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FINAL REPORT

**Family & Community Services
Housing NSW**

NSW Homeless Action Plan Evaluation

Final Evaluation Report for People Exiting Institutions Projects

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List of Abbreviations

AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AOD	Alcohol and other drugs
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
COSP	Community Offender Support Program
CRC	Community Restorative Centre
CSC	Community Service Centre
CSNSW	Corrective Services NSW
CTI	Critical Time Interventions
FACS	Department of Family and Community Services
FNC	Far North Coast
HAP	Homelessness Action Plan
JJ	Juvenile Justice
JTAP	Joint Tenancy Assistance Program
LSI-R	Level of Service Inventory – Revised
MCREU	Melbourne Criminology Research and Evaluation Unit
MNC	Mid North Coast
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
NRSDC	Northern Rivers Social Development Council
PSI	Parolee Support Initiative
RHC	Regional Homelessness Committee
SDRO	State Debt Recovery Office
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Service/s
THaSS	Targeted Housing and Support Services
YP	Young person/s
YPiCHS	NSW Young People in Custody Health Survey 2009
YPLC	Young People Leaving Care



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

People leaving child protection, custody and health facilities are a priority target group for assistance to access and maintain stable, affordable housing, under the 2009-2013 Australian National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014 (HAP) is aligned with the objectives of NPAH.

As part of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan a number of projects are funded to prevent homelessness in people exiting institutions. Four of these projects were selected for the HAP extended evaluations. Each project targets vulnerable clients with interlinked complex issues and problems, dealing with difficult transitions from living in structured institutional settings to living in the community, or moving from foster care to independence. These points of transition are identified as presenting particular risks for becoming homeless in the absence of support and access to suitable accommodation.

Two of the projects, based on the North Coast of NSW, target young people (Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres and Young People Leaving Care Support Service); the other two projects target adults (Targeted Housing and Support Services and Sustaining Tenancies). All projects had a primary goal of preventing homelessness and for three of the projects, an additional objective of reducing re-offending.

The lead government agencies for the projects are Juvenile Justice NSW and Community Services for the youth projects, and Corrective Services NSW for adults leaving custody projects. In the context of their relevant Regional Homelessness Action Plans, these agencies partnered with established local non-government organisations to implement each project and deliver the client services.

The service model for all projects involves a multifaceted approach, incorporating support for accessing accommodation on exit into the community, intensive tailored case management support and access to relevant services over an extended period, typically of 12 months. Where possible, support is commenced prior to leaving the institution (ideally 3 months prior). A major focus is supporting clients to sustain tenancies and build skills to live independently in the community. All projects have a focus on improved community integration and coordination of services centred on client needs.

Caseworkers provide a range of client supports directly as well as referrals to relevant services and programs, where available, to build individual skills, improve physical and mental health, reduce substance abuse, develop literacy, numeracy and employment skills, facilitate family reunification, improve capacity to navigate service systems and increase social integration. Individual care/support plans provide holistic tailored care phased over the period of participation in the service, with reducing intensity as clients become more settled into the community.

Evaluation process

The evaluation methodology was similar across all projects, consisting of a review of the relevant literature ("what works" for the target group), development of evaluation instruments, review of available project documentation (including administrative and reporting data), stakeholder consultation (with a cross section of key informants, including a small sample of clients from each project), and visits to the service setting. It was not feasible to undertake surveys of stakeholders, given the high number of different stakeholder groups, their diversity and small numbers involved in the various projects. For program clients there was also a high likelihood of a very low response rate.

For the reasons above the evaluations were small scale, largely descriptive and drew predominantly on qualitative data from stakeholder consultations. For all projects there were limitations in the administrative data available and its reliability, particularly with regard to services and entitlements accessed and received. These could have impacted the outcomes. The findings are also limited by a lack of baseline data and no matched controls, and insufficient timeframes for follow-up of longer-term outcomes. Similarly, it was not possible to follow-up exited clients who had not completed their program.

Key findings

The evaluations found that although each project differed somewhat in target groups and setting, across all projects there were clearly identifiable benefits for clients and for local services. Over the period to June 2012 the projects supported a total of approximately 175 clients (86 young people and 89 adults) to access and sustain housing. Social housing was the most common type of housing secured. Some clients have had their own home for the first time in their lives.

Table 1: Exiting Institutions projects: Comparison of client target groups

Characteristics	2.21	2.22	2.8	2.10
Age range	14-24 years	16-24 years	25-60 years	20-53 years
Gender				
Male	75%	50%	0%	80%
Female	25%	50%	100%	20%
Cultural Background				
Aboriginal	56%	44%	36%	90%
Non-Aboriginal	44%	56%	64%	10%
Location	MNC & FNC	MNC & FNC	Western Sydney	Broken Hill
Total project Target #'s to 30 June 2012	16	56	40	37
Actual #'s to 30 June 2012	27	59	55*(24 exited)	34*(20 exited/left)

* Numbers reflect number of clients accepted into the service.



Demonstrated benefits for clients include:

- Reduced homelessness;
- Improved emotional well-being and social integration;
- Reduced substance abuse;
- Improved physical and mental health;
- Increased living skills including literacy and numeracy, budgeting and household management; and
- Increased confidence and capacity to access mainstream services.

These outcomes were reported individually by clients and observed by service providers, but outcomes could not necessarily be validated by specific instruments, or were found in individual case notes. Reduction in homelessness figures were derived from client and stakeholder reports, including HAP portal data and in some cases, baseline data at point of entry to the project. It was not possible to determine if clients would have been homeless without the project intervention.

All clients interviewed reported feeling more positive and optimistic about their life and future prospects. Service providers commented on greater engagement with services by clients, together with increased capacity and confidence of some clients to navigate service systems. Restoration of children was very important to the women in the THaSS project as well as one male client interviewed for the Broken Hill project. Across all projects, family reunification was a significant client outcome.

There were positive outcomes in education and training, employment and job-readiness, and participation in employment initiatives. In Broken Hill, where employment options are limited for this relatively low skilled target group, the CRC established “Choppa Weed”, an innovative social enterprise that has given men work experience in gardening and maintenance. Actively supporting client attendance at the local Jobs Network agency and collaboration with the local “Strive to Drive” learn to drive program has seen several men gain driving licences in Broken Hill for the first time.

Both the THaSS and the Sustaining Tenancies projects targeted a majority of clients who were assessed¹ as either medium to high or high risk of re-offending, and it appears that the service delivery was well matched to this target group. Reports of reduced re-offending² by clients and improvements in behaviours linked to re-offending, including improved anger management and reduced drug use, were noted by clients and service providers as important outcomes. It was noted by Probation and Parole interviewees that some adult clients completed Probation and Parole orders for the first time ever. Changes in offending behaviour may have been assisted by a range of factors such as participation in other programs (Probation and Parole, Drug and Alcohol) and not solely due to participation in the project. That said, the projects all had a strong focus on supporting clients to access services and programs in a sustained way to ensure they gained the benefits of all available general and specialist services.

¹ Using the Corrective Services NSW Level of Service Inventory Revised (LSI-R) scale.

² Detailed analysis of adult re-offending as recorded by Corrective Services NSW was not possible due to the short time-frame of the project and the fact that re-offending is measured at 24 months following release from custody or the end of a community based order.



All funded services developed effective partnerships and collaborative working arrangements with a wide range of other generalist and specialist service providers and this has been of great benefit for clients in accessing accommodation as well as a wide range of other support services. This also confirms the consensus view in the literature that a critical factor of success for these client groups is to have a wide range of relevant services working together and focussed on client needs. An important outcome in all projects and reported repeatedly by service providers has been improved local service integration and coordination, resulting in new referral pathways and an overall increased appreciation and understanding of the nature of issues presented by the client groups.

The projects were funded at different levels for varying target numbers of clients. The annual budgets for 2011/2012 were \$200,431 (Sustaining Tenancies), \$484,093 (Young People Leaving Juvenile Justice), \$783,625 (Young People Leaving Care) and \$868,560 (THaSS). On crude estimates, average per capita client costs of service provision ranged from \$28,952 (THaSS) to \$12,371 (Young People Leaving Care). Funding is only partly reflective of levels of need. Estimates did not take account of the varying lengths of time over which clients received support, nor the costs of other services and support, including costs of re-incarceration where this occurred. Brokerage costs varied per client according to available budgets and client needs.

Success factors and challenges

Common factors contributing to the success of the projects relate both to the multi-component design of the service model and its implementation, with each element being important but unlikely on its own to be sufficient for success. The key success factors identified were the following:

- Access to accommodation, providing a stable foundation for clients;
- Support to sustain tenancies;
- Individual tailored case management over an extended period, supporting clients through critical transition periods, challenges and setbacks;
- Support to access to other services;
- Phasing of intensity of services, reflecting different levels of client needs and progress;
- Quality of caseworker support for clients;
- Attention to staffing issues to ensure cultural safety for Aboriginal clients;
- Support for restoration of children, for women in particular, both by selecting suitable accommodation and providing support through various court and agency processes;
- Judicious use of brokerage funding according to individual needs;
- Building on existing relationships and expanding partnerships to support client needs;
- Taking a proactive advocacy role for clients; and
- Providing access to a service independent from justice services for clients with a history of offending.

The major challenges common to all projects has been a lack of available and affordable housing, limited access to specific client support services (particularly accessible drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities in regional areas), and shared difficulties recruiting and maintaining staff to support client needs.



Conclusion and implications

The four projects to prevent homelessness in people exiting institutions share some common features and elements of service delivery that broadly reflect current best practice.

The projects stand at two ends of the lifespan spectrum of addressing disadvantage and homelessness; early intervention and prevention for young people at one end and “breaking the cycle” intervention for repeat homelessness and incarceration for highly disadvantaged adults at the other end.

The youth projects show significant overlaps between the client groups of young people in the juvenile justice system and those leaving care. There are valuable opportunities for intervening early to break the cycle of young offenders and prevent a lifelong trajectory of repeat episodes of offending and imprisonment. Addressing the many complex issues that were faced by young people accessing the projects was a lengthy process. Case management support needs to be available over a sufficiently long period of time to allow for a setback or failure to be dealt with and resolved. Involving Aboriginal workers in a mainstream service was a powerful way to secure program engagement amongst Aboriginal youth.

For the adult projects, the evaluation confirmed that access to a model of intensive, multifaceted service over an extended period can be effective in supporting clients through the risky transition periods after leaving custody, to facilitate their settlement into the community. For some, this has broken the long term cycles of homelessness and offending and provided a more optimistic future, at least over the period covered by the evaluation.

As reflected in the literature, the evaluation findings confirmed that a “one size fits all” approach is unlikely to be effective for these complex client groups. Holistic client focussed services, involving collaboration across different government and non-government organisations and delivered over a sustained period, resulted in a range of important positive outcomes for these client groups. Attention to quality staffing and provision of culturally safe services is particularly important given the high proportion of Aboriginal clients in these target groups and the urgent need for effective interventions to break the cycles of intergenerational trauma.

Detailed cost analysis of the projects was not undertaken as part of the evaluations; however some inferences can be drawn about the potential longer term system savings which may be possible through investment in these types of interventions as they are targeting clients who impose high costs on service systems, particularly criminal justice systems in the case of those who offend.

In relation to the youth projects, relative cost effectiveness of the approaches needs to be considered in the context of the increased value of timely investment early in the life of a young person. These target groups of young people have risk factors that are indicative of a costly trajectory going forward. The recent study on lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups (Baldry et al 2012) suggest that early and well-timed interventions to establish and maintain secure housing and associated support services are likely to curtail longer term societal costs of service demands and interactions with the criminal justice system. Amongst the 11 case studies in their research, lack of adequate services early in the lives of the individuals was associated with very costly criminal justice, health and homelessness interactions and interventions later in their lives, with an estimated individual life course cost of between \$900,000 to \$5.5 million.



The evaluation findings of the adult projects were indicative of reduced re-offending and possibly reduced re-incarceration, which can only be confirmed with longer term analysis of CSNSW data. Even though the studies are small scale and based predominantly on client feedback and anecdotal stakeholder reports, these are positive indications that warrant further evaluation frameworks be developed with specific attention to processes to assess longer term system savings, given the very high justice system costs for inmate custody and community supervision.

The projects, while all based on best practice principles, were implemented within a very tight timeframe, without robust project plans linked to articulated change theories/ logic models, with clearly defined outcomes and progress indicators. In particular the portal reporting did not capture the detail of individual circumstances and outcomes in a range of domains. Nevertheless, as pilot projects, all have demonstrated significant positive benefits in highly disadvantaged and vulnerable target groups, particularly in reducing homelessness, which was the primary emphasis of all projects.

The projects warrant further development and refinement and implementation over an extended period with more focussed attention to specific service elements (level of service intensity and duration, support to access mainstream services, case management effectiveness, quality of service partnerships, provision of accommodation, types of accommodation). It would be instructive to monitor the differential impacts that these have on specific client variables and service outcomes. There need to be more clearly defined outcomes and indicators to enable tracking of client outcomes and service utilisation data over time. This could also enable closer scrutiny of costings and potential cost effectiveness and the potential contribution of the service investment in overall system savings.

The recently released *Going Home Staying Home Reform Plan* of specialist homelessness services (SHS) reflects a shift from crisis to early intervention and prevention and the adoption of flexible service responses to complex clients and an individualised/ needs based approach (NSW Government 2013). The common elements in the design of the exiting institutions projects service models clearly align with this approach and provide indicative evidence of its efficacy.

In sum, the exiting institutions HAP project evaluations should be seen as providing evidence to confirm that a comprehensive, individualised/ needs based approach to client service delivery is an effective structure within which to develop transition solutions to prevent homelessness for these target groups.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of HAP evaluation

In 2009, the NSW Government released the NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014 (HAP). It sets the direction for state-wide reform of the homelessness service system to achieve better outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The HAP aims to realign existing effort, and increase the focus on prevention and long-term accommodation and support.

The HAP also aims to:

- Change the way that homelessness and its impact on the community is understood;
- Change the way services are designed and delivered to homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless; and
- Change ways of working across government, with the non-government sector and with the broader community to improve responses to homelessness.

Under the HAP there are three headline homelessness reduction targets, which are:

- A reduction of 7% in the overall level of homelessness in NSW;
- A reduction of 25% in the number of people sleeping rough in NSW; and
- A reduction of one-third in the number of Indigenous people who are homeless.

The HAP includes approximately 100 NSW Government funded local, regional and state-wide projects which assist in achieving the homelessness reduction targets. As at June 2012, 55 of the projects were funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The remaining projects include other programs or services that contribute to addressing homelessness.

The projects are aligned to one of three strategic directions:

- Preventing homelessness; to ensure that people never become homeless;
- Responding effectively to homelessness: to ensure that people who are homeless receive effective responses so that they do not become entrenched in the system; and
- Breaking the cycle: to ensure that people who have been homeless do not become homeless again.

Ten Regional Homelessness Action Plans (2010 to 2014) were developed to identify effective ways of working locally to respond to local homelessness and provide the focus for many of the HAP projects.

HAP Evaluation Strategy

The HAP Evaluation Strategy has been developed in consultation with government agencies and the non-government sector. It involves three inter-related components, which are:

- I. **Self-evaluations** – The purpose of self-evaluation is to gather performance information about each of the HAP projects across key areas in a consistent way, and to collect the views of practitioners about the effectiveness of their projects.

II. **Extended evaluations** – The purpose of the extended evaluations is to analyse and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of 15 selected projects and the service approaches to addressing homelessness that those projects represent. The service approaches covered by the extended evaluations are:

- Support for women and children escaping domestic violence;
- Youth foyers;
- Support for people exiting institutions;
- Tenancy support to prevent evictions; and
- Long term housing and support.

III. **Meta-analysis** – The purpose of the meta-analysis is to synthesise the aggregated findings from the self-evaluations and extended evaluations as well as other evaluations available on HAP activities.

The HAP evaluation will assist with measuring progress towards meeting the HAP targets as well as provide evidence of effective responses and lessons learnt that should be considered in the future response to homelessness in NSW.

1.2. *Overview of service model and projects for exiting institutions evaluations*

The first strategic direction of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan is preventing homelessness and a key priority is to “transition and maintain people exiting statutory care/ correctional and health facilities into appropriate long-term accommodation”. A number of projects were funded to assist these target groups and of these, four projects providing support for people exiting institutions were selected for the extended evaluations. The four projects are:

Project 2.8	Targeted Housing and Support Services (Western Sydney) (THaSS)
Project 2.10	Sustaining tenancies following exits from correctional facilities (Broken Hill) (Sustaining Tenancies)
Project 2.21	Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres (North Coast) (SWITCH [JJ])
Project 2.22	The Young People Leaving Care Support Service (North Coast) (SWITCH [YPLC])

Each of these projects target vulnerable clients dealing with a difficult transition, either from living in a structured institutional setting to living in the community, or moving from foster care to independence. These points of transition are identified as presenting particular risks for becoming homeless in the absence of support and access to suitable accommodation.

A foundation of the model of each of these four services is the provision of holistic support, individually tailored to client need. This includes intensive case management and referral to appropriate services (where available) over an extended period, typically 12 months. A primary focus is on securing appropriate accommodation as soon as possible and ongoing support to sustain the tenancy and prevent homelessness.

The client groups for projects 2.21 and 2.22 respectively are young people who are leaving care, and young people exiting Juvenile Justice facilities. In practice, there is a large overlap between these groups; many of those in Juvenile Justice have an out-of-home care background.

Projects 2.8 and 2.10 both support adults who are exiting custody. In the case of project 2.8 the focus is on women exiting custody in Western Sydney, while the focus of project 2.10 is people released from Broken Hill Correctional Centre (predominantly Aboriginal men).

The clients of all of these projects present with complex, interlinked issues and problems, and there are overlaps across the target groups (as indicated above for projects 2.21 and 2.22). In summary, the projects represent two ends of the lifespan spectrum with early intervention and prevention for young people at one end and “breaking the cycle” intervention for repeat homelessness and incarceration for highly disadvantaged adults at the other end. All projects have been established to intervene early in the process of exiting from an institutional setting.

While the projects are similar in that they have a focus on people exiting institutional settings, provide a similar model of intensive support, and provide services across a 12 month period; there are also some important differences in relation to individual target groups, scale and geographic setting. The table below provides information on client characteristics of each project as at 30 June 2012.

Table 2: Exiting Institutions projects: Comparison of client target groups

Characteristics	2.21	2.22	2.8	2.10
Age range	14-24 years	16-24 years	25-60 years	20-53 years
Gender				
Male	75%	50%	0%	80%
Female	25%	50%	100%	20%
Cultural Background				
Aboriginal	56%	44%	36%	90%
Non-Aboriginal	44%	56%	64%	10%
Location	MNC & FNC	MNC & FNC	Western Sydney	Broken Hill
Total project Target #'s to 30 June 2012	16	56	40	37
Actual #'s to 30 June 2012	27	59	55*(24 exited)	34*(20 exited/left)

* Numbers reflect number of clients accepted into the service.

One of the four projects was located in Western Sydney (2.8 THaSS). Being based in a metropolitan area this project had access to a greater range of services and supports than the other three projects, which were in regional locations (Mid and Far North Coast and Broken Hill).

1.3. Governance arrangements

The projects had a variety of governance arrangements, including:

- A formal Steering Committee which met face-to-face quarterly in the case of SWITCH (JJ);
- A regular teleconference update in the case of SWITCH (YPLC) and its lead agency; and
- An oversight group of local interested stakeholders who advised and supported the project establishment in the case of Sustaining Tenancies project. A more formal Steering Committee was established later for this project.

The relevant Regional Homelessness Interagency Committees (RHIC) also had varying levels of involvement. On the North Coast, representatives from the lead agencies for both SWITCH projects were members of the RHIC. However, although this committee was responsible for the development of the initial project briefs, it did not appear to have any significant day-to-day role with respect to the governance and reporting arrangements of the service providers. Similarly, with the two adult projects there was minimal engagement with the Regional Interagency Homelessness Committee through the projects' implementation.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief review of the literature was undertaken to explore “what works” in reducing homelessness among the two key target groups for the exiting institutions sub-group of the HAP extended evaluation projects. This included consideration of factors that are seen as important for best practice approaches for these target groups. As a secondary focus, the review also briefly considered the literature relating to what works to prevent re-offending in released prisoners, specifically in the context of the linkages between housing, re-offending and return to custody.

The issue of homelessness in these vulnerable target groups and the inadequacy of traditional programs in meeting their transition needs has been identified as a priority by governments in the US, UK and Canada as well as Australia. A core focus of implementation of the 2009-2013 Australian National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) is assistance for people leaving child protection, custody and health facilities to access and maintain stable, affordable housing. Significant funding is beginning to support the exploration of innovative service models in Australia and other countries, however it is too early to access evaluative data from these new initiatives to determine with any confidence what outcomes are being achieved, for which target groups, and through which program components. The NSW government in its implementation plan for the NPAH considers that increasing the evidence base is a critical element of driving reforms to the service system.

It is widely reported that there are limited published evaluative studies of interventions to address homelessness in general and very few in the target groups of interest (AHURI 2009). In particular there is limited research evidence about non-metropolitan homelessness and effective responses to this in Australia (AHURI 2009). However, there is an emergence of descriptive and qualitative studies that are contributing to the evidence base about effective practices for people leaving custody and young people leaving state care and protection. There appears to be a growing understanding of the complexity of factors and the dynamic interactions between these related to the circumstances of these members of the community (Willis & Makkai 2008).

Recently there has been increasing attention to, and innovation in, transition and re-entry programs which prepare people to leave institutions and support them once they exit into independent living. There are some small scale descriptive studies of these. However, there continues to be virtually no **formal** evidence of “what works” specifically in preventing homelessness for these target groups (BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development [undated], Everson-Hock et al, 2011; Hadley, 2010; Mares and Jordan, 2011, Muller-Ravitt and Jacobs, 2012: National Reentry Resource Centre, 2012; Baldry et al 2003, Baldry et al 2007, Fontaine & Biess 2012, WIPAN 2012) Many of the programs that have been evaluated involve small sample sizes, largely descriptive studies and problematic research designs.

There are significant challenges inherent in undertaking robust large scale quantitative evaluations of interventions to address homelessness, not the least of which is the well recognised interconnection of multiple factors that are compounding and difficult to separate as variables. This is particularly the case in the complex inter-linkages between homelessness, offending and recidivism (Willis & Makkai 2008, Lackner 2012). Most innovative programs aim to achieve multiple goals, with multiple components to address the complexity of linked contributory factors. In the Corrections realm in particular, reducing homelessness may be only one of a number of goals that are secondary to the primary goal of reducing re-offending and recidivism and facilitating resettlement and integration into the community. Measuring impact on homelessness per se is less



important, and disentangling which elements in particular may have led to impacts on homelessness is problematic. Caution has also been noted regarding use of re-offending rates as a sole measure of effectiveness of programs aiming to address the complex factors linked with homelessness and recidivism (Cunneen & Luke 2007).

In some early examples of post-release programs for prisoners, such as the Bridging the Gap program introduced into Victoria in 2002, it was noted that the model was designed without detailed knowledge of the problems that were being addressed and consequently without a clear theoretical or practice model to frame the response (MCREU 2005). This limited the extent to which the evaluation could infer causal relationships from the outcomes that were identified in the evaluation which appears typical for many studies.

Links between homelessness and post-release from custody

There are recognised links between having suitable, stable and supported housing to facilitate resettlement into the community and reducing re-offending in released prisoners and unsuitable housing has been noted to be a major factor in unsuccessful transition to life outside custody and hence higher risks of recidivism (NSW Homelessness Alliance 2011, Willis & Makkai 2008, Fontaine & Biess 2012). However, the nature of the linkages is not yet well understood, nor the extent to which criminogenic and other factors play a role along with housing.

A range of factors have been identified as barriers to prisoners finding suitable accommodation in post-release studies (Meehan 2002, Willis & Makkai 2008, Fontaine & Biess 2012, NSW Homelessness Alliance 2011). Lack of coordination between appropriate government and non-government agencies post-release is also identified as a key contributor to inadequate service provision (Meehan 2002, Baldry et al 2007, Fontaine & Biess 2012, NSW Homelessness Alliance 2011).

Studies in Australia and overseas indicate that women are considered to be at higher risk of homelessness than men post-release. In addition to assistance with accommodation, assistance is required with finances, employment and family reunification along with services to address women ex-prisoners' higher risk of poor mental and physical health (Baldry et al 2003, Baldry 2007, Lackner 2012, Desai 2012). There are currently inadequate housing and tailored ongoing support services to assist women and assistance to access housing alone, is in itself, inadequate. A recent small scale qualitative study by Women in Prison Advocacy Network in NSW reveals some of the complexity of needs of women exiting custody, including the importance of safety (WIPAN 2012). Aboriginal women in particular have been noted to have specific needs that are not currently being met in relation to dependent children, housing, family, friends and associates connections, alcohol and other drugs, culture and trauma (Baldry & McCausland 2007, Desai 2012).

There are some major challenges in defining and determining housing status and rates of homelessness for Indigenous people (Biddle 2012), however, it is well established that Indigenous Australians have both proportionately higher rates of homelessness overall and much higher rates of incarceration than non-Indigenous Australians, reflecting their overall disadvantage in the community (Australian Human Rights Commission 2005, NSW Government 2013). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are estimated to have homelessness rates three times the rate of the non-Indigenous population (ABS 2011). There is also a higher risk of return to custody associated with Indigenous status (AHURI 2004, Willis & Makkai 2008) and this is further compounded by higher

rates of alcohol and drug use. In the 2011 inmate census in NSW, Aboriginal men represented 22.3 per cent of the total male inmate population and Aboriginal women represented 30 per cent of the total female population (Corben & Eyland 2011).

The 2009 Young People in Custody Health Survey (YPICHS) identified that Aboriginal young people and young people with complex needs are over represented in the juvenile justice system. Young people of Aboriginal origin make up approximately 50% of young people in custody, despite making up around 4% of the adolescent community in NSW.³

The same survey showed that amongst all young people in custody, 87% had mental health issues, 78% were found to be risky drinkers and 65% had used an illicit drug at least weekly in the year prior to custody. Overall, 27% of all young people in custody had been placed in out-of-home care before the age of 16 years, but this proportion was higher for both young women (40%) and Aboriginal young people (38%). All of this indicates key areas where young people leaving Juvenile Justice are likely to need support.

Links between homelessness and youth

As with ex-prisoners, young people leaving care experience higher rates of homelessness than young people in general, with family breakdown, including neglect, conflict and abuse being major risk factors (McDowell, 2008, Homelessness taskforce 2008). Other causal (and overlapping) factors include mental health issues, unemployment, poverty, alcohol and other drug issues, and crime (Barker, 2010).

Young people aged 12 to 24 years represent 28% of the homeless population in New South Wales (Counting the Homeless Report)⁴ and it has been well established that experiencing homelessness early in life is a significant risk factor for long-term homelessness. A 2010 review of Juvenile Justice noted that a large number of children and young people remain on remand in Juvenile Justice centres due to a lack of stable accommodation, either because they are homeless or unable to return home due to family breakdowns or safety concerns (Noetic Solutions 2010). This underscores the need for sound effective prevention programs, including support for the provision of stable housing for young people especially young people who are more vulnerable through their leaving care or juvenile detention status.

Best practice characteristics for homelessness prevention

The AHURI research synthesis on homelessness suggests that improving homelessness outcomes requires:

- Involving mainstream agencies in homelessness response;
- Coordinating government, non-government and emergency agencies in providing housing and support;
- Building trusting support relationship over time;
- Using multidisciplinary case management teams;
- Providing support services addressing identified need; and
- Providing permanent supportive housing rather than transitional accommodation (AHURI 2009).

³ p 11 Indig, D, et al, 2011, *2009 NSW Young People in Custody Health Survey: Full Report*, Justice Health and Juvenile Justice, Sydney.

⁴ The report used 2006 Census data.



Additionally, for those exiting institutions:

- Coordination and planning prior to institutional exits are critical to ensuring housing needs are considered and options explored;
- Comprehensive support to address a range of issues and challenges faced by individuals exiting institutions is required pre/ during/ post institutionalisation;
- Intensive support for independent living programs may be more appropriate for early intervention with young people that have complex needs;
- Post-housing support is critical for maintaining stable accommodation and beginning the process of social reintegration; and
- Experiencing homelessness under 18 is a significant risk for longer term homelessness (Willis 2004).

Young people leaving care

The seminal longitudinal research conducted by Cashmore and Paxman (1996, 2007) finds that young people leaving care are required to negotiate a number of changes in their lives earlier and in a much shorter period of time than other young people of the same age. Their research suggests that a young person's transition to adult life will be better negotiated when it is staggered (e.g. people have the opportunity to remain in care to complete their secondary education), stable accommodation is provided, financial help is available, and social support provided after leaving care. Their insights into the predictors of likely success or failure in aftercare indicate factors such as poor educational attainment, marginal employment, short-term and poor quality accommodation, poor mental health and limited social support diminish life chances.

With respect to young people leaving care, the literature suggests that while housing is a critical dimension (Gronda 2009), the presence of reliable, sustainable social relationships is also important (Johnson et al 2009). In responding to the multiplicity of interlinked factors that young people face, effective case management is critical. A key dimension of this is the development of positive relationships between workers and service users, involving the development of trust and the promotion of choice for young people (FaHCSIA 2012).

The literature confirms that other important dimensions of effective service delivery include:

- Collaborative work (Kang et al 2005, Kidd 2003);
- A strengths-based approach, which is flexible and forgiving (Cauce et al 2000);
- Individualised assessments, goal setting and planning;
- Capacity building, both of the young person and staff (Bruce et al 2009); and
- Continuity of care (Crimmens et al 2004).

The service task is not only to resolve practical immediate requirements for stable and suitable accommodation, but to identify and address underlying psychological, emotional and social needs and foster greater independence and self-determination. The research shows that individuals who have experienced volatile transitions are more likely to be successful where they have addressed their substance abuse issues, developed improved relationships with family, found the right support and found employment. Young people who received transition support were overall more likely to complete compulsory education, be in current employment, be living independently and be less likely to be young parents (Everson-Hock et al 2011).



With respect to young people leaving care in NSW, it was recently reported that:

- Only 18 per cent of 15 to 17 year olds in New South Wales had a leaving care plan, despite it being a legislative requirement of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998;
- Less than 60 per cent of young people in New South Wales out-of-home care knew about the access to Transition to Independent Living Allowance; and
- 35 per cent of young people become homeless within the first year of leaving care (McDowell, J 2008).

This suggests that there is a need to assist young people leaving care with negotiations around their leaving care plans, accessing their entitlements, support to secure and sustain stable housing, and time to learn what it is to live independently.

People exiting custody

There is increasing evidence that supporting ex-prisoners to re-integrate (or indeed integrate) into society post-release requires adoption of a multi-pronged approach to address a range of factors to prevent homelessness and recidivism. These include specific attention to identified risks of re-offending (Lackner 2012, Fontaine et al 2012). In Australia, as elsewhere over recent years, there has been increasing recognition of “Throughcare” as best practice in working with offenders to reduce recidivism and assist community integration (Borzycki 2005, Willis and Makkai 2008, Lackner 2012).⁵ Ideally, this also incorporates integrated case management and community based aftercare on release, linked with post-release services and programs. However, the extent to which implementation of “Throughcare” strategies are implemented in prisons in Australia and the impacts of these is not yet clear (Baldry 2012).

Little is known internationally about the most effective housing and transition models for Aboriginal people leaving custody (Desai 2012, Baldry 2007). In re-iterating the lack of evidence of effective models of post-release housing and support for Aboriginal women in particular, Baldry (2007) suggests that programs with an emphasis on “Throughcare”, aftercare with a case management approach, and underpinned by a holistic philosophy are likely to have the greatest benefit.

Providing support to access suitable accommodation is a key element of post-release, and failure to address housing arrangements adequately prior to release can increase the risk of homelessness and failure to resettle in the community (Willis & Makkai 2008, Desai 2012). It has been claimed that appropriate housing “can also serve as the literal and figurative foundation for successful re-entry and reintegration for released adults” (Fontaine and Biess 2012). However, “research is scant on how specific housing models in and of themselves, can lead to better outcomes for (ex-prisoners) ... and the specific housing models that can improve outcomes” (Fontaine and Biess 2012).

⁵ Throughcare has been defined as the continuous, coordinated and integrated management of offenders from the offender’s first points of contact with correctional services to their successful reintegration into the community and completion of their legal order (Clay 2002, cited in Baldry 2007).



A number of factors have been identified as essential in successful post-release services for prisoners (Borzycki and Baldry 2003):

- Individually tailored case management, following risk assessment, using reliable tools and incorporating prisoners input;
- Case plan development, outlining programs and access to services as soon as possible after prison reception;
- Brokerage of services from organisations best equipped to provide services;
- Demarcation of staff responsible for supervision and staff responsible for social and other supports; and
- An understanding that individuals may easily become overwhelmed if confronted with a range of reporting requirements following release.

A number of authors also emphasise that the definition of service success needs to extend beyond recidivism to consider small gains and improvements in other factors related to offending, such as pro-social behaviours and evidence of social integration (Borzycki and Baldry 2003, Cunneen and Luke 2007). Fontaine and Biess (2012) also state that “Successful re-entry and reintegration encompasses more than reductions in re-offending and re-incarceration; it includes changes in individual behaviours associated with re-offending and re-incarceration, such as reductions in substance abuse and other risky behaviours, increased family functioning and social support, educational attainment, gainful employment opportunities and wages, and participation in pro-social activities, such as community groups, faith activities, and volunteer or recreational groups.”

The available evidence of “what works” in reducing recidivism specifically highlights the importance of using the “risk principle” – that is, focussed attention to the risks associated with re-offending (and thereby risking tenancies and homelessness) (Latessa 2006, Bonta et al 2010). This approach results in improved outcomes with a reduced risk of re-offending, sustained tenancies, and reduced risk of homelessness where the level of service provided is matched to the risk level of the offender. This sets the criminogenic needs as the target of the intervention, with high risk clients receiving more intensive services, and incorporates responsiveness in matching the style and mode of intervention to the ability and learning style of the offender (Bonta et al 2010).

In NSW, Corrective Services NSW uses a validated risk assessment tool - the Level of Service Inventory – Revised (LSI-R) to assess prisoners’ risks of re-offending (Corrective Services 2012). The tool assesses a range of static (unchanging) and dynamic factors that are known to be associated with offending. These include age at first conviction, number of convictions (static factors), level of alcohol or other drug use/ dependency, antisocial attitudes/ thinking, behaviours and associates, family/ marital problems or instability, and low levels of education and employment (dynamic factors). Although the tool is well validated among many population groups, its robustness for Aboriginal women is known to be limited (Corrective Services 2012).



2.1. Types of housing and transition models

Generally, from the literature, the examples of housing models for the exiting institutions target group fall into two categories: supportive housing and specialised re-entry programs.

Supportive housing encompasses models that:

- Involve multiple funding sources and usually involve partnerships between multiple non-profit providers with different areas of expertise;
- Provide permanent, affordable housing that is closely linked with supportive services, often delivered at the housing site (flow or floating care);
- Provide comprehensive social services to tenants using a case management model; and
- Do not typically include criminal justice supervision.

Specialised re-entry programs (transition programs) are a recent innovation within the broader category of supportive housing. Specialised re-entry programs:

- Are specifically designed to meet the needs of people being released from custody;
- Provide case management and counselling services tailored to releasees;
- Provide specialised re-entry housing, often linked to transition planning activities (i.e. beginning in the correctional institution itself). This can include, for example, transportation from the correctional facility, entitlements and benefits advocacy, family reunification services and legal advocacy;
- Sometimes include programming or units set aside for people with special needs (e.g. mental illness, substance addiction, HIV/ AIDS), providing additional services; and
- Typically involve some form of criminal justice supervision as a pre-requisite for living in this type of housing (AHURI 2009).

A recent report by Gaetz and Scott (2012) argues that a clear distinction needs to be made between youth homelessness and adult homelessness and, as a result, different solutions are appropriate. They discuss the challenges of the expectation identified by Cashmore and Paxton (Cashmore, J and Paxman, M 2007) that young people can make a speedy transition to living independently. Key variables are:

- Age: the younger one is, the more adolescent challenges complicate one's transition to adulthood, with youth thrust into adult roles at an accelerated rate. Impacting on this is:
 - neurological changes in adolescence impacting on cognitive development and effective decision-making; and
 - legal constraints on those under 18 years of age (such as levels of social security, ability to sign a lease);
- Poverty and discrimination: making it more difficult to access affordable and safe housing;
- Family support;
- Experience with independent living; and
- Experience with child protection services or involvement with the law.

Gaetz and Scott (2012) argue that young people need a service model that allows them time to grow and learn, and to make mistakes. This is particularly so for young people leaving institutional care, whether child protection or correctional care. These young people have underdeveloped life skills, inadequate education and lack of supports and resources (including income) that most young people rely on when moving into adulthood.



Youth transition models

An important program for homeless young people with complex needs in contact with the juvenile justice system is the Joint Tenancy Assistance Program (JTAP). The target population for JTAP is homeless young people or young people at risk of long-term homelessness in contact with the juvenile justice system, with complex needs, who are 16 to 18 years old at the time of the referral. Accepted and developed as a program over the past 12 years, JTAP has informed the development of the North Coast Juvenile Justice project, which is one of the projects in the exiting institutions extended evaluations. JTAP provides a staged approach under an intensive case management structure over a period of 12 months. Participants complete a series of goals moving towards independent living, maintaining a tenancy, developing support networks, and participation in education/ employment/ training. An option exists to repeat phases as necessary. The original JTAP model included the provision of semi-supported housing through a partnership with a community housing provider and Housing NSW.

A 2009 evaluation of JTAP, found that the elements contributing to its success are flexibility, skilled joint case management, phased approach, service networking, brokerage and cultural sensitivity.

Other youth models

- British Columbia Homelessness Intervention Project – the project is in its third phase and is developing pilot projects to test an established “single integrated team” approach with youth exiting foster care and adults exiting correctional institutions. An evaluation by a team of academic researchers observed that “the short-term outcome data [concerning people who have been sentenced in BC] indicate that HIP has the promise to succeed where previous interventions and initiatives has failed” (BC Ministry of Housing and Social Development, undated).
- Youth Villages Transitional Living – this program currently operates in seven US States. The program supports troubled youth to transition to independent living. Core features of the program include assessment, safety plans, a youth driven approach, positive family relationships, housing assistance and highly structured staff supervision and consultation. A methodologically rigorous evaluation is underway which specifically explores the outcomes (including homelessness) of program participation on youth leaving foster care (Muller-Ravitt and Jacobs, 2012).
- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has commissioned a study of programs that assist youth who are aging out of foster care within the context of the Opening Doors federal homelessness initiative, to be completed in 2012 (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2011).

Models for people leaving custody

There is a range of integrated post-release programs and services in Australia and overseas which incorporate support for accessing suitable housing along with other supports. Most post-release programs have a number of goals, with multiple strategies and are frequently focussed on reducing re-offending; few are focussed on reducing homelessness alone. Many are specifically targeted to people with either mental illness or drug addictions. Very few to date have been rigorously evaluated, but emerging data is contributing to understanding the complexity of factors at play, and more robust data on effective interventions is likely to be forthcoming in coming years.



- The Bridging the Gap program

The Bridging the Gap program piloted in Victoria from 2001-2003 was a forerunner of post-release services in Australia, and involved a cooperative effort by five community based support agencies and Victorian Corrections, with each of the support agencies having a defined target group within the program. The program involved 286 participants, targeting high risk and high need offenders with drug or alcohol issues. It was an intensive post-release transitional support program providing direct services and supporting access to drug and alcohol treatment, accommodation, education, health, legal assistance, training and employment, family reconciliation and child care and custody. Evaluation of the pilot showed positive outcomes in relation to reduced drug dependence, participation in treatment programs and accommodation status. Approximately 50% of participants had stable accommodation at the end of their engagement in the program. Participants had lower rates of post-release offending while in contact with their support agency than comparable non-participants. Evaluation of Bridging the Gap revealed key lessons:

- Many prisoners have always lived on the margins of society to the extent that short term interventions are unlikely to bring about fundamental changes in their lives;
- A major goal of post-release programs should be effective engagement with mainstream services;
- Effective reciprocal relationships between workers and participants are fundamental to success;
- Effective coordination and collaboration between program and broader services is a vital factor; and
- The Bridging the Gap services at times found they were in competition with other agencies or programs, in particular in accessing suitable accommodation (MCREU Melbourne 2003).

There are integrated systems in NSW and arrangements between various government and non-government agencies to support enhanced offender re-integration into the community post-release. Corrective Services NSW has developed the “Throughcare” framework for integrated offender management, using evidence based community and custody management of offenders. Corrective Services NSW also funds or facilitates a wide range of services and programs to assist inmate integration back into the community. Since 2008, there has been a specific allocation of resources for accommodation post-release, and CSNSW funds a number of special purpose transition accommodation support facilities and services:

- Community Offender Support Program (COSP) NSW

The COSP was introduced in centres across NSW in 2008 to fill identified service gaps for higher risk offenders on parole or community based orders for 3-6 months. There are three intake streams which are: reintegration and resettlement, crisis accommodation and case management placement. They have a specific focus on “Throughcare” to community reintegration and resettlement and will often accommodate people who are excluded from other services. To date, no evaluative data is available about the effectiveness of COSP.

- **Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**

Some specialised services such as the Community Restorative Centre (www.crc.org.au) (CRC) in NSW have a core purpose of supporting prisoners during incarceration and post-release to help resettlement back into communities and to reduce the incidence of people re-offending and returning to custody. CRC receives funding for a number of transition models that have a strong focus on a “housing first approach” recognising the importance of stable accommodation as an important platform for resettlement. CRC provides a range of direct services to reduce the stress of transition from custody to the wider community such as employment, health, finance, housing, identification, family re-unification and dealing with debt.

- **Parolee Support Initiative (PSI) NSW**

The PSI delivered by the Community Restorative Centre is funded by Corrective Services NSW and provides comprehensive support to parolees in the Liverpool/ Fairfield/ Parramatta areas with serious mental health issues and/or cognitive impairment, throughout their period of transition from custody back into the community. It seeks to reduce the cycle of homelessness and re-offending incorporating a “housing first” model with wrap around care, floating and flexible support and strong partnerships with other organisations. Housing NSW provides accommodation and CRC delivers intensive outreach support of up to 20 hours per week, commencing three months prior to release to identify post-release needs. Support needs may include mental health and disability services, drug and alcohol support, employment, budgeting, shopping, and tenancy maintenance. Although the client numbers are small, the PSI has demonstrated positive outcomes for clients and evaluation data will be forthcoming.

As noted previously there are recognised links between housing and re-offending, however it is not yet clear to what extent provision of housing can be a factor in reducing recidivism and for which people. There is a need for further research to gain a more robust evidence base about the causal factors involved in reducing homelessness and/or re-offending in this population. Many programs appear to not control for risk of offending in evaluating interventions and outcomes.

Overseas models

- Early signs from recent initiatives in the UK and the US employing a Social Bonds approach to reducing recidivism appear to be showing considerable promise with repeat offenders through provision of integrated services for prisoners and families and intensive support into the community (Hems, L 2012).
- FUSE - the US Coalition for Supportive Housing (www.csh.org) Frequent User Service Enhancement initiatives are based on the premise that supportive housing can break the cycle between homelessness and criminal justice involvement. FUSE uses a systems change model which has three key pillars: (1) data-driven problem-solving, including identification of high-cost, high-need individuals who are shared clients of multiple systems; (2) policy and systems reform aimed at shifting resources towards the more cost-effective and humane solution of permanent housing and support services; and (3) targeted housing and services. FUSE is currently operating in at least twelve states in the US and provides both generic supportive housing, and specialized re-entry housing, some for people who have jail and homeless shelter histories and substance abuse and/or mental health issues. A preliminary



outcomes assessment, using a quasi-experimental evaluation model with a matched comparison group, indicated that FUSE participants maintained stable housing at a higher rate (85%) than those in the comparison group (Coalition for Supportive Housing, 2011). After twelve months, only sixteen per cent (16%) had any shelter admission compared to 98% of the treatment group (Coalition for Supportive Housing, 2011).

- Another example of a FUSE specialised re-entry program is the Hennepin County (Minnesota) FUSE which involves interagency collaboration between county corrections, housing and social services. A key feature of the program is a community NGO providing in-reach services to link individuals to supportive housing upon exit from the institution.
- In Ohio, a FUSE program was set up to place 100 people with mental illness exiting from custody into supportive housing. Once again, multiple agencies were involved, including corrections, housing and mental health, and a key element was the in-reach support services offered prior to discharge.
- The Coalition for Supportive Housing has an ongoing evaluation plan to examine longer term outcomes, including homelessness (Coalition for Supportive Housing 2009).
- There is some recent evidence to indicate that provision of housing is more likely to be effective in impacting re-offending when targeted at high risk offenders, together with interventions carefully targeted to address offending behaviours. This was confirmed in a recent American study of housing and support interventions for people with mental illness and ex-offenders which looked specifically at the impacts on recidivism (Miller and Ngugi 2009).
- Evaluation of a recent Ohio study with ex-prisoners confirmed that a combination of supported housing and support to address a range of other factors reduced recidivism, with matched controls across 13 prisons in the 12 months following release. The findings indicated that a major success factor was the contact with a support worker, however it is not certain if risk of re-offending was specifically controlled for (Fontaine et al).
- The Oxford House model, a specific housing treatment model for individuals with histories of substance abuse, is based on the principles of self-governance and mutual support and research has shown that individuals with substance abuse histories who live in Oxford Houses are less likely to re-offend, are less likely to use substances, are more likely to be employed, and spend less time engaged in criminal activities (Jason and Ferrari 2010; Jason et al. 2006). However, the Oxford House model is appropriate for only a subset of those released from custody (i.e. those released with substance abuse issues who agree to a peer-led recovery model) (Fontaine and Bess 2012).
- Critical Time Interventions – CTI is a time-limited, case management model designed to prevent homelessness and other adverse outcomes in people with mental illness following discharge from hospitals, shelters, prisons and other institutions. CTI provides emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition to the community and by strengthening the individual's long-term ties to services, families and friends (Critical Time Intervention, 2013). There is no evidence yet of effectiveness in preventing homelessness for people exiting custody however, it is likely that there will be further evaluation of a CTI program recently introduced in the UK (Jarrett, Thorneycroft, Forrester, et al, 2012).



3. EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODS

3.1. Ethics process

All projects were subject to the ethics processes required by their lead agencies.

For Project 2.21, where the lead agency was Juvenile Justice NSW, approval by the Juvenile Justice Research Steering Committee was required. This committee is not an ethics committee and projects are often required to secure external ethics approval before the research committee accepts a project. For the Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres project, acceptance was granted without specific ethics approval based on the fact that the research was using the same research protocol which is being used for all projects involved in the extended evaluation of the NSW HAP which had received approval from the University of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee and Corrective Services NSW. The approval by the Juvenile Justice Research Steering was granted on 18 September 2012.

For Project 2.22, where the lead agency was Community Services, there was no mandated ethics approval process, however, similar to the Juvenile Justice Research Committee position outlined above, ethics approval from the University of New South Wales for other HAP evaluation projects was sufficiently broad to cover the conduct of the evaluation of Project 2.22.

Ethics approval for Projects 2.8 and 2.10 was secured from Corrective Services NSW Ethics Committee, which was formally granted on 9 October 2012.

For all four projects, a plain English information sheet and client consent form was developed, adapted from a standard document provided by Housing NSW.

A \$30 gift voucher was provided as an incentive for the clients who were interviewed.

3.2. Summary of methods

The evaluation methodology across all projects was similar involving:

1. A brief literature review (see Section 2 of this document).
2. A review of available documentation from Housing NSW, the contracting/ lead agencies and the service delivery non-government organisations.
3. Initial briefing meetings with key informants including lead agencies and service providers.
4. Review of relevant administrative data and reports:
 - a. Portal data submitted to Housing NSW for each of the quarters of the projects from September 2010. As figures were cumulative across the financial year, the June 2012 figures were used for the analysis of 2011/2012 outcomes;
 - b. Self-evaluation reports provided by the lead agencies to Housing NSW at the end of June 2012;
 - c. Selected client case notes (for interviewed clients only who had given informed consent).
5. Development of interview guides for clients and for service providers (See Appendix 2 & 3).



6. Key informant and stakeholder interviews and site visits to service settings in Western Sydney, North Coast and Broken Hill.
 - a. The site visits afforded an opportunity to see the settings of the services and to interview the various service providers as well as enabling interviews with a number of other stakeholders. There were additional follow-up telephone interviews with other stakeholders where it was not possible to meet face-to-face.
 - b. Client interviews: Service providers assisted in arranging interviews. However, not all individuals attended as scheduled on the day. A \$30 gift voucher was offered to clients as an incentive to participate. The numbers of clients interviewed were 2.8 (6), 2.10 (5), 2.21 (3), 2.22(7).
 - c. Stakeholder interviews: These were a mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews with a cross section of relevant stakeholders who included:
 - i. lead agency informants;
 - ii. HAP service provider staff; and
 - iii. other service providers (Probation and Parole, housing providers, Centrelink, health and other service providers, employment agencies, police and real estate agents).

3.3. Limitations

Each of the evaluations was of necessity largely descriptive, drawing predominantly on qualitative data, together with available administrative data from service providers and lead agencies as well as evaluation data submitted to Housing NSW. Across all projects there were limitations in the administrative data available from services regarding some specific client details (for instance services accessed, entitlements received, indicators or measures linked to client outcomes).

The findings are limited, as they are an exploration of what worked effectively for individuals. While the findings may be indicative of outcomes for the broader target group of clients, they cannot be generally extrapolated to the larger population for a number of reasons:

- First, the sampling size for each project was small and there were no matched controls; it was not possible to include individuals who were referred but chose not to join the project/s or who left the project prematurely; and once clients exited the project after 12 months they were not able to be followed up to capture sustained outcomes;
- Second, baseline data was not available for the projects, nor was the evaluation set up to collect baseline data;
- Third, with delays in project set-ups, several of the pilots had been providing services for clients for under two years at the time of the evaluation and longer term impacts were not possible to determine; and
- Finally, the evaluations provide a snapshot in time of the pilot projects rather than any longitudinal information.

4. FINDINGS – SERVICE MODEL

All project goals were broad, with an underlying focus on achieving stable, sustainable housing and meeting a range of individual needs that can impact adversely on housing stability. Each was also concerned with improving service integration and coordination. Preventing homelessness and addressing risks associated with homelessness were the core focus of all projects as part of supporting clients to transition to a settled community life following exit from institutional care. In three projects, the service focus also included addressing issues and behaviours associated with offending and an additional objective of reducing re-offending.

Evaluation data that informed the findings included quantitative and qualitative data drawn from administrative and reporting data together with anecdotal reports and interview responses with a cross section of stakeholders.

4.1. *The effectiveness of the service model for client outcomes*

The evaluations all confirmed there were significant benefits for clients from engagement with the project and accessing a service model which was multi-faceted. The evaluation evidence points to positive outcomes across a range of important areas, including accommodation/ housing, reduced offending, improved mental and physical health and social and emotional well-being, skills development, employment and other important social integration factors. The timeframe for the evaluation meant that longer-term follow-up was not possible for most clients, particularly those who had left or been exited from the projects following the twelve month case management period. A few clients who had completed their program were amongst those interviewed regarding their views of the effectiveness of the service model.

Projects provided a wide variety of services and acted as a referral point to assist clients to access additional services which would meet their complex needs. This included support with physical and mental health issues, dental health, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, access to education, training and employment, trauma counselling, anger management, parenting and child care issues, financial and budgeting skills, independent living skills training, legal issues, family mediation and transport.

Housing Outcomes

In the absence of robust data on homelessness for the client groups, it could not be stated with certainty how many clients would have been homeless in the absence of the projects. However, to the extent that clients were successfully housed or existing accommodation arrangements stabilised (for example, kinship placements in the case of young people under the age of 16 exiting the juvenile justice system), all projects had an impact on reducing homelessness.

Client self-reports about their confidence in maintaining their housing arrangements into the future and their improved ratings of their quality of life, compared to before the intervention of the project, suggest that the projects have been a major factor in avoiding (and in some cases ameliorating) homelessness.

The client characteristics of the target groups serviced by all projects match those described in the literature as predictive of high and very high risk for homelessness. The changes in client outcomes for some key risk factors suggest that there is a potential for longer term reductions in homelessness for these clients.

Accommodation was arranged or stabilised for all clients as part of their participation in the project with a range of different types of accommodation and housing secured through various mechanisms. In the first year of the THaSS project, 20 community housing properties were specifically allocated through the Australian Government Economic Stimulus package for the clients of the service. However, additional properties were not available in subsequent years for new clients. Overall, social housing was the most commonly accessed housing type, with some private rental. For some young people, accommodation was arranged with families or stabilised with the use of family mediation. Temporary accommodation (TA) through Housing NSW was used for a small number of THaSS clients when immediate access to Nation building properties was not available due to building delays.

Table 3 below shows from the 30 June 2012 portal data, the types of housing outcomes achieved for clients.

Table 3: Housing outcomes

Housing Type	2.21	2.22	2.8	2.10
Social housing	3	11	59	17
Private rental	3	14	2	10
SHS accommodation	1	2	1	0
Temporary accommodation (TA)	0	0	5-6	0
Temporary with family/ friends	0	3	3	7
Other	7	13	0	2

All projects needed to devote extensive efforts to secure housing for their client groups. In particular, for projects 2.8 and 2.10 this involved developing operational partnerships with community housing providers, which for 2.8 was essential after the first year when Nation Building properties were no longer available.

The projects managed a range of issues faced by clients in securing accommodation. These included:

- Age barriers to signing lease agreements (for young people under 18 years of age);
- Low literacy and knowledge and experience with processes for securing accommodation;
- Being in custody and unable to negotiate and sign tenancy agreements;
- No rental history or poor rental history and in some cases, negative family reputations and blacklisting; and
- Affordability issues.

On the supply side, issues included:

- Discrimination; and
- Lack of suitable properties.

In the case of the two SWITCH projects (2.21 and 2.22), the existence of the program was a factor in increasing access to private rental tenancies. Project participation gave confidence to real estate agents in letting properties to young people, knowing both that there was another contact point should any tenancy issues arise, and that the service would be visiting the young person regularly to provide support and monitor progress.



The close working relationships between CRC and community housing providers for projects 2.8 and 2.10 were important in some case in accessing private rentals or TA until permanent social housing was available.

Sustaining tenancies

Across all projects clients were reported to have been able to sustain tenancies successfully, some for extended periods of time. There was limited follow up of housing outcomes after clients exited the projects, so data on the longer term impact of the projects on sustaining tenancies were not determined with any degree of precision. However, the exited clients who were interviewed had successfully sustained their accommodation and a number of community housing providers reported that clients had been successful in sustaining tenancies and/or transitioning to private rentals and permanent accommodation. Establishing a positive rental history was an important outcome for clients.

For many clients, both young people and adults alike, this was the first time that they had a home of their own. Numbers of clients reported previous histories of rough sleeping. Having a home was a particularly significant outcome for adult clients, following their histories of repeated cycles of incarceration and leading very marginal lives.

Projects provided a wide range of support to assist clients in sustaining as well as securing tenancies, including direct practical assistance in making appointments with appropriate housing providers/real estate agents, writing applications and preparing for interviews, attending interviews, explaining obligations and responsibilities and providing transport. The two youth projects developed a “Reality Rental” course tailored for young people and based on the “Rent It Keep It” course available from Housing NSW. Building skills in financial literacy, budgeting, managing a household and negotiating family and social pressures all contributed to increased capacity in sustaining a tenancy.

An important factor in assisting CRC clients to sustain tenancies was undertaking advocacy with housing providers, and maintaining a close working relationship with them, so that concerns about clients (such as inappropriate behaviour, house guests, excessive noise) could be raised early. In turn, CRC was able to intervene with clients to address identified issues. This was of particular importance for some Aboriginal clients where there were family and peer network pressures and expectations that were difficult for clients to deal with. Caseworkers were able to support clients in dealing with “humbugging” and, by collecting the individual at the point of release assisted them to avoid the immediate temptations and pressures to revert to risky behaviour such as alcohol and drug taking. Support was also provided in the way of backup and advice to clients to prevent tenancies being jeopardised by unauthorised family members staying overnight and pressure to join in partying.

One community housing provider commented on difficulties with a small number of CRC (THaSS) clients who left tenancies without notice and/or sustained damage to property, incurring costs for the provider. It was a reflection of the strength of the partnership with CRC that the provider expressed confidence that this type of issue could be raised and addressed satisfactorily with CRC.



Non-housing supports

As noted above, clients were provided with a diversity of services to support sustaining tenancies and broader client transition to stable life in the community, dealing with practical and social and emotional needs as well as addressing factors related to re-offending for those involved in the criminal justice system. Individual case plans were developed to tailor supports to best meet the needs of each client and these were reviewed and revised as part of the case management as clients progressed.

A particular feature of the non-housing supports was facilitating access to available mainstream services, including doctors and dentists, specialist counsellors, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, employment services, TAFE courses and other skills development and vocational training, and legal services. Many supports were also provided directly by the services, for example, counselling, independent living skills training, including shopping and meal preparation, family mediation and relationship skills, and resume preparation.

Support was provided to deal with legal issues, including family law matters and attendance at court hearings. Clients (mostly women, but some men) with children were assisted with applications and hearings to support child restoration. Support was also provided to deal with SDRO debt matters, for instance through Work Development Orders.

Impacts on re-offending

Based on service provider and client feedback, the findings indicate there were reductions in re-offending, which was a significant outcome for the adult clients, although the precise extent and nature of this was not possible to determine. For the purposes of CSNSW reporting, re-offending is measured at 24 months following release from custody or the end of a community based order. Therefore, for the purposes of this evaluation, re-offending cannot be analysed because the “time to re-offend” is insufficient for most of the sample. However, there were reports by Probation and Parole interviewees of clients having completed parole orders for the first time in their lives. Clients reported a benefit of the project as being able to stay out of custody. For several clients the project clearly enabled the client to break the cycle of offending.

With respect to re-offending rates, data collected by SWITCH on the 2011/2012 cohort showed that nine of 27 clients (33 %) of clients had re-offended.⁶ However, when these statistics were examined, SWITCH reported that the re-offending behaviour of these individuals happened early in engagement with the project (Stage 1) and that some court engagement related to offences which had been committed prior to SWITCH referral.

Other client outcomes

There were important non-housing outcomes for clients across all projects that were identified in the evaluations, many of which related to factors of disadvantage and vulnerability. These were widely reported by clients and a range of service providers and stakeholders and include the following:

- Family reconnection and restoration of children. Across all projects, reconnecting with family was cited as important for a number of youth and adult clients. Supporting restoration of

⁶ Information sourced from Attachment 3B Certified Annual Activities and Outcomes Report for 2011/2012 prepared by YP Space MNC Inc for SWITCH program for Juvenile Justice NSW.



children was a particular focus of women in the THaSS project and clients were supported with court appearances, meetings with Community Services, applications, contact visits, and securing housing to accommodate their children. Restoration of children and being stable enough to foster relationships with their children was an important outcome for several of the Sustaining Tenancies clients;

- Improved literacy and numeracy and skills development, including in vocational, areas was noted across all projects which contributed to engagement in job readiness activities;
- Improved health, mental and physical well-being which contributed to greater capacity to engage in activities;
- Reduced drug and alcohol dependence which was marked in a number of adult clients who had maintained drug free status for an extended period, which contributed to greater stability and capacity to settle;
- Employment experience and job readiness, for e.g. obtaining drivers licences, undertaking work with “Choppa Weed”;
- Increased self-efficacy, confidence and a more positive outlook for the future, including expressions of pride in their achievement;
- Increased confidence and capacity to access mainstream services and support, and the therapeutic and other benefits flowing from this; and
- Increased social integration.

For many clients, this was their first experience of receiving intensive personal support in a period of transition and/or vulnerability for homelessness. This was positively experienced as having a reliable, non-judgemental support worker available. According to client accounts, having caseworker support and back up, even during episodes of crises and setbacks, brought an increased sense of confidence in navigating services and systems, and increased capability to achieve positive life goals.

The projects have had relatively short-time frames in which to demonstrate sustainable outcomes, particularly in light of the complexity and long-standing nature of some client circumstances. It may be that some of the non-housing outcomes are attributable to other services that clients were accessing during the period, though in many cases access to these was instigated by the projects. Of potential longer-term significance, however, is that some of the areas of positive individual change which have been demonstrated are identified as important factors in reducing recidivism (linked with criminogenic risk for instance), and homelessness.

4.2. The critical factors for success

Across all projects there were a number of common features that can be seen as critical factors for success. Some of these factors are intrinsic to the design of the service delivery model, while some are attributable to the mode of its implementation.

Service model features that are critical are:

- Provision of housing/ suitable accommodation as a stable foundation;
- Strategies to support sustaining tenancies;
- Provision of intensive case management support tailored to individual needs;
- Staged approach to service delivery; and
- Availability of support for 12 months to see clients through transition periods and possible setbacks.



Housing as a foundation

Securing appropriate accommodation as a key priority, immediately or as early as possible following institutional exit, was identified as a key success factor. This was addressed in the development of individual care plans for each client. In all projects, it was intended that there be a period of “pre-institutional exit” planning to allow for accommodation arrangements to be put in place, although in reality, some clients were referred very close to the date of exiting the institution, or had been released and were already experiencing homelessness or impending homelessness. In the case of the Sustaining Tenancies project, several clients were referred following release.

Important elements in planning for and securing accommodation included discussion of varying accommodation needs and, particularly in the case of adults being released from custody, identification of potential risks to sustaining tenancies and setting in place processes to mitigate these on release.

Attention to appropriateness of housing was also important in relation to factors such as location and the need to accommodate children. The allocation of dedicated housing in the first year of the THaSS project was very helpful to securing immediate housing outcomes.

Support for sustaining tenancies

The common focus on actively supporting clients to sustain tenancies through advocacy, developing individuals’ knowledge and skills, and overall capacity building was an important contributor to positive outcomes across all client groups.

A wide range of support services was offered by the projects that had a direct impact on clients’ ability to sustain a tenancy. These included:

Household management

- Assistance with household set-up through access to financial support and the sourcing of furniture and whitegoods, including internal brokerage support;
- Assistance with financial literacy and budgeting skills;
- Assistance with literacy and numeracy;
- Assistance with grocery shopping and meal planning; and
- Assistance with cooking and housekeeping skills.

Personal/ behavioural issues

- Dealing with AOD issues/ harm minimisation and accessing services;
- Anger management and trauma counselling;
- Relationship counselling;
- Family mediation; and
- Mental health support and referrals.

Managing social and community pressures

- Dealing with family and community pressures and expectations. This was particularly important for Aboriginal clients.

Monitoring and early intervention

- Monitoring and flagging concerns and problems early (e.g. rental arrears, noise, inappropriate visitors) and communicating about these with clients and housing providers. This was important in addressing issues and preventing escalation which could risk the tenancy.



Intensive case management support tailored to client needs

Provision of case management support with varying intensity and tailored for client needs meant that the specific needs and vulnerabilities of individuals identified through assessment could be incorporated in case planning. Comprehensive, holistic and coordinated service planning was provided with a caseworker generally assuming overall responsibility, with some sharing of client support as deemed appropriate. Clients leaving custody had Individual Support Plans (ISP) developed and in the Sustaining Tenancies project in particular, sharing client management across the team was important in implementing these. In the SWITCH (JJ) project, Juvenile Justice retained primary responsibility for case planning at the point of referral. For the SWITCH (YPLC) project, planning was linked to Leaving Care Plans. Delivery of intensive case management support was provided by SWITCH caseworkers.

Specific service access and other support needs were incorporated into client care plans to address drug and alcohol dependence, mental health issues, specific training and skill development for job readiness, numeracy and literacy, anger management, court and legal issues. Many of the young people entering the SWITCH program had little prior training in the skills required for independent living and adults leaving custody commonly required support in re-uniting with children and reconciling family conflicts.

As noted above, an important component of planning and support for those leaving custody was proactively dealing with issues that could negatively impact on maintaining tenancies with specific strategies incorporated within care plans prior to release.

Staged approach to service delivery

All projects provided a model of service support that was sequenced with varying intensity according to the stage of transition of the client. In the prison projects, the initial pre-exit or pre-release period (of ideally three months) was for building the client-worker relationship and establishing trust and developing a comprehensive care plan. The stages on institutional exit typically involved initial intensive support phased gradually down over a number of stages to minimal support, as the client became more settled and confident in independent living in the community. For adults leaving custody, high intensity support involved up to 16 hours per day, with access to 24 hour call in recognition of the critical transition period in the first weeks, with has a high risk of re-offending and re-incarceration.

In the SWITCH model there were three distinct stages. The first stage, at an average of 8 hours per week intervention, for approximately two months, focused on housing and stabilising accommodation and early implementation of individual case plans, to meet the complex needs of clients and assist them achieve their goals. Stage 2, at an average of five hours per week for six months, focused on medium term planning and engagement with education, training and employment as well as sustaining tenancies (or re-housing if required) and developing skills for independent living. Stage 3, at an average of three hours per week for the final four to six months of support, focused on continued support services and consolidation of gains.



Availability of support for 12 months

The extended period of client support was identified as being very important to allow for ongoing support during the transition period and to accommodate dealing with individual setbacks and crises. For many clients exiting custody, this frequently extended beyond their parole and supervision and was of particular benefit for clients with long histories of instability and poor integration in the community.

Other support structures available to young people exiting institutions, such as Post-release Support programs and transition support programs for young people leaving care, are of shorter duration and unable to provide the intensity of support of the SWITCH projects. Twelve months programming allows time for needed skills, goals and personal growth to be achieved, and provides a measure of consistency and stability in the life of the young person. Staff observed that SWITCH had been the most constant element in the lives of many of the individuals in the program.

Success factors related to implementation:

- Strong partnership development and extensive service networking and collaboration;
- Skilled casework staff and sound client engagement;
- Staff members who are Aboriginal;
- Service independence from the criminal justice system; and
- Support to access mainstream services.

Partnerships, networking and collaboration

With all projects needing to access suitable housing as well as a range of other services in the community to meet the individual needs of clients, the importance of service networking and collaboration cannot be over-estimated. All projects had sound relationships across the service system and took a proactive approach to developing strong partnerships with key organisations and generally strengthening comprehensive service networking and collaboration.

The strong partnerships developed between CRC and a range of community housing providers were integral to accessing housing for projects 2.8 and 2.10, and the proactive expansion by CRC of its partnerships and networks to a wider range of providers, including beyond the Western Sydney region. The Sustaining Tenancies partnership with Compass Housing in Broken Hill involved a co-location agreement, and the close proximity of staff has facilitated close communication and collaboration in addressing a wide range of client needs and supporting sustaining tenancies in a very timely and responsive manner.

There have been formal and informal operational partnerships and effective working relationships established by CRC with a range of other service providers, including health and mental health services, Aboriginal services, Centrelink agencies, and other NGOs which has supported service access for clients.

In the youth projects, both consortium partners brought strong and extensive social capital to their participation in the project. This enabled the projects to pursue tailor-made solutions for individuals and to bring together the needed supports for the young person to succeed. Their sound reputation for commitment and collaboration contributed to their effectiveness. A practical example of partnership on the Mid North Coast was the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed with a local community housing provider. This secured a property for one client and the experience with



the partnership led the community housing provider to modify their eligibility criteria to include 'couch surfing' and temporary accommodation, to better reflect the circumstances of young people who are at risk of homelessness more generally.

In the main, there was very little community housing overall in the geographic areas served by the projects and what existed was difficult to access because of high demand and lengthy waiting lists. All projects adopted a strong advocacy approach to the task of securing housing both with community housing providers and private real estate agents in their regions. Projects 2.21 and 2.22 further strengthened their links with private real estate agents through the conduct of two pilot "Reality Rental" courses (based on Rent It Keep It).

Skilled casework staff and sound client engagement

The quality of engagement and nature of the relationship with a case manager is an important factor in the success of young people leaving care. Across all projects the quality of project casework staff in terms of their professionalism and strengths based approach, good communication skills, respectfulness shown to clients, collaborative case management, early detection of issues and prompt follow-up, their openness and dedication to following the person's support plan, and their proactive approach was confirmed by other service providers. This created a "no surprises" situation, with issues raised before a crisis might ensue.

At the individual level, all clients reported that they received support and affirmation and valued having a reliable, respectful support person.

Both the SWITCH projects and the Sustaining Tenancies project employed Aboriginal staff and this was a significant factor in supporting strong Aboriginal client engagement in the projects and local community buy-in. This assisted projects to provide services in a culturally safe manner, whilst at the same time avoiding any stigma that might be associated with a service which was restricted to Aboriginal specific clients.

Service independence from the criminal justice system

While there were strong linkages with staff of Corrective Services NSW and Juvenile Justice, in the cases of projects 2.8, 2.10 and 2.21, for those clients with histories of offending, having workers from a service which was not linked with the justice system was important. For the adults leaving custody this was a strong factor in developing trust and a feeling of safety with the caseworkers. This was a positive element also observed by Probation and Parole informants for projects 2.8 and 2.10.

Support to access mainstream services

All projects proactively and consistently worked to ensure optimum access of all clients to mainstream services by assisting with making appointments, providing or arranging transport and frequently accompanying clients to services. This provided the opportunity for advocacy with service providers and support to enhance understanding of individual client histories, issues and challenges. Supporting clients' access to services through increased awareness of available services, assistance to navigate systems, and support to attend services meant that clients were able to benefit more consistently from these services than if they did not have the same level of intensive support.

Three of the projects were in regional areas where there is limited availability of public transport. This meant that an important facilitative factor was the provision of transport solutions for clients.



This ranged from collecting and driving individuals to important appointments and interviews, support to gain drivers licences, and the provision of brokerage assistance with the purchase of bicycles. Caseworkers also commented that the time spent driving clients to appointments was well spent as it provided another opportunity to informally check in with client progress.

4.3. Key challenges in this approach

Projects faced a number of challenges and these varied to some extent according to the project client group, service location, and resource level of the project. The three most significant challenges across the projects were:

- Lack of suitable, affordable housing;
- Limited access to services and employment in regional locations; and
- Recruiting, maintaining and supporting suitable staffing.

Lack of suitable, affordable housing

This was the most common significant challenge faced by all projects with the exception of the first year of the THaSS project. Locating suitable affordable accommodation options for clients was difficult when projects were located in areas with limited supplies of social housing and high demand for affordable properties. Temporary accommodation (TA) was used at times as a last resort. Access to suitable accommodation was made more difficult, particularly for the youth projects, where more affordable housing was located on the fringes of towns and/or in more regional areas presenting additional challenges of meeting transport requirements with no public transport infrastructure. For some of the less stable female clients in the THaSS project it was found that being accommodated in TA initially until permanent accommodation was secured posed some risks. This was in extreme cases where the TA location was associated with drug use and prostitution and a small number of clients were vulnerable to being drawn back into risky habits.

This housing challenge was addressed by service providers through the proactive development and maintenance of partnerships. In the case of THaSS in Western Sydney, partnerships were with a wide range of community housing providers; in the case of the North Coast projects, relationships were developed not only with what limited community housing organisations existed, but also with the private rental market. The Sustaining Tenancies project in Broken Hill worked in very close partnership with Compass Housing, the only local housing provider. This was greatly enhanced through the colocation arrangement.

For the young people in the SWITCH projects, housing access was further compromised by the relatively low levels of income support that they can access (notably Youth Allowance). Not only did this restrict affordability generally, but also it had an impact on access to community housing. With rental payment set at 25% of income, young people on income support pay less than other tenants, and this decreases their attractiveness as tenants.

Challenges also existed in securing appropriate housing for women with children, in safe locations away from negative social networks and violent partners. For many women, being in housing which is safe from violent partners can be a key to maintaining tenancies. A majority of available social housing stock is in low socio-economic areas where there are relatively higher levels of risk and negative peer networks. At times it was also difficult to secure housing with adequate rooms to accommodate children.



Limited access to services and employment in regional locations

Three of the projects were located in non-metropolitan areas and this meant that there was a general paucity of other support services for referral of clients. Most notable amongst these was the lack of drug and alcohol rehabilitation and detox programs for both young people and adults in Broken Hill. In the Far North Coast, use was made of youth specific AOD services in Queensland to assist a young project participant. There were also limited mental health and dual diagnosis services in Far West NSW, no on-going Aboriginal healing programs, and few employment opportunities for clients.

In Broken Hill, the CRC has taken a very proactive approach to building client job readiness and employment opportunities. Vigorous support for clients to comply with Job Network requirements and address SDRO debts has enabled clients to participate in Strive to Drive learn to drive program and several have received a drivers licence for the first time. CRC has also established “Choppa Weed”, an innovative social enterprise providing gardening and yard maintenance services locally. Eleven clients have engaged in work with the enterprise, providing some of them with their first ever experience of real employment.

Recruiting, maintaining and supporting suitable staffing

The complexity and nature of client needs across the target groups of all projects required highly skilled staff with particular skills in dealing with very diverse needs, and in building trusting relationships with clients. While it had a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal clients, the THaSS project was unsuccessful in its endeavours to recruit Aboriginal staff.

Projects met the challenges of attracting and supporting staff by the provision of regular staff training and supervision sessions, team meetings and easy access to senior staff expertise for advice and mentoring from within the services.

Apart from the Sustaining Tenancies project in Broken Hill, projects experienced challenges in recruiting and maintaining adequate staffing levels for project needs.

Specific target groups needing consideration by projects were Aboriginal clients (all projects), young people (projects 2.21 and 2.22) and consideration of service issues relating specifically to the needs of women (THaSS). Also important in the Western Sydney project was that a number of the women were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Aboriginal clients were well supported across all projects through carefully recruiting Aboriginal staff who were trusted in the local community and/or ensuring that non-Aboriginal staff were highly competent in providing culturally safe services. Aboriginal clients were also referred to available local Aboriginal services where this was appropriate.

In the Sustaining Tenancies project in Broken Hill, almost all clients were Aboriginal and it was important that the local Aboriginal community were consulted about and supportive of the project. The small staff team (one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal) were reported to be very well regarded in the community and aware of and sensitive to important family and community dynamics and issues. Close involvement of the community from the outset has been a key success factor for the project. In turn the project was reported to have had a wider positive impact on the community in general.



The SWITCH projects specifically included Aboriginal youth worker trainee positions in each location. These worked well, with the Aboriginal workers employed graduating into junior casework roles with their own caseloads in the final year of the projects. Feedback suggested that a major strength of this approach was that Aboriginal young people felt both supported and at the same time not singled out from other young people, as the SWITCH service was a general youth service. The SWITCH projects more generally had a focus on ensuring the staff recruited had appropriate youth background qualifications and experience.

Women's needs were specifically addressed in the THaSS project – their high and complex needs were reflected in the low case-load allocated to caseworkers to enable them to work closely and intensively with clients as needed. Specific consideration was given to issues such as restoration with children and ensuring accommodation was located in a suitable area away from violent partners or contacts and was child-friendly. Women from CALD backgrounds were referred to language and ethnic specific services and support as appropriate.

4.4. The impact of the projects on service systems

The limited period of time of project implementation has restricted the extent to which impacts on the broader service system can be ascertained. Nevertheless, there was strong positive feedback from a range of external stakeholders across the four projects about the positive impacts and benefits that the projects have brought to addressing the needs of their target groups. Key aspects were improved coordination and integration of services with caseworkers leading or supporting coordinated, cross-service approaches tailored to meet individual client needs.

Also noteworthy from the perspective of other stakeholders was the strength the projects in being able to provide a 12 month period of intensive support to individuals. This degree of assistance was previously unavailable. The consensus was that this made a real difference in client outcomes. Clients were assisted to work through a range of issues that would otherwise impact negatively on their ability to sustain stable tenancies. Post-release services, including Probation and Parole, community housing providers and transition support services for young people leaving care welcomed the service intensity and continuity provided by the projects.

A third way in which the projects influenced system change was the impact they had on increasing the awareness of client needs within other service organisations. This was particularly the result of proactive client advocacy and most notably for young people and women leaving custody in Western Sydney. In the case of young people, a tangible example of benefits flowing from this was change to service eligibility criteria for a community housing service, which now recognises "couch surfing" or "in temporary accommodation" as eligibility categories for community housing.

There has been increased collaboration and networking between service providers with new referral pathways and processes adopting a more holistic approach to clients, such as multi-service case conferencing. The collaborative efforts mean that collectively services were better equipped locally to meet the needs of people exiting institutions.

For some services, the introduction of the new service resulted in considerable saving of staff time taken in dealing with these complex clients, and freed them up for other priority clients. This was particularly reported to be the case for Probation and Parole in Broken Hill and Western Sydney and also noted by a number of community housing providers, all of whom have high case-loads and limited capacity to deal with these very complex clients.

5. FINDINGS – COST ISSUES

The table below provides a summary of cost comparisons across the four projects, based on expenditure data for the 2011/2012 financial year supplied by the service providers.

Table 4: Project cost comparisons

Cost item	2.21	2.22	2.8	2.10*
Total project expenditure 2011/2012	\$484,093	\$783,615	\$868,560	\$200,431
% direct staffing costs	53.9%	59.6%	74.97%	70.05%
% operational costs ⁷	41.4%	33.6%	22.65	29.95%
% brokerage	4.7%	6.8%	2.38%	0.0%
Number of clients serviced ⁸	27	59	30	14
Total brokage expenditure	\$22,676	\$53,714	\$20,656	0.00
Average brokerage per client	\$840	\$910	\$689	0.0
Annual per capita cost	\$17,089	\$12,371	\$28,952	\$14,316
Average cost per month of service	\$1,494	\$1,030	\$2,413	\$1,193

* Additional funding was provided to project 2.10 in 2011/2012 from underspends and permission was granted to pool the funds for both 2.8 and 2.10 so that any future underspends could be used to support the Sustaining Tenancies project which was funded at a much lower level.

5.1. Cost effectiveness of the approaches

As indicated in Table 4 above, across the four projects there was a variation in annual per capita costs ranging from \$12,371 in the case of project 2.22 (Young people leaving care) up to \$28,952 (THaSS). This is reflective of the complexity of the needs of the individual people in the projects and in the case of THaSS, the high staff/ client ratio, which was deemed important for supporting the complex needs of the female clients. This led to some excess project capacity for the THaSS project that was addressed by doubling the caseload and subsequently securing approval for underspends to be used for the Sustaining Tenancies project.

The evaluation did not include any financial analysis of the other inputs which the program has been able to leverage on behalf of the individuals served (e.g. access to mental health counselling, other financial entitlements and adjustments e.g. to Centrelink payments, TA from Housing NSW) nor any cost savings through areas such as possible decreased hospital admissions.

Direct comparisons of the proportion of funds allocated to direct service staff and administrative and operational costs across the four projects is not possible because of the incorporation of administrative and management staffing costs into operational costs for the youth projects.

⁷ In project 2.12 and 2.22 operating costs include administrative and management staff costs.

⁸ For the 2.8 and 2.10 clients these numbers represent new clients released from prison only and the total number of clients worked with over the year was considerably greater.



The SWITCH program operated largely as an integrated service model across the two projects (2.21 and 2.22) with common staffing and model features. Not only did this allow for balanced caseloads and good geographic coverage, allowing speedy responses to young people, irrespective of program stream, but this also enhanced cost-effectiveness. This was because staff duplication was avoided and it was easier to ensure that caseworkers were employed to full capacity.

In relation to projects 2.8 and 2.10, there were significantly different funding levels with the THaSS project having an overall budget of \$868,560 and Sustaining Tenancies only \$288,000. Although the target client numbers for 2011/2012 for Sustaining Tenancies (20) was slightly lower than THaSS (23), both models require intensive case management for the clients, particularly in the early post-release period of around 3 months. In fact, due to excess project capacity in THaSS, 30 new clients could be taken on in the period through the increased caseload allocation in February 2011. Due to the limited overall budget for 2.10, funds allocated for brokerage were used for other project priorities including staffing and an additional vehicle that were deemed essential to the effective operation of the model. Due to the co-location arrangement with Compass Housing considerable operational cost savings have been made by the project which has been very important. There is considerable scope to reduce the per client costs of the THaSS project through increasing the caseloads for caseworkers with more careful phasing of service intensity and reduction of funds allocated for brokerage.

For both the projects 2.8 and 2.10 the evaluation findings indicate that there has been a reduction in re-offending and re-incarceration. However, in small studies such as these, it was not possible to demonstrate savings in system costs for inmate custody and community supervision. The daily cost of full time inmate custody is \$174.74 (open custody) or \$211.23 (secure custody) or \$63,780 per annum, \$77,090 per annum (Corrective Services NSW 2011). However it is noted that for cost savings to be made with the correctional system, complex calculations are required by Treasury and there needs to be closure of entire wings or centres.

The cost effectiveness of the approaches, especially the support for young people, needs to be understood in the context of the increased value of investment early in the life of a young person. These target groups have risk factors that are indicative of a costly trajectory going forward. The recent study on lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups (Baldry et al 2012) suggested that early and well-timed interventions to establish and maintain secure housing and associated support services is likely to curtail longer-term societal costs of service demands and interactions with criminal justice system. Amongst the 11 case studies in the research, lack of adequate services early in the lives of these individuals was associated with very costly criminal justice, health and homelessness interactions and interventions later in their lives, with an estimated individual lifecourse cost range of between \$900,000 to \$5.5 million.

An interesting test of the importance of this principle of early intervention was the SWITCH JJ project extension to pilot the employment of an early intervention court support worker on the MNC. The role of this position was to target individuals who may be on their first or second time court appearance and who are at risk of homelessness. The intervention of information and support, including an option for six weeks intensive case management showed early promise in allowing a number of young people to avoid a custodial experience and to address factors that may impact on their future offending and homelessness.



For the three projects that used brokerage funding from the outset, it appeared that the funding was adequate with an average per capita expenditure in the \$600 to \$1,000 range. For 2.10 there needed to be an additional allocation made for brokerage due to the extreme disadvantage of clients and the need to purchase household goods and other items.

5.2. Cost differentials

Within the two youth projects, the per capita cost of the SWITCH (YPLC) project was less than that of the SWITCH (JJ) project (69%). This is largely the result of the inclusion of two streams of young people (early intervention and case management), within the SWITCH (YPLC) project. Those in the early intervention stream were provided with support prior to exit from leaving care. This frequently involved working closely with a transition support service, sharing some of the support needs in the early stages of project engagement and dealing with issues before they became more entrenched. On the other hand, the case management YPLC clients presented with complex needs and intervention requirements which were comparable to the SWITCH (JJ) clients.

Within the adult projects, as noted above, there were significant cost differentials with THaSS receiving four times the funding of Sustaining Tenancies, yet servicing only double the number of clients. The THaSS project had the potential to manage a considerably higher caseload than originally planned and meet significantly increased targets. Brokerage funding could have been greatly reduced due to the easier access to services and goods in a metropolitan location.

5.3. Cost benchmarking

The projects did not lend themselves to any rigorous cost benchmarking. Nevertheless, the recent lifecourse costs study by Baldry et al (2012) above would indicate that there are significant cost savings to be obtained by investment in a strong early intervention approach that meets the complex needs of individuals who are exiting institutions to support successful independent living/reintegration into the community.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of key lessons learnt

All the exiting institutions projects have shown that they are able to deliver a range of housing and non-housing outcomes, which have prevented homelessness for significant numbers of clients who exhibit a range of vulnerabilities and risk factors which predispose them to a high possibility of homelessness.

The table below summarises the key lessons learned about what works and what could be improved. The implications for future responses to homelessness are then discussed in the section which follows.

Table 5: What is working and what could be improved?

What is working?	Comments
Building on existing community connections and expanding partnerships	Existing local community connections enabled projects to provide needed supports and referrals quickly. Projects strengthened and extended relationships with other key parts of the service system such as community housing providers.
Combining accommodation and casework support	Both elements appear essential with each component reinforcing and complementing the other.
A proactive advocacy approach	A proactive, flexible and constructive approach allowed the development of effective tailor-made solutions to address individual needs across a variety of domains. Program staff advocated for individuals with other parts of the service system. Young people and adults who have long histories of incarceration with complex service needs have limited capacity to navigate the service system themselves.
Providing 12 months of support	It takes time to stabilise complex issues and secure sustainable alternatives. A 12 month period of support was sufficiently long to allow for a setback or failure to be dealt with and resolved. Dealing with the multiple and entrenched often life-long histories of disadvantage and trauma requires sustained support.
A staged, transitional approach	Pre-exit planning can occur; stages allowed for client progress to be tracked and rewarded. Stages can be repeated if needed.
Culturally safe services – with Aboriginal staff in a mainstream service and culturally competent non-Aboriginal staff	Aboriginal clients felt both supported and not stigmatised where there were Aboriginal staff in a mainstream service. Aboriginal staff provided improved understanding of client needs and community issues and sensitivities.

What is working?		Comments
Brokerage funding tailored to need		<p>Allowed for quick responsiveness to meet needs, particularly for very disadvantaged clients.</p> <p>Complemented other sources of financial support available to clients.</p> <p>Level needs to be adapted to setting and access to resources and services locally.</p>
Colocation partnership with community housing provider		Enabled close collaboration between staff in the different services and speedy response to issues which arose in relation to client tenancies.
Consortium partnerships (Youth projects)		These allowed for greater geographic coverage and sharing of partner agency strengths.
What could be improved?		Comments
Insufficient affordable housing		Project efficacy could be increased by linkages to actual housing stock (such as community housing, head lease arrangements).
Project lead times		<p>Delayed project start times increased pressures to deliver outcomes in shorter time frames; intake processes were curtailed.</p> <p>Some projects experienced difficulties in recruiting the full complement of appropriately skilled staff.</p> <p>No “developmental” opportunity for fully developing the models.</p>
Longer project times		A longer duration for projects would allow for the capture of longer term outcomes to determine if benefits are sustained and to assess overall system savings. (This has been further exacerbated by delayed project start times - see above).
More robust data collection and agreed indicators of success from the outset		<p>Realistic indicators of success which reflect the complexity of clients will allow for small positive changes to be captured e.g. increased employment rates, self-reported increases in self-efficacy and self-esteem.</p> <p>Good baseline data to be collected (e.g. age of first experience of homelessness, parental responsibilities)</p> <p>Revise portal data collection/ categories to better match project and client characteristics and outcomes (e.g. housing types to include living with family on an ongoing basis, non-housing outcomes to include support with pregnancy and childbirth).</p>
Earlier project referral		The early intervention and service planning tasks could be strengthened by earlier referrals to the services prior to institutional exits.



6.2. Implications for the future response to homelessness

Part of the challenge in solving homelessness for the client groups supported by the exiting institutions projects is accessing housing in an environment where there is insufficient appropriate and affordable housing stock available. One of the projects was fortunate in that in its first year of operation, it was linked to the allocation of specific community housing properties. Future projects which are targeting people exiting institutions could be strengthened by the inclusion of more robust mechanisms to access suitable housing. This could include:

- The use of an MOU with community housing providers to prioritise access to housing;
- Specific targeting of community housing properties for the client group supported by the projects;
- Coordination of access to available affordable housing across all funded homelessness projects/ target groups in a region - perhaps by having a role in allocation linked to the Regional Homelessness Committee structure; and
- Use of “head lease” arrangements whereby providers could manage the initial tenancy obligations associated with a property. Once a client has demonstrated the skills needed to sustain the tenancy, the tenancy obligations could be handed over to the person/s for the longer term.

Going Home Staying Home Reform Plan, the NSW Government's reform agenda for specialist homelessness services is focused on a number of service and system improvements for addressing homelessness. These include a shift from crisis to early intervention and prevention and the adoption of an individualised/ needs based approach and flexibility of services to respond to complex needs. The exiting institutions projects align with this closely and their core focus is early intervention and prevention of homelessness. Similarly, the projects' successes through the adoption of models that are individualised and needs driven shows the efficacy of this approach.

6.3. Implications for specific client groups who are exiting institutions

Across the projects there were implications for a number of specific client groups. These were Aboriginal clients, young people and women, and to a lesser extent, women who were from CALD backgrounds.

Implications for Aboriginal people

- Staffing considerations

Aboriginal staff who were carefully recruited and the use of Aboriginal specific trainee positions in the case of the youth projects were important project features. Together with ensuring that non-Aboriginal staff were highly competent in providing culturally safe services, all projects were able to meet the needs of their Aboriginal clients as well as report good levels of satisfaction. Close attention to provision of culturally safe services and appropriate staff recruitment should be central to all transition services where Aboriginal people are likely to be clients.

- Model considerations

An extended period of intensive support is vital for Aboriginal people exiting custody who have long histories of disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and entrenched problems. For some who experience set-backs and relapses a longer period of support beyond 12 months is important to reduce longer term cycles of incarceration. There should be future consideration of mechanisms to provide ongoing support in similar projects.

Implications for young people

- Income support considerations

Current levels of income support for young people put them at a disadvantage when accessing affordable, sustainable housing. This is a disadvantage not only in the private rental market but also in accessing community housing where individuals on a higher level of income payment can be favoured.

- Model considerations

Young people need a service model that allows them time to grow and learn, and to make mistakes. As identified by Gaetz and Scott (2012) it is unrealistic to expect that young people can make a speedy transition to living independently, especially young people leaving institutional care, whether child protection or correctional care. These young people often have underdeveloped life skills, inadequate education and lack of supports and resources (including income) that most young people rely on when moving into adulthood.

This suggests that an extended period of support, including the possibility of supported transitional housing arrangements where appropriate, can greatly increase the chances of success for these vulnerable groups of young people. Within the youth projects, the staged approach to the provision of support allowed for short-term goals and medium terms goals to be developed and achieved or repeated as necessary.

Implications for women

- Service delivery implications

For women, important service considerations included attention to restoration with children and ensuring accommodation was located in a suitable area away from violent partners or contacts and was child-friendly. For some young women, specific supports were needed around pregnancy and child-birth. Women from CALD backgrounds were referred to language and ethnic specific services and support as appropriate. Many female prisoners have histories of mental illness and sexual trauma which need to be sensitively addressed. All transition programs that include women as clients need to incorporate consideration of specific issues for women in their service delivery model.



6.4. Other insights gained that can enrich the evidence base

- The significant overlap between a juvenile justice experience and out-of-home care placement was confirmed

The youth projects confirmed the findings reported in the literature that young people who are involved with the juvenile justice system are also highly likely to have experienced one or more out-of-home care placements (see p.17). For example, amongst the ten young people interviewed for the evaluation, there was a 40% overlap, where the young person could have been in either of the leaving care or Juvenile Justice projects given their backgrounds.⁹

- The value of a similar holistic model applied to youth and adults across the continuum holds the potential for breaking the cycle of offending and incarceration

Given the high rates of prisoners who have histories of contact with the juvenile justice system, the youth projects indicate that there is great potential to reduce their longer term trajectory into adult offending through investment in intensive wrap around service models for them at an early stage.

6.5. Future research that could strengthen the evidence in this area

There is a need for longitudinal studies that are carefully structured to differentiate between different client needs and characteristics and responses to different elements of the service models.

Questions that could be explored include:

- Is early intervention at the point of first or second contact with the juvenile justice system effective in averting homelessness and ongoing juvenile justice system involvement?

Project 2.21 (SWITCH-JJ) worked well for young people exiting Juvenile Justice Centres but it may be that an increased focus on intervening earlier in the process of engagement with the criminal justice system could divert people from homelessness and further criminal activity earlier in their lives. The Youth Information, Resources and Court Support Program which was started on the MNC by SWITCH was exploring this possibility. Further research and trialling of this approach would allow more evidence to be gathered about its efficacy.

- Who should have priority of access?
- How can resources be more targeting to have the greatest impact for reducing both homelessness and recidivism?

The THaSS project worked well for women, however it is not evident the extent to which those with high needs were targeted who may have been at low risk of re-offending, and potentially equally well served by accessing other less intensive mainstream services. Closer attention to selection of clients based on risk may result in more efficient use of resources.

The SWITCH program worked well for young people exiting Juvenile Justice Centres but it may be that an increased focus on intervening earlier in the process of engagement with the criminal justice system could divert people from homelessness and further criminal activity earlier in their lives. See comments about the Youth Information, Resources and Court Support Program above.

⁹ Of the three JJ clients interviewed, two had an out of home background and of the six YPLC clients interviewed, two had a juvenile justice background.



- What is the appropriate program length?

There were clear views across all projects that the capacity to offer 12 months of support was a major strength of the models, but the question remains as to whether an even longer period could enable more people exiting institutions to avoid homelessness. Insufficient time has elapsed to test the sustainability of the gains that were made by individuals during the projects; it is not clear if follow-up intervention could further strengthen the gains which have been made.

- Would the provision of housing stock as part of the program improve program outcomes?

One of the projects had direct access to community housing in its first year of operation. Further research could test whether tied housing, such as through community housing allocations or the inclusion of “head lease” arrangements could enable projects to achieve both housing and non-housing outcomes in a more timely and sustainable manner.

- The experience of individuals who were not successful in the project

It was not possible within the scope of the evaluations to seek the views of clients who had not been successful in the various projects or who had chosen not to take up the offer of referral to a project. Further research with these people may provide additional evidence about the changes which would be required to improve their chances of successful transition to stable accommodation and independent living.

Finally, any future research as well as program monitoring should include the development of clear understanding and agreement with service providers around the specific quantitative data to be collected and take into account the feasibility of data collection, the systems for collecting and reporting the data to ensure its integrity, and its interface with any other internal and external reporting obligations.

APPENDIX 1: REFERENCES

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