At the time of interview John had lived at CANFaCS for 5 months awaiting housing allocation. During his time at CANFaCS, his relationship with Rose's mother became more cordial, and he was able to resume overnight contact with Rose. At the time of interview John was very concerned about his son's emotional well-being, and how this had been affected by homelessness, and by his disrupted relationship with his mother.

John regards his life as being totally orientated towards his relationships with his children, and being a good role model for his children. During the interview John expressed concern that the longer he had to wait for housing allocation, the more difficult life is for Steve, and he looked forward to being able to set up a secure and stable home for his children.

5.5 LEGAL CONTEXT

As noted earlier, the main reasons for men seeking assistance from CANFaCS are issues of domestic violence and conflict. We therefore examined the legal issues that impact on the fathers who access CANFaCS.

Table 23: Legal issues

	Before		After	
No legal processes	60	38%	50	37%
Had a DVO on them	29	18%	15	11%
Father had DVO on someone else	20	13%	15	11%
Other legal processes (eg family court)	21	13%	21	15%
No information	29	18%	36	26%
Total	159	100%	137	100.00%

Almost half (47%) of the fathers were involved in the legal system with 31% involved in Protection Orders. This figure does reduce at the end of the support period with 22% of the fathers involved with Protection Orders.

In relation to criminal matters 15% (24) of men had criminal matters with a further 6% (10) experiencing bail conditions. With regard to orders affecting children, 13 men (8%) had Children's Court Orders and 18 men (13%) had Family Court Orders.

5.6 DISCUSSION

The CANFaCS data profile and case studies present a unique overview of homeless sole father families. A number of strong themes emerge as central to the experience of homelessness for these men. These include the varied pathways that precede homelessness, the complex intersection of homelessness, unemployment and poverty, and finally, the strong desire to be a successful father. This section presents a brief discussion of each theme interspersed with quotes from the fathers' stories to provide personal commentary to each theme:

- pathways to homelessness
- the links between homelessness, unemployment and poverty
- men's strong desire and motivation to be a *good father*

Pathways to homelessness

The CANFaCS profile data and the men's stories suggest that there are a number of key triggers that precede homelessness. These include a sudden change of role from non-custodial parent to sole father. This shift in responsibility brings with it new demands in key areas such as accommodation, income and employment. Often current accommodation arrangements are inappropriate for various reasons, including overcrowding, being an unsuitable environment for children, and a fear of violence. This common experience has been identified by CANFaCS, but no empirical studies explore this relationship in detail. One of the fathers interviewed gives an example of this experience:

... I was going through a lot because of my situation having my son come down, I was worrying about things, I wanted to get a home for us to live. In the house [I was living in], they were friends, but they were workers, single, no children, just single people lifestyle, you know. I couldn't expect them to stop doing what they wanted with their life you know, because all of a sudden I had my son there. And I was sort of thinking they should have a little bit of respect and, you know, just tone it down a bit, and it just didn't work out ...

A small number of men stated that they and their children were victims of violence. Seeking safety for themselves and their children was one of the triggers of homelessness and a motivating factor in seeking support and refuge at CANFaCS. Sometimes, the response of services such as the police, Child Welfare and the Family Court were experienced as inadequate - with the strong suggestion that men were not regarded as potential victims of family and domestic violence. As one of the fathers explains:

... I raised my concerns with [the child protection agency] about the attacks on me in front of the children by the mother, her constant breaking of the domestic violence order, the inefficient way the police act - yet, "go home, we can't do nothing, there are more serious cases". I can't understand when they are going to act ...

The links between homelessness, unemployment and poverty

Becoming a homeless father is also linked to difficulties in finding and maintaining secure employment. The responsibilities of sole fatherhood mean that working hours need to be flexible to accommodate the varying needs of children. Whilst the number of part-time workers has increased in Australia (Saunders, 2002: 87), women form the majority of part-time workers (Saunders, 2002: 93). The collective experience of the men in the study was that the conditions and the hours in the industries in which they could work are not conducive to providing care to children. An additional factor is that where workers are on low incomes, paid childcare is prohibitively expensive. A father highlights these issues:

... It came as a bit of a shock when I got laid off instantly, and that's when I guess you sit at home for a while and look at the papers at jobs, [thinking] that might suit me, that might suit me. But then it's sort of all full-time, and I'm thinking, well, you know, I can't start a job off and then, with kids ... that's a lot of sickies, that's more than you get for an adult in a year. It just gets that really frustrating. The network for guys just isn't the same as there is for women. A lot of bosses are understanding that they [women] need time off for children and that, whereas the areas I'm skilled in are sort of more, "just deal with it, we need you here!" ...

Policy disincentives to working were identified in the interviews. These included the rent in public housing, which increases when the occupant is working. Another financial impediment to gaining regular income was the loss

of Centrelink payments and the associated benefits such as child care and pharmaceutical subsidies. Being caught in a poverty trap becomes an unintended consequence of gaining an independent income:

... You know, to survive in society in Australia there's no incentive to work. You know, I'm in a situation now where I'm in a government house and I get help with child care; yet if I go out to work, I end out paying top rent and lose child care, and I end out working for probably \$20, and that's the situation everyone faces - but how do you beat that cycle? ...

For all of the fathers that were interviewed, low income, and sometimes major debt, was a key factor in limiting housing options, and finding a pathway out of homelessness. These fathers regarded the importance of finding secure and affordable accommodation as an essential building block to their children's emotional wellbeing, and in their capacity to be a successful father:

... The only other option was to rent privately; it was way out of our range - it was \$300 a week for a three bedroom house or something - there was no way we could have made it from week to week, paying that much in rent. I know you get some sort of subsidy back from Centrelink, but it still doesn't cover it. And the other thing was the kids - we'd been to and fro, and back and fro, and we just needed somewhere that we could settle down, and know where we were going to be, and we could start rebuilding our lives. And I guess that's a part of wanting to be in ACT Housing. There were only two reasons really: one, we couldn't afford anything else; and we wanted a home ...

Men's strong desire and motivation to be a 'good' father

The fathers expressed strong feelings about their relationship(s) with their children, and a strong commitment to provide the children with security, readily identifying the relationship between security and having their own home:

We've become mates, we really have. I was worried that it wasn't going to work out, yeah, but I don't have to worry about that no more, 'cause, yeah, we'll always be with each other now. I think, you know, he'll move out, of course, in the years to come and that, and do his thing, but I'm his Dad - I'm his Dad, so, and he's me son, so, it's a bit mushy sort of thing, but you know, but it's how I feel. This is our home, and it can't be your home without him being here with me, you know - we've just got to help each other, that's all you can do, isn't it? you know, just try to be happy and that. We don't have a lot, but you don't need to have a great deal do you? ...

Seeking refuge at CANFaCS was a difficult but essential turning point in the lives of these men. Their help seeking behaviours mirror the findings of

current research on the difficulties men experience in seeking assistance (Donovan, 1999). The men identified feeling ashamed and uncertain when they first encountered the staff at CANFaCS.

I rang up CANFaCS. I was a bit hesitant to start with, because I thought: 'I should be able to do this', you know - a lot of my friends have kids and that, and I saw them do it, and yeah, it was just hard for me to ring up CANFaCS; a bit of pride I suppose, but I swallowed that and in we went ...

The shift in identity to sole custodial parent meant that a number of fathers struggled to develop confidence in their fathering. Many struggled to develop the necessary skills and knowledge of parenting, motivated by a desire to become good role models for their children.

I don't drink; I don't take any drugs. I just want to be a father to my children - but not be how I was. I didn't have a father around, I missed out. I never did father-son things, you know, whereas my whole life now involves those two. Whether it's after work, or weekends, it involves them. So that's basically my outlook ...

In conclusion, the experience of being a sole father who is homeless is complicated by structural, familial and emotional factors. An important finding in this study is that little research has been done on the needs and issues confronting these fathers and their children. This section of the report illuminates how one group of fathers not only experiences homelessness, but also, how a shift in role and responsibility to sole resident parent challenges these men to develop new identities and meaning in their lives. The remaining sections of the report document the development of the CANFaCS model as one way of meeting the challenge to provide, not only safe short-term accommodation to homeless fathers and their children, but also, to support men to develop as fathers.

Recommendation 5.1

In order to better understand the relationship between sole father families, homelessness, and domestic violence, the 'domestic violence' option of Question 12 of the Client Form be enhanced to record whether the client used, or was subjected to, violence.

6 CANFaCS MODEL

6.1 HISTORY

Service for Single Men and Men with Accompanying Children

As a result of political lobbying by the ACT branch of the Lone Fathers Association (LFA) of Australia, the then ACT Liberal Government provided a grant to LFA in May 1999 to provide an accommodation service for single men and men with accompanying children.

The Canberra Times reported that the LFA 'had lobbied for a men's refuge for 15 years' (Cassidy, 2002c). There were some signs that this 'refuge' initially was envisioned as a service for men and their children escaping domestic violence.² However, when the LFA's service came into existence, it was described as a 'family support service for men and children who have been left homeless through the breakdown of a relationship and financial hardship' (service brochure). From 1999 to 2002, the LFA's Men's Accommodation And Crisis Service (MAACS) was used by 100 men and 60 children who called [the refuge] home when they'd been kicked out of theirs' (Cassidy, 2002a).

The LFA continue to own the name 'MAACS'. According to the LFA web site, MAACS provides short term crisis accommodation, information and referral services to men, or men and their children who are in a marriage or relationship breakdown situation.

MAACS operated for two years and eight months, accommodating two client groups under the one roof; single men without children, and fathers with children.

² Two small surveys initially were used to justify the service; one an apparent survey of "male victims of domestic abuse"; the other a short questionnaire to ACT service providers which began by stating, "It is proposed that there is a need in the ACT for a safe place where men who are homeless through domestic violence and/or economic pressures can stay for a short period of time."

MAACS was evaluated by an external consultant³. Following an increase in funding, the funding department instigated a tender process for the management of the service - this time to only serve fathers with children in their care. While the original service was funded outside of a formal tender process, when the service went to tender, the LFA were unsuccessful in securing ongoing management of the service. Instead, the service was awarded to the Canberra Men's Reference Group with Marymead Child and Family Centre (Department of Education and Community Services, 2002).

The Lone Fathers Association interpreted their failure to secure the service in the tender process as an instance of discrimination (Cassidy, 2002b; Downie, 2002). While the Family Services Minister welcomed the Canberra Fathers and Children Service to its new role (Cassidy 2002c), the LFA and some Opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly were critical of the evaluation and tendering process (Cassidy, 2002d; 2002e). Public debate about the men's service continued through to April and May (Cassidy, 2002f; Moloney, J-P.2002). This debate had quietened by mid-2002, and as *The Canberra Times* reported in 28 October 2002, the Canberra Fathers and Children Service quickly began operating at full capacity. CANFaCS increased its levels of service beyond those achieved by the previous management, establishing productive working relationships with other organisations in the sector, and improving its responses to homeless fathers and children.

Men's Issues Reference Group (MIRG)

The members of the Canberra Men's Reference Group had originally come together through their involvement in a previous group, the Men's Issues Reference Group. This group had been established in 1998 by the local Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) to consult on practice and policy issues about men and violence. One of the initiatives that rose out of this collaboration was the development of DVCS MensLine – a local 24-hour crisis service for men whose lives are affected by domestic violence, including those troubled by their violent and abusive behaviour, and the effects of these

³ The ACT government has not released this report.

behaviours on themselves and those they love, and men who are subjected to violence.

MIRG met regularly with DVCS from April 1998, providing knowledge and feedback to DVCS on how best to reach boys and men in the community, and around what kinds of issues may arise for men in relation to violence. MensLine was officially launched on 25 November 1998.

Canberra Men's Reference Group

Prior to tendering for CANFaCS, members of the Canberra Men's Reference Group had been involved in the development of initiatives to support men and their families both locally and nationally. The range of experience, skills, and perspectives brought together by the members of the Canberra Men's Reference Group included policy development and program management of government and community initiatives in the areas of family policy, work and family, family relationship support, parenting programs, child protection and domestic violence, as well as research of national significance on men and fatherhood.

Members of the Canberra Men's Reference Group also had considerable experience in direct service delivery to disadvantaged and high-need men and families, separated fathers, men in the correctional and juvenile justice systems, as well as in education, community development, community sector training and mental health services. These experiences, skills, and perspectives fed into the CANFaCS philosophy, and informed the Canberra Men's Reference Group's interest in tendering for the fathers' service.

In line with research demonstrating men's concerns about the impact of their violence on their children as a motivating factor for changing abusive behaviours (Donovan, 1996), when the tender for the accommodation service was announced, the Canberra Men's Reference Group saw the opportunity to tender for a service for fathers and their children as a way of promoting a safe community by enhancing the relationships of fathers with their children - within

the context of a supported crisis accommodation service.

Marymead Child and Family Centre provided an auspice for the Canberra Men's Reference Group to establish Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) with the aim of achieving incorporation within eighteen months. Marymead is a non-profit service with considerable experience in the delivery of human services for families and children.

Establishment of CANFaCS

CANFaCS began operating on 1 February 2002.

In its first six months of operation, CANFaCS: established a unique service with strong links to other agencies; transformed the Reference Group into a community based Management Group; managed a costly legal case regarding a claim for tenancy by a family who had barricaded themselves into the downstairs area; manoeuvred through a hostile media and political environment; managed an extensive refurbishment process of the property; responded to an ACT Legislative Assembly inquiry into homeless men and their accompanying children; and addressed neighbourhood opposition to the accommodation service - whilst simultaneously providing a seamless transition of services for sole father families from the previous service provider.

CANFaCS is now a legal entity in its own right and seeks partnerships with other quality services to enhance relationships between fathers and their children who are in various at-risk circumstances. CANFaCS remains the only such service in Australia.

6.2 VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

CANFaCS is driven by a set of **values and principles** in its work with sole father families: These values are:

- *fathers matter*
- *clients are not just individual service users - the 'client' at CANFaCS is the relationship between fathers and their children*
- *first call for children*
- *safety for all*
- *homelessness is a social justice issue; and*
- *community is important*

Fathers matter

Much of the literature on fathers in the last thirty years has focused on 'father absence', 'fatherlessness', and the impact on children's wellbeing of fathers not financially contributing after separation. CANFaCS states this value, not simply as a response to those negative views of fathers, but as an ideal to what fathers can aspire to. CANFaCS views fathers as important as any other member of a family. This is built on a belief in the positive contribution that fathers can make to their children and families' lives, and to the community.

Yet there is a balance to be made between disqualifying a father's value in a family, and overstating the importance of father involvement. The CANFaCS model does not hold that either families', or children's lives (especially boys' lives), are necessarily diminished because fathers are not involved. Rather, the service practice aims to build on a father's strengths and to help individual men become the fathers they want to be. In this sense, CANFaCS defines fathering more broadly than a father's relationship with his child alone. This more expansive definition includes working with the father to develop and

maintain positive relationships with other people in their children's lives – especially children's mothers.

In attempting this balance, CANFaCS is often referred to in the public press as a 'pro-feminist organisation' (Cassidy, 2000a), yet this label doesn't appear to take in the breadth of aims that the organisation is attempting to achieve. The CANFaCS model is definitely supportive of women and children's safety, and is built on a gendered analysis of violence; yet the agenda of the organisation is broader than simply promoting a feminist agenda.

The ***operational framework*** arising from these values can be summarised as: accessible, inclusive, respectful of diversity and difference, and open to all eligible fathers - irrespective of sexuality, cultural, religious or racial background, age or (dis)abilities.

Clients are not just individual service users - the 'client' at CANFaCS is the relationship between fathers and their children

As community agencies begin to view their clients more broadly than the specific users of their services, the CANFaCS model goes beyond specifying 'fathers' or 'children' as the service's primary client. As adults, fathers are better at expressing their needs than children, yet children's needs are not always addressed by attending to the needs of their father, because children are separate people who have their own needs, dreams and hopes. The CANFaCS model therefore intervenes to enhance the *relationship* between fathers and children.

Operationally, the name Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) was chosen to distinguish the organisation from a 'men's refuge' in order to focus the work of the organisation on the complexity of relational support. Holding the *relationship* as 'client' means that case management interventions are rarely black and white, but require the service to always work 'in the grey'. Therefore, in recognition that every intervention is an ethical consideration, an Advisory Group was formed with representatives from men's, women's and

children's services, and domestic violence services, to consult and provide advice on particularly complex issues.

In addition, consistent with the belief that the client isn't always a (single) person, the language used in CANFaCS reports and submissions rarely refers to 'clients'. When referring specifically to individuals the preferred terminology is 'fathers', 'children', 'mothers' or 'others'.

The ***operational framework*** arising from these values can be summarised as: focusing on strengthening family relationships, irrespective of family circumstance; and professional, transparent and accountable practices towards fathers and their children, their partners, ex-partners, funding bodies and the community.

First call for children

Recognising that the needs of fathers and children can at times be competing and mutually exclusive, the CANFaCS model prioritises the needs of children when those needs are in conflict with the father's needs.

As a witness to the fundamental dignity of all children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the CANFaCS model adopts the term '*first call for children*' in preference to the Australian Family Court language: '*bests interests of the child*'. To varying degrees, at least some children in *all* nations face unemployment, homelessness, violence, poverty, and other issues that dramatically affect children's lives. As children are members of a family, CANFaCS aims to be a centre for excellence in the provision of services to all fathers and their children who are in need. CANFaCS letters of employment specify that it is essential that staff members are respectful of, and agree to carry out their duties within, the context of these principles and values.

The **operational framework** that arises from these values can be summarised as child-centered, client-directed, strengths-based, holistic and integrative.

Safety for all

In the belief that domestic violence is more pervasive in our community than is evidenced by the numbers of women and children presenting at women's refuges, the CANFaCS model prioritises the safety of *all* people affected by violence. This includes people who use violence, people who are subjected to, or witness violence, as well as other family and friends who are impacted indirectly by violence.

Operationally, the CANFaCS model uses the language of '*persons subjected to violence*' or '*persons who use violence*' in preference to the language of '*victims*' and '*perpetrators*', in order to avoid the kinds of practice-based problems that emanate from those labels. Workers also assess a family's safety at first contact with the service, as well as inquiring into such things as a father's suicidality at the assessment interview (in recognition that it is common for many men to have thoughts about ending their lives after separation).

The **operational framework** that arises from these values can be summarised as being focused on the promotion of safety for all, self-care and the responsible care of others. This framework is sustainable in terms of both worker capacity, and wellbeing.

Homelessness is a social justice issue

In line with narrative and solution-focused principles, which work at separating the person from the problem, the CANFaCS model holds the belief that homelessness is a social justice issue separate from an individual. Although some fathers may have problems with alcohol and other drugs, or may have a psychiatric disability, these problems, in and of themselves, do not result in

homelessness. Rather, homelessness results from a failure of the social system to uniquely support individuals.

Operationally, CANFaCS participates in forums and social strategies to address homelessness, as well as submitting to political inquiries eg: Legislative Assembly Standing Inquiry and the Parliamentary Inquiry into joint custody. Based on non-discriminatory and social justice principles of empowerment, self-determination, respect and equality, the CANFaCS model works to enhance the lives of all family members, recognising that broader social inequality and inequities affect the contexts of individuals' lives.

The **operational framework** that arises from these values can be summarised as being focused on resolving crises and establishing the capacity to sustain independent accommodation, based on sound methodologies and being open to emerging experience.

Community is important

In many jurisdictions across Australia, families are required to separate when homeless, and in some women's refuges, boys over the age of twelve are not permitted. The CANFaCS model recognises that homelessness threatens relationships, and can separate family members from one another. In holding to this value, CANFaCS attempts to avoid further separation of family members. Operationally, the service will not provide accommodation or outreach support to families where the family is prepared to split up in order to be accommodated across the service system. Operational experience demonstrates that housing stress already places considerable pressures on interpersonal relationships *without* the further burden of family separation during a time of crisis. Case management with half a family is also not workable.

In addition, the fathers and children at CANFaCS are in relationship to each other and to many people, places and things beyond the father-child dyad -

many of the problems experienced by homeless sole father families are relational to financial, legal, health and other social systems. The CANFaCS model recognises this relational aspect of fathers' and children's lives by attempting to link families to both personal and social system supports that build a sense of community and connectedness.

Operationally, in order to build a sense of community and connectedness, the CANFaCS property is not a confidential address - mothers, grandparents, friends, etc. can visit the family at the family's request. Each year, the CANFaCS staff and Management Group invite past and present sole father families, their extended families, neighbours and supporters, to a Fathers Day barbeque. In partnership with some of the women's refuges, children, for whom it is safe to do so, are invited to spend time with their father(s) at the CANFaCS property, with staff from the relevant women's refuge in attendance. The staff team attempts to build a community of support for sole father families in many ways.

The **operational framework** that arises from these values can be summarised as being focused on building links to community, as well as on improving collaboration and partnerships with other community organizations and government agencies.

It is the intention of the CANFaCS Management Group and workers that these values, and the operational principles that flow from them, permeate and influence every part of the organisation's work. How this intention is expressed will be explored under the headings of CANFaCS' knowledge, theory and practice, service delivery, organisational arrangements and governance.

6.3 KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

CANFaCS' values and principles developed from a theory and knowledge base providing a clear foundation for practices and policy decisions within the organisation. At the same time, these values and principles influence the

choices of theoretical and knowledge bases utilised. For example, CANFaCS' understanding of the political, social, economic and legal environments, including its knowledge of the causes and effects of homelessness, informs the service's values statement '*homelessness is a social justice issue*'. This value, in turn, affects the choices made regarding methods of working with individuals, families, communities and government.

Knowledge base

CANFaCS is open to emerging knowledge and experience, utilising a broad range of knowledge areas in service delivery. This range includes knowledge of:

- the political, social, economic, and legal environments, and how these impact upon the lives of sole father families and homelessness (Family Court Counselling, 1996)
- social change, particularly with respect to gender roles, relationships and contemporary understandings of masculinity (MacKay 2004)
- working with domestic violence, (Jenkins, 1991)
- family relationships including men as fathers, and the strengths fathers can bring to the fathering role (Scott & O'Neill, 1996; Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe, Donovan, Habib, Callaghan & Pawson, 1999)
- the needs of separated fathers and their children, and knowledge of '*authoritative parenting*' following separation (Marymead Child & Family Centre, 2001; Amato,1998b; Jordan, 1996)
- child development and child protection (ACT Department of Education and Community Services,1998; Tomison, 1998)
- men's help-seeking strategies and needs, and their implications for appropriate father-friendly service delivery (Donovan Research, 1998)
- homelessness, pathways to homelessness, and needs of homeless families, including the effects of homelessness on children (O'Neill, 1999)

- community and government agencies and resources (Child Support Agency, 2000), and
- methods of working with individuals, families, communities and government), in particular, narrative and solution-focused approaches (White & Epston, 1990; Berg, 1994)

Narrative and solution–focused approaches

As the only service in Australia targeting sole father families experiencing homelessness, CANFaCS has developed particular methods of working with its client group, which are anchored in its statement of values and principles, and its operational framework. These methods are informed by narrative (White, 1995; Carey & Russell, 2003) and solution-focused approaches (Berg, 1994). Both approaches are based on service users identifying and developing their strengths. Building on what service users are already doing *well* means that even the most complex situations will evidence some progress.

Utilising narrative approaches, CANFaCS workers are respectful of the service users' experiences of their lives, and of their unique differences. At the same time, they may work with a father to work from an alternative perspective, which separates the person/client from '*the problem*', and identifies occasions when the problem has not been part of his life. This opens up many possibilities, allowing the worker, and the service user, to work cooperatively *against* the problem, increasing the service user's sense of agency in his own life, and further developing those skills enabling his movement towards greater independence.

The honouring of difference integral to the narrative approach enables different cultural, religious, class, ethnic and linguistic differences to be expressed as client-preferred processes. Examples include: client-specific, and thus, culturally sensitive, advocacy and support plans, which articulate individually and culturally appropriate goals. In the day-to-day operations of the service, CANFaCS workers utilise an intentional focus on issues of

respect for *'difference'* and *'respect for others'* in working with individual fathers. Much of the hidden curriculum of day-to-day service user/worker interactions is directed towards encouraging positive and appropriate relational practices with fathers, their children and others, which demonstrate acceptance, inclusion and responsibility.

Solution-focused strategies concentrate on finding solutions for problems/issues in the present and the future, rather than looking for causes in the past. This fits comfortably with a narrative approach, and is integrated into the stages of case management: screening, intake and assessment; support planning and goal setting; direct service delivery, advocacy and referral; exit planning and the transition to independent accommodation; as well as case closure and evaluation.

Such strategies promote client-directed, collaborative, goal-oriented work that can easily be evaluated by the service user, CANFaCS itself, and the funding body. Such goal-oriented work can be extremely helpful to men who, as was seen in the literature review, respond positively to action-oriented work in promoting solutions. CANFaCS works with many service users who feel 'stuck' and for whom homelessness and other problems seem overwhelming and defeating. Solution-focused strategies within a narrative framework can identify alternative avenues for action, and possibilities for a different future. They can, indeed, promote hope.

One of the fathers interviewed described the process in this way:

... Like, (the worker) even said it to me one day: "Some days you get so far in you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel", you know, and his help, (although most of it I had to do for myself), he just got me to a stage where I could see the little light at the end so I could start going for it. 'Cause when I first [went into CANFaCS], I just had so much stuff pouring down on me, I was a wreck, you know; I didn't know what to do and how to start dealing with it - and then (the worker) drew up a program to organise priorities of dealing with things, and who I should deal with, and how to deal with them...

Workers operating from a narrative perspective are keen to connect people to a sense of community. Case management that assists service users to (re)connect their lives to new or improved, supportive relationships with family, community and services means that: crises are more likely to be resolved; relationships will be enhanced; and the service user's ability to live independently of emergency accommodation is more likely to be sustainable.

One of the fathers interviewed described the connectedness he experienced when attending a community group, to which he had been referred by CANFaCS:

... It just helped me I think; when I went to a couple of these things, I had this thing in my head that I was different, and I went there, and there were blokes there just like me - and that helped me out. I just had this pride thing, I suppose, that's what it would've come to in the end, and when I went there they were just like me; it didn't matter, you know?...

The narrative approach views problems as operating on a broader social level, and considers the work of a human service organisation to be intimately associated with issues of social justice, social exclusion, poverty, discrimination, prejudice and exploitation. This influences CANFaCS' advocacy work, which is described later in more detail.

6.4 SERVICE DELIVERY

Organisational aim

CANFaCS Incorporated is a values-based community organisation working and advocating for social justice within a narrative and solution-focused framework. To further its values and goals, CANFaCS has as its objective the strengthening of relationships between men, their families, and their communities through strategies, and activities, that address homelessness, domestic violence, and the quality of men's family relationships and parenting skills.

Funded amount

In 2003/04, CANFaCS received \$186,000 for the provision of crisis accommodation to no more than four sole father families at any one time, and the provision of 5 outreach hours per week.

The organisation operates its office from a small annex attached to the rear of the property, which CANFaCS leases from ACT Housing to provide crisis supported accommodation. The agency does not have a service vehicle.

Staffing

Currently the staffing levels for the service are 2 full-time equivalent workers. This comprises 1 full-time Coordinator, and three part-time Case Workers. One of the staff members is female.

Given the variety of pathways into homelessness for sole father families, CANFaCS is a generalist service, and staff are required to be competent across a range of issues, including: family separation; suicidality; domestic violence; all forms of disability; child protection; and systemic issues.

CANFaCS is staffed between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday with on call arrangements in place at other times.

Eligibility

Fathers who have at least one child in their overnight care, at least one night per fortnight are eligible for support from CANFaCS. The child does not need to be the father's biological child but there must be a recognised caring relationship.

In respecting the diversity of families, and the variety of contemporary living arrangements in evidence, a father who has a female partner *is* eligible for support from CANFaCS if he identifies himself as a sole father family and lives separately from his partner. Families where the female partner is an involved member in the family's decision-making are referred to other accommodation services. CANFaCS also provides accommodation and outreach support to fathers who have a male partner.

Accommodation / No turn-aways

Homeless children are already at risk of poor outcomes. However, homeless children in their father's full-time care are at increased risk of sleeping in cars and on the streets (as a result of the lack of available accommodation options for sole father families) than are homeless children in other family types. As crisis accommodation options for sole father families are limited across Australia, CANFaCS prioritises supported accommodation for fathers who have their children in their care full-time, or very nearly full-time (ie: 14/14 nights).

The accommodation service has run at near capacity since the commencement of operation, so the organisation has needed to network with other local accommodation providers to provide emergency housing to sole father families. In partnership with Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service (CEAS), an ACT Government-funded brokerage program to temporarily accommodate families in caravans and cabins until more secure accommodation becomes available, CANFaCS has been able to prioritise the provision of emergency accommodation to families with children. This has provided additional capacity to accommodate fathers who have their children in their care 14/14 nights.

The CANFaCS values statement drives workers to ensure that *all* fathers with children in their care 14/14 nights are provided emergency accommodation. The staff are committed to a policy of '*no turn aways*' in recognition that they do not work within a larger system response to this client group. See '*Advocacy*' section for a service response to this problem.

Outreach

In recognition that the number of available supports for sole father families is, in general, more limited, CANFaCS provides every eligible father at least one outreach appointment.

Although CANFaCS is only funded to provide 5 hours outreach support per week, operational experience has demonstrated that at least 15 hours per week is required to provide a meaningful outreach support service. Consequently CANFaCS has consistently exceeded its funded capacity for outreach.

In addition, sustainable outcomes are more likely to be achieved when outreach support is provided following a family's move from SAAP to permanent accommodation. However, given resource constraints, CANFaCS (with advice from the Advisory Group and SAAP services) made the decision to prioritise outreach support to eligible fathers who were not accommodated at CANFaCS. This shift in outreach support from former residents to fathers who had received no support was preventive in intent and nature, as many families only required a limited amount of support to enable them to maintain their housing. In this way, accommodation breakdown was avoided, leaving options other than SAAP available. Where current accommodation had completely broken down, outreach support was provided to assist the family to access emergency accommodation. In these instances, the funding body made additional funds available to purchase CANFaCS case management support, enabling outreach to be provided to these families in excess of CANFaCS' core funding.

From 1 February 2002 until 31 December 2003, 138 fathers received outreach support, with 274 children benefiting from this.

Accommodation support

The CANFaCS crisis accommodation service is a 6-bedroom government owned house in a residential street in North Canberra. The property is able to house 4 families at any one time. From 1 February 2002 until 31 December 2003, 49 fathers and 77 children were accommodated. Due to the high demand from those fathers with children in their care full time, CANFaCS prioritises accommodation to this group over fathers who may only have their children for a few days a fortnight.

Length of Stay

All families entering the accommodation service are offered accommodation for an initial period of two weeks. During this period the service works with fathers to assess their needs, and the likely benefits of longer-term case management and supported accommodation for them and their families. Fathers who have other options available, or who neither need nor want case management support, are not accommodated after the initial two-week period, and the father is referred to more appropriate supports.

Families who stay at the accommodation service stay for an average of three months. During a family's stay, the service works with fathers to resolve the major issues contributing to their homelessness (in line with the goals agreed in family case management plans), and identifies other safe accommodation options that families can access until permanent accommodation becomes available. Ongoing accommodation beyond three months is agreed to in instances where significant case management support is required. Continued stay at the accommodation service is subject to regular review.

The housing affordability crisis in Canberra limits housing options for sole father families. Shared or group-house living invariably breaks down for families with children, and there are no community housing options for sole

father families. In recognition of the impact of communal living on children's wellbeing, CANFaCS is reluctant to provide crisis accommodation for longer than six months.

Number of families accommodated

Between the date of the service's commencement on 1 February 2002 and 31 December 2003, 49 families with a total of 77 children have been accommodated at the CANFaCS crisis accommodation centre.

Outreach support

At an outreach appointment, the father's story is documented in a support letter that the father can use as a key to gain access to the service system by providing pertinent information to a variety of service providers. The support letter also minimises the number of times fathers have to tell their story if support is not available. Case Workers provide fathers with information about Australia's national housing crisis and discuss how he might act to resolve his family's crisis. Support is provided with applications and other forms in recognition of the limited literacy of many fathers.

Outreach support primarily works with the father, supporting him to resolve his housing crisis and to address issues that may contribute to his homelessness. Fathers who have their children in their care only a few nights per fortnight are typically accommodated in rooms of family, friends or group living arrangements. When all these options are exhausted, CANFaCS will advocate for the father to be accommodated in a caravan through CEAS. Given resource constraints, limited support is provided to enhance the father's relationship with his children, or to assist him with the activities required to support those children in his care when he secures permanent accommodation. This specific group of fathers is in particular need of safe, affordable housing to enable them to have ongoing contact with their children.

Number of families provided outreach support

At any one time the service is providing outreach for up to 20 sole father families living in caravan parks, friends' and relatives' spare rooms, group

houses, as well as to families living in temporary accommodation. Between the date of commencement on 1 February 2002 and 31 December 2003, 138 separate families, with a total of 274 children, received outreach support from CANFaCS.

Referrals

Fathers are usually referred to the service through community service linkages, for example: regional community service centres, government agencies, self-referral or by word of mouth. As was indicated in the profile of clients, in *Section 5* of this report, families with complex needs are accepted as the norm. Fathers may be dealing with substance abuse, depression or other mental illness, physical disability, health problems, social exclusion and isolation, legal matters, family breakdown, poverty, unemployment and violence issues. Children at the service also face multiple challenges including: coping with the impact of dislocation and uncertainty, exposure to violence and conflict, plus the breakdown of friendship and family networks of support. CANFaCS provides information and referral to people who request support, but are ineligible for the service.

Referrals to other agencies for families supported by CANFaCS are managed within the context of case management support plans. CANFaCS workers: track and assess the value of each referral; provide information to increase referral agencies' understanding of homeless sole father families' needs; and give constructive feedback to agencies about families' experiences of the referring service.

Direct service delivery

CANFaCS primarily works alongside fathers helping them to achieve their goals to resolve their families' housing crises. CANFaCS recognises that separated and homeless men have particular support needs, and that the quality of their ongoing relationships, especially with their children, can be greatly enhanced when these supports are available.

Case managed direct service delivery includes assessment, support planning, counselling, skills training (including non-violence training and conflict resolution skills training), providing information and assistance with parenting issues, help with family budgeting, management of mental health and substance abuse issues, assisting the preparation of correspondence, forms, and documentation for benefits or housing applications, and arranging transport to appointments.

One of the fathers interviewed commented on this assistance:

... They encouraged us, taught us how to cook healthy, teaching how to make stews and healthy meals for the kids - even so far as teaching you how to shop for the kids in the cheapest way. And yeah, it was a pretty complete service ...

He described the skills he had developed through the case-managed service delivery process:

... I'm [now] much more confident about dealing with the agencies, the child support and that now. Like, I've had to fax off heaps of stuff, and I would not have had a clue you know, I would have been scared to go down to the post office and say I need to fax something. Now, I know how to write things, and how to address people, and to deal with them in the appropriate ways without being forceful or rude - but still letting them know that my things should be of high priority without being pushy, dealing with people on the phone. Just listening to (CANFaCS worker), the way he [was] on the phone, just being patient ...

Advocacy

Advocacy for families includes, not only persistent, direct representation on their behalf to government agencies, and community service providers, but also playing a leadership role in advocacy on behalf of homeless families and the SAAP sector to government and the community. For example: at the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Accommodation and Support Services for Homeless Men and their Children, rather than promote the need for more services to sole father families at the expense of other homeless groups, CANFaCS highlighted to the Committee the national homeless crisis and the need for a strategy for *all* homeless populations. CANFaCS also submitted to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements in the Event of

Family Separation, given the service's relevant experience supporting families after separation in a national housing crisis.

6.5. ORGANISATION AND GOVERNANCE

CANFaCS Inc. is a non-profit community organisation incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1991 in the Australian Capital Territory. The organisation is managed by a Management Group elected by members of the Association that sets strategic directions, supporting staff in delivering the outputs and outcomes required by funding agreements and organisational goals.

The statement of values and principles informs the CANFaCS Teamwork Agreement, which commits the service to being 'sustainable in terms of worker capacity and well-being'. The Guiding Values of the Teamwork Agreement can be found at *Appendix E*.

Management Group

The functioning of the Management Group is congruent with the aims of the organisation. The spirit of governance is cooperative between staff, Coordinator and the Management Group. The Management Group includes the service Coordinator and a staff representative. The Management Group is responsible for strategic direction and planning.

Advisory Group

CANFaCS has established an Advisory Group to provide sectorial advice on specific operational issues. Meeting six times a year, the Advisory Group contributes to the resolution of complex problems, advising CANFaCS in their development of service policies and procedures. This ensures that practices are effective, accountable, and transparent to all groups in the community. Membership of the Advisory Group is built around a core that includes a resident representative, and is sectorial with representatives from men's, women's, children's, and domestic violence services. Case Workers provide

operational experience on the Advisory Group, which is facilitated by the service Coordinator. From time to time people with specialist knowledge are invited to attend as Critical Friends of CANFaCS.

Policy and procedure

As a community organisation, policy and procedure are developed at the grass roots level in cooperation with operational experience. Typically, Case Workers and the Coordinator will draft policy to be discussed and modified at Advisory Group meetings. The Management Group ratifies policy, providing it is in line with CANFaCS value statements, but the Management Group does not direct policy.

One example is CANFaCS' move to a harm reduction approach to substance abuse by residents. Former residents of the accommodation service are represented on the Advisory Group, and thus, fathers have direct influence in the ongoing operation of CANFaCS. This participation has resulted in improvements to policies and practices that needed to balance: the safety of children in the accommodation service with the safety of the drug using service user (and most commonly, his children); the service's legal responsibilities; the organisation's aims; as well as fitting the organisation's response into a broader social system.

6.6 SUMMARY OF THE CANFaCS MODEL

Together, the ***values and operational framework*** underpin CANFaCS' ability to provide support to families. In the day-to-day work of the service they are expressed as:

- accountable governance practices (so that our obligations to our families, to our funding bodies and our community are met)
- oversight by a Management Group of experienced professionals and community representatives (so that our activities and growth are managed in an informed, strategic and responsible manner)

- an informed, contemporary understanding of homelessness, the pathways that lead individuals and families into homelessness, the support needs of homeless people, and strategies to assist homeless people in moving towards stability and self-reliance
- an informed, contemporary understanding of masculinity and fatherhood, and the needs of separated fathers with children in their care
- an understanding of the positive contribution that men can make to their children's' and families' lives, as well as to the community (so that we focus on strengths, choices and solutions - not just knowledge and skill deficits)
- an appreciation of men's, sometimes, different needs and help-seeking strategies (so that our practices are father-friendly, culturally sensitive, and appropriate)
- a commitment to strengthening family relationships, whatever the family form (*the relationship is the client*)
- a focus on the promotion of self-care and responsible care of others (so we work with fathers to maintain safe, respectful relationships with *all* family members, including ex-partners, and to enhance the fathers' own health and emotional wellbeing)
- employment of committed, skilled, experienced and qualified workers
- strong management support for our workers, and worker representation in decision making (so that workers know that their knowledge and skills are valued)
- best-practice policies, and case management practices (so that our work with families is not haphazard and reactive, but is guided by experience and clear procedures; so that workers' and families' safety is protected, and our work is documented and accountable)
- a commitment to building our skills and knowledge (so that our service gets better at doing the things that work)

- sound financial and administrative management (so that resources are used responsibly and effectively in supporting our families, and so that we can account for our expenditure of public funds)
- strong links with other services, including protocols and partnership agreements with key agencies (so that families with complex needs can be referred to other agencies with confidence, in a planned rather than *ad hoc* manner)
- active engagement in sector network with our peer agencies, our funding bodies and government (so that we can advocate more effectively on behalf of our families and homeless people generally)

6.7 DEFICITS OF THE MODEL

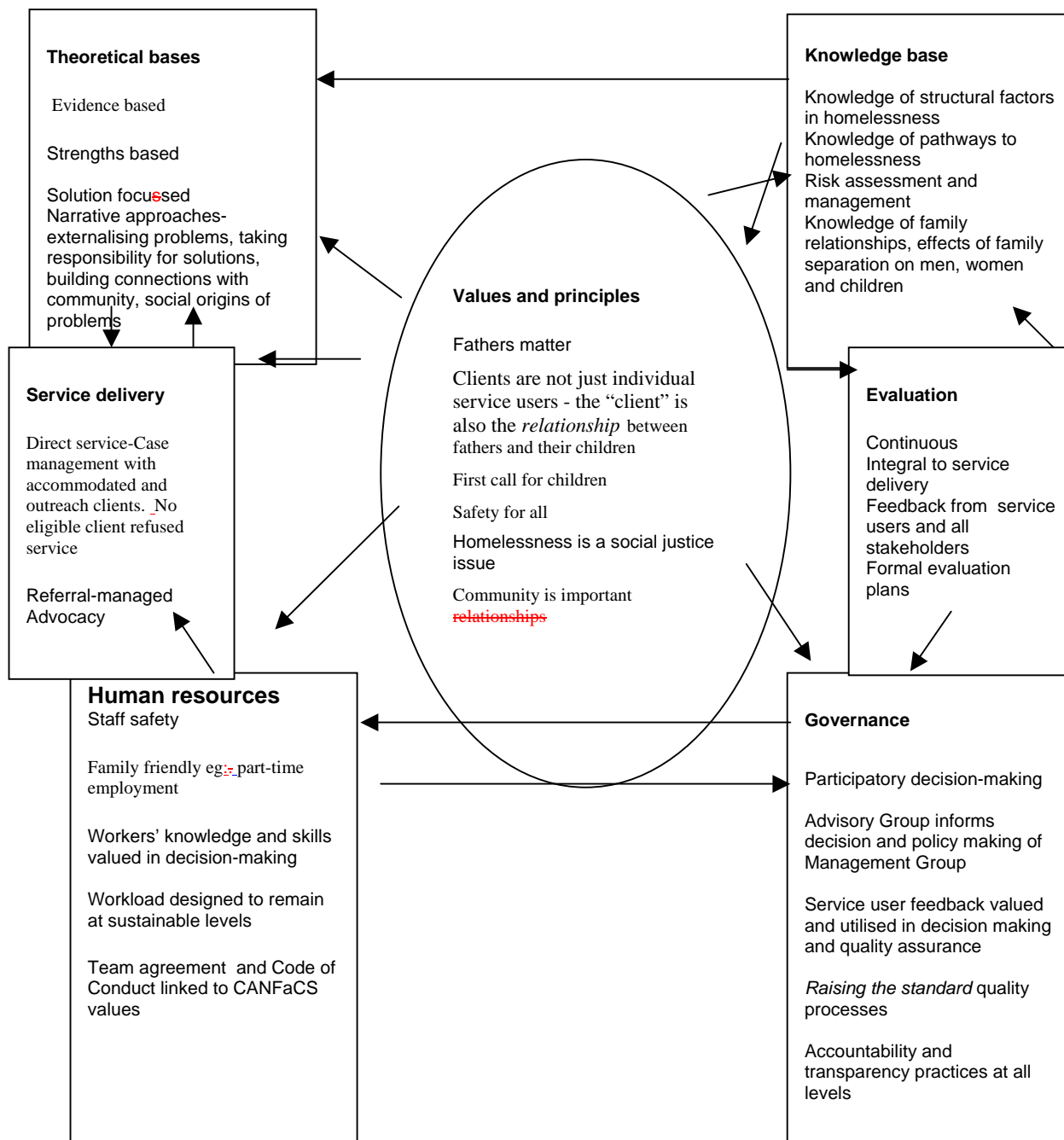
CANFaCS' commitment to the needs of children has been challenged by staffing levels, which preclude employing a dedicated children's worker. Such a worker would resource the organisation to support children with the impact of housing stress, dislocation, the stresses of communal living with strangers, and in some situations, with the trauma of the precipitating event that brought the family into homelessness. A designated children's worker would be able to assess individual children's needs, advocate for the children in the service, and develop case-management plans in consultation with the children, parents and other workers. Based on knowledge of the effects of family separation and of communal (refuge) living on children, meeting children's needs is a high priority.

In addition, a stand-alone communal crisis accommodation service, in and of itself, is not a complete response to the needs of homeless sole father families. Transitional, medium-term individual housing facilities are required to enable families to live independently post-SAAP accommodation.

As many fathers have the most interaction with their children on weekends, staff working at least four hours Saturday and Sunday would enable relationship support to fathers and their children by: engaging fathers in

positive parenting practices (focusing on communication, discipline and managing emotions); enhancing father's relationship with their children through age-appropriate play; assistance in the preparation of nutritious children's meals; introductory first aid for kids: and developing sustainable family-friendly networks.

Figure 1. Summary of CANFaCS service delivery model



7. TRANSFERABILITY OF THE CANFaCS MODEL TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The experience of CANFaCS suggests that its statement of values and principles is its most transferable aspect. These values may be different from some other organisations offering services to men. CANFaCS' values have formed a solid base for priorities, which enable the needs and safety of fathers, children and mothers to be addressed, for the benefit of the families, and the community as a whole.

Program evaluation would be required prior to definitive statements of transferability. However, the experience of CANFaCS suggests that its values and principles are transferable because they:

- make a difference in terms of engagement with the men. The values form the basis for addressing particular help seeking behaviour that is gendered
- prioritise particular aspects of service delivery in order to break down traditional boundaries between men's and women's services
- consider the impact of domestic violence on children based on current research
- facilitate the development of a community of concern wishing to promote wellbeing and safety in family and community relationships, and
- have the potential to be operationalised in a variety of ways to fit diverse contexts

If a service such as CANFaCS were to be developed in another area of Australia, the values and principles statement could provide a framework for consideration of particular local contextual issues. Clearly local contexts will affect the level and extent of need for services for sole father families experiencing homelessness. The following factors would be relevant in considering how the values would best be operationalised, and indeed, whether or not other aspects of the CANFaCS model would be transferable:

- the local political, cultural, social and economic context
- local needs assessment
- existing service system; and
- funding sources and constraints

CANFaCS developed in response to its own particular context, and a service for this group in another jurisdiction might look and operate quite differently to CANFaCS to meet local needs. However, as long as the CANFaCS value statement guides service development and operation, then it is likely that the needs of children, fathers, mothers and the community will be addressed for the benefit of all.

This report has highlighted the fact that not all services for men operate from the same value base as does CANFaCS. This report has also emphasised that some value bases do not provide an effective foundation for overall family and community safety and wellbeing, in particular, those that prioritise men's rights, or assume that fathers' needs and those of their children are always one and the same.

If a need for a service for sole father families who are homeless were identified in a particular context, it would be important for policy makers, funding bodies and service delivery agencies to clearly consider the type of service and the value base of the service to be developed. This report suggests that in the current debate about men's services it is necessary to, not only rigorously assess the underpinning value and principle base of

CANFaCS, but to also compare and contrast these values to other services for men (for example men's rights groups such as The Lone Fathers Association). This would give service providers and policy makers a clearer understanding of what values work and why. Such rigorous assessment would allow policy-makers who advocate for more men's services to clearly describe the type of men's service they want. This report has been a first step in the rigorous examination of the effect of CANFaCS' meticulously developed values statement on all operations and policies within CANFaCS.

CANFaCS considers that its values and principles would be transferable to another context where local needs assessment revealed a need for services to sole father families. The values could be adopted by other services for fathers and children, whether or not the service involved an accommodation component. CANFaCS' experience suggests that the application of these values effectively enables fathers to positively develop their relationships with their children and the wider community, maximising individual, family and community wellbeing and safety, in addition to promoting safe housing for sole father families.

Recommendation 7.1

Scope the different models in Australia which provide services for sole fathers and their children experiencing homelessness. This will identify the range of service models in order to determine how the National Homelessness Strategy is meeting the needs of sole father families experiencing homelessness.

Recommendation 7.2

Research funding is made available to assess the effectiveness of the impact of CANFaCS' values and principles on service outcomes, as compared to other organisations servicing sole father families.

8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This exploratory research project has provided some important insights into the extent and experience of sole fathers, their children and their pathways into homelessness. It has done this by exploring the existing literature, analysing secondary data from a number of sources, as well as developing case studies of sole fathers, their experiences of fathering and of homelessness. It has also documented in some detail the history and current service model of CANFaCS, highlighting the important values framework, which could be used in the development of other services for sole fathers who are homeless.

The exploratory nature of this study, the limitations of the literature in this area, and the complexities of data collection, both in SAAP services and in the Census, mean that it is still not possible to make generalisations about the profile of sole father families who are homeless, and their pathways into homelessness. The data tell a somewhat limited story of sole fathers' pathways into homelessness in Australia and how they utilise existing SAAP services. However, it is possible to suggest trends and to identify areas for further research, always with the purpose of discovering more about effective points and methods of intervention, both around policy and practice.

8.1 THE FATHERS

Current figures indicate that the number of sole father families in Australia is increasing. Recent policy and public interest in the role of fathers is indicative of the possibility of more fathers taking an active role in caring for their children. Increasing rates of separation and divorce mean that many will be doing this in a sole father capacity.

The data analysis in this report reveals that numbers of support periods for sole fathers with children in their care in SAAP services have increased markedly since 1999-2000, whilst remaining a small proportion of the total support periods. These figures do not, however, reflect incidence of sole father family homelessness. Many families are thought to split up when homelessness hits. It is recommended that, re: service planning, the next Census collects the numbers of sole father families (and thus sole mother families) as a distinct group could be included in the complex process of counting the homeless in Australia.

What we know is that there have been increasing numbers of homeless people over the past 30 years in Australia, with an increasing proportion of homeless families within the homeless population. No previous studies were identified, which directly addressed numbers of sole father families, or the patterns of their pathways into homelessness (as distinct from pathways of families in general). If the projections are born out in practice then this gap in knowledge requires attention. Further research into the experiences of sole fathers and their children who are homeless is urgently required to ensure proper services are developed.

The most noticeable aspects of the profiles indicated by both the national and local ACT data, are the high numbers of fathers receiving government income support, (confirming low-income as a factor in sole father homelessness), the high representation of fathers over 35, reflective of the older age groups of sole fathers in general, and the high proportions of Indigenous fathers, reflective of the high proportion of Indigenous people utilising SAAP services.

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8.2 PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

The national data indicate a pattern of reasons given for seeking service, which were similar to couple families with one exception: relationship breakdown was the main pathway into homelessness for sole father families. Based on what we know from the literature about the negative impact on men of relationship breakdown, a more focused approach to understanding these impacts on housing stability is essential. The national housing crisis and the overrepresentation of sole parents in low income quintiles, indicate the likelihood of many separating couples not having sufficient funds after separation to provide two fully functioning households in order to care for their children.

The other reasons, shared with couple families with children were: eviction or accommodation ending; unavailability of usual accommodation; and financial difficulties. These reasons all add weight to the structural explanations for homelessness and provide key insights into early intervention points.

This relationship breakdown pattern was also found in the CANFaCS data. However the CANFaCS data recorded a sizeable proportion of fathers attending CANFaCS who identified family violence or conflict as the main reason for seeking help. It has been postulated that this may be due to the explicit emphasis of CANFaCS on '*safety for all*', thus facilitating such responses. The legal data gathered from CANFaCS fathers indicated the complexity of legal matters with which some of these fathers are involved, including being the subject of domestic violence orders, or the person who has taken out the order.

The above observations about sole father families are consistent with two of the homelessness pathway patterns proposed by MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003): the housing crisis pathway; and the family breakdown pathway, (tempered as they must be with respect for the difficulties and limitations of data collection, and the small numbers involved). However,

there are limitations in our knowledge of how these pathways relate in detail to sole father families. In particular, as already noted, there has been considerable material generated exploring the family violence relationship to women and homelessness. More research could be undertaken which focuses on sole father homelessness as it relates to relationship separation and family violence in order to identify relevant points of early intervention and prevention of homelessness.

CANFaCS' experience and the interviews conducted for this research indicate that becoming a resident father can be the trigger or precipitating event for homelessness. Although there is no quantitative data to support this, the national data indicate an increase in the percentage of fathers living alone with children after support. More research is required to explore the relationship of homelessness to the assumption of resident care of children in sole father families.

Recommendation 8.1

Research funding be made available to explore the relationship between homelessness and sole fathers who have increased residence of children, with a view to identifying possible points of early intervention and prevention.

8.3 FURTHER ISSUES

The interviews with the fathers highlighted three other important themes: the policy and work place difficulties in working and fulfilling fathering responsibilities; the high importance they attached to being a good father and role model to their children; and a certain reluctance to seek service assistance. The case study interviews illustrate the seriousness with which these fathers take their parenting role. Although initially reluctant to seek assistance, once accessed, the service workers helped them develop a range of skills that enabled them to 'become the good fathers' they wanted to be.

Clearly, affordable housing needs to be a policy priority, as has been highlighted in the recent National Summit on Affordable Housing, held in Canberra on 27-29 June 2004 (Powall & Withers, 2004). Other policy issues relevant to sole father families experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness are: the need for greater work place flexibility; and, in situations of shared parenting following separation, income support measures, such as those recommended by Carberry (1998), so that parents who share care equally are treated equally.

As there is currently only one SAAP service that provides services for sole fathers and their children, (CANFaCS itself), it was not surprising that this group appears to have more unmet needs at the conclusion of support periods than children of homeless sole mothers, (but less unmet needs than children of homeless couples). This may reflect service delivery and staffing where services are available to sole fathers and couples with children.

The fathers' individual stories presented in this report highlight the complexity of sole fathers' experiences of homelessness. They illustrate the interaction of some of the structural, social and personal factors contributing to homelessness in different ways with different families. They illustrate how these factors interact to form pathways into homelessness.

Whilst it was beyond the scope of this project to explore the pathways *out* of homelessness for sole father families, a subject which could be explored more fully in further research, the CANFaCS model attempts to facilitate exits from homelessness.

8.4 THE SERVICE MODEL

The model developed by CANFaCS has arisen in response to the complexities discussed above, in particular, the social, political and economic contexts. The essence of the CANFaCS' model is its statement of values and principles, which has been articulated and operationalised on the basis of current knowledge about men, children, families and relationships.

Its statement of values and principles means that it engages with the broader social context promoting the well-being of relationships, safety for all involved in a situation, and prioritising the needs of children. It aligns itself with all organisations and programs promoting safety, and working against family violence. This recognition, consistent with the Men and Family Relationships Program, is very much in keeping with many of the programs funded under this program.

CANFaCS is the only SAAP service dedicated to sole father families. Like many of the services funded under FACS' Men and Family Relationships Program, CANFaCS is aware of the importance of father-friendly practices. Its high rate of utilisation provides one indicator of the relevance of such strategies. It has been beyond the scope of this research to consider the ways in which SAAP services, which service sole father families in addition to other client groups, meet the needs of sole father families. However, it would be useful to investigate this in order to formulate best practice models for working with this client group.

CANFaCS' impression, based on its ongoing quality control procedures and feedback measures (see *Figure 1*, page 101), is that the operationalisation of its values in its model is effective in achieving housing and other desired

social outcomes for sole father families, and their wider relationships. This research project recognises that a formal evaluation of CANFaCS would be extremely valuable. CANFaCS intends to allocate resources to achieve this as soon as funding permits.

This report contends that the transferability of the model rests, not with the details of organisation and practice, which have developed in response to the ACT's particular environment, but with the values and principles, which can then be applied to the local context, and the particular service needs of a community.

This report has highlighted the fact that not all services for men operate from the same value base as does CANFaCS. We would argue that some value bases do not provide an effective foundation for overall family and community safety and wellbeing, - in particular, those that prioritise men's rights, or assume that fathers' needs and those of their children are always one and the same. In the current debate about men's services it is necessary to, not only rigorously assess the underpinning value and principle base of CANFaCS, but also to compare and contrast these values to other services for men.

The trend that sees increasing numbers of homeless families with the parallel shift to changes in the ideology and practice of fathering would lead us to conclude that more needs to be done to understand these two major trends and how they affect each other. This report has highlighted the problematic and limited data about sole fathers and their children who are homeless. The documentation of the CANFaCS' experience is a first step in providing part of the picture.

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APPENDIX A: SPECIAL QUERY TO NDCA

- Names of services, names of contacts, and service phone numbers for all SAAP services that provide accommodation and assistance to homeless fathers with accompanying children
- The number of fathers with accompanying children
- The age range of fathers (<25, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+)
- A breakdown of income source of fathers before and after support period according to the 22 sources in the NDCA form
- The percentage of fathers with accompanying children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- The percentage of fathers with accompanying children against the 9 periods of unsafe, insecure or inadequate housing recorded in the NDCA form
- A percentile breakdown, according to State, of location of fathers with accompanying children before the period of unsafe, insecure or inadequate housing
- A breakdown of Q16, Q17 and Q18 of the NDCA form, according to our target group: fathers with accompanying children
- A breakdown of individual types of services requested by fathers with accompanying children in closed support periods by need and provision
- A percentile breakdown of the number of homes in which a child has lived in the past year, according to our target group, fathers with accompanying children
- A percentile breakdown of numbers of children accompanying fathers by age and gender
- A breakdown of individual types of services requested for children accompanying fathers in closed support periods by need and provision

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR FATHERS

Background

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (prompt: where are you from?, what are you currently doing?)
- Can you tell me about your family? (who is/are your family, kids, partner, pets?)

Contact with CANFaCS

- How did you find out about the service?
- What was the main reason you came to CANFaCS?

Experience of Homelessness

- What was happening in your life before you made contact with CANFaCS? (exploration of the homelessness)
Prompts: How long homeless? How did it happen? What were the life events/pressures?

Experience of fathering

- How long have your children been in your care? Has this changed?, and if so, how?
- Explore children's current living arrangements with their mother or other carers (shared care, sole care etc, foster care, grandparents)
- What are the hardest things that you face? (eg: work, juggling work, stable accommodation, money, fathering, people's judgments, being in the welfare system)
- What are the hardest things that your children face? (seeing their mother, stable schooling etc, living with strangers, not having enough to eat)

Experience of CANFaCS

- What do you see as the main role of CANFaCS in helping you and your children?
- In what ways have the workers at CANFaCS been able to help you and your children?
- What did CANFaCS do that you and your children found helpful/unhelpful?
- What did CANFaCS do that you found helpful/unhelpful for your children?
- Can you tell me what has happened to you and your children since you left CANFaCS?
- What are some of the issues that you now face?
- What do you see happening for you and your children in the future? (ie: short term, medium)

Thanks

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS FOR FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: An Overview of CANBERRA FATHERS AND CHILDREN SERVICE MODEL

NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS: MORAG MCARTHUR and JOANNA ZUBRZYCKI

Canberra Fathers and Children Service (CANFaCS) and the School of Social Work at ACU National are carrying out research into father's experience of homelessness. Single fathers who have care of their children and have been homeless are increasing in number and we do not know very much about your experiences. You have been asked to participate in an interview which will ask you about your experience of homelessness. We will ask you about what was happening in your life before you came to stay at the service, what you think are the most pressing issues you and your children face and what you see happening for you and your children in the future.

The interviewer simply needs your time and co-operation. It is anticipated that the interview will take about one and a half hours and will be taped with your permission. If something comes up later that worries you from the interview a counsellor's name will be provided to you.

Through this research process we hope to understand the experiences of fathers and their children who have been homeless. The findings of the research will be of use to other accommodation services and policy makers. Improving our understanding of homelessness will lead to better services

for other homeless dads. We would expect that the research would be written up for publication in an academic journal which we will give you a copy of.

You are free to stop the interview at any time and withdraw your consent without giving a reason.

What you tell the interviewer will remain confidential – that is your name will not ever be used. We will use yours and others stories to illustrate the issues facing homeless dads but you will not be identified in any way. If there were anything that would identify you we would not use it without your permission.

Any questions regarding this project can be directed to the researchers at the
University,

Morag McArthur or Joanna Zubrzycki
School of Social Work
Australian Catholic University
Signadou Campus Antill St, Watson ACT 2602.
02 6209 1125

This study has been approved by the University Research Projects Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

In the event that you have any complaint about the way you have been treated during the study, or a query that the Investigator has not been able to satisfy, you may write care of the nearest branch of the Office of Research

*e.g. Chair, University Research Projects Ethics Committee
C/o Office of Research
Australian Catholic University
25a Barker Rd, Strathfield
NSW, 2135
Phone 02 9739 2100*

Any complaint made will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and the participant informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Informed Consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the interviewer.

We are able to pay you \$30 for your participation in the interview.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Morag McArthur
Senior Lecturer
School of Social Work
Australian Catholic University

CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS FOR
FATHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN: An Overview of CANBERRA
FATHERS AND CHILDREN SERVICE MODEL
(block letters)

NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS MORAG MCARTHUR and
JOANNA ZUBRZYCKI.....
(block letters)

I (*the participant*) have read and understood the
information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have
asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this
activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data
collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other
researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(block letters)

SIGNATURE DATE
.....

SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWER

DATE:.....

APPENDIX D: THE GUIDING VALUES OF THE CANFaCS TEAMWORK AGREEMENT

CANFaCS is a values-based community organisation, and our organisational values and principles guide and inform the Teamwork Agreement.

In order to promote the interests of fathers and children in need, CANFaCS is committed to inspiring and sustaining a strong, well-resourced work force.

The governance of CANFaCS is cooperative between staff, Coordinator and the Management Group.

Our commitment to children and families is demonstrated wherever possible, extending workplace support and flexibility to assist employees to balance their work and family responsibilities.

CANFaCS is committed to work practices that respect culture and diversity and are environmentally responsible. Efficient use of resources is essential, cultural and religious practices are respected, and wherever possible, flexibly accommodated.

CANFaCS strives for social justice recognising that workplace inequalities for women, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the disparity between government and community pay scales and conditions result in a weakened organisation. CANFaCS Teamwork Agreement seeks parity in employment conditions and opportunities for men and women, between programs, within the sector, and in relation to government employment conditions.