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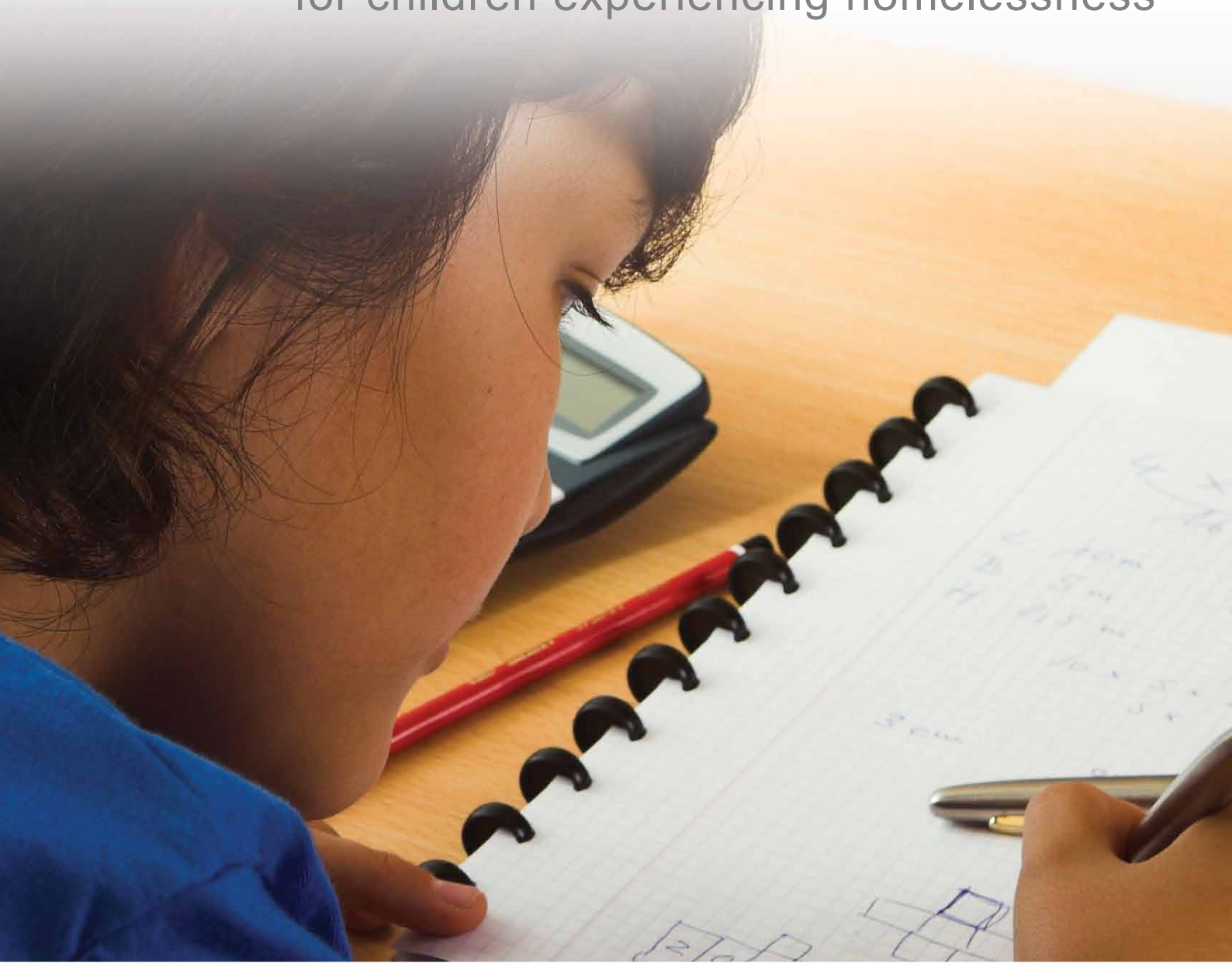


Brotherhood
of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Hanover 
HOUSING - SUPPORT - RESEARCH

Education Development Project

Improving educational and housing outcomes
for children experiencing homelessness



Final evaluation report | October 2009
A National Homelessness Strategy Demonstration Project



Education Development Project: Improving educational and housing outcomes for children experiencing homelessness

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We would like to thank the parents, students, schools and agencies that participated in the Education Development Project. We would also like to thank those who took the time to be part of the evaluation of this project in completing the various survey tools and engaging in the various conversations around practice improvement. In addition, we would like to thank those agencies and schools who participated on the two local project reference groups and took time away from their busy schedules to support and provide advice to the project.

We also appreciate FaHCSIA's funding support for this project and hope that the activities of the project and recommendations in this report lead to lasting improvements in support and school engagement for children and young people in the middle years of schooling experiencing homelessness.



Education Development Project: Improving educational and housing outcomes for children experiencing homelessness

Executive Summary

Education literature has clearly established the importance of the middle years of schooling as a time where average student achievement can plateau or decline. Critically, the middle years are also consistent with the age when children and young people experiencing homelessness begin to disengage from school.

Children experiencing homelessness are less likely to attend school, more likely to finish their schooling early and not as likely to progress as far educationally as other children. This in turn leads to limited life choices for these children and also longer-term costs in unemployment and lost productivity to the community.

The Education Development Project was a two year pilot project jointly managed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Education Foundation division of the Foundation for Young Australians and Hanover Welfare Services.

The central hypothesis of the project was that any improvement in educational engagement for children in the middle years of school (Years 5-9) who are experiencing homelessness requires changes in current practices in the homelessness and education sectors.

The project worked across two locations in the south east of Melbourne – Cheltenham and Frankston - and had four key objectives:

1. To improve educational engagement for children experiencing homelessness;
2. To provide secure and stable transitional housing for the families and children during the two year demonstration period;
3. To enhance support practices; and
4. To develop practice insights that could be adopted by the broader homelessness and education sectors.

To undertake the project, an Education Development Worker was employed in each of the two locations to provide support to the families and students, forge relationships with local agencies and schools and support practice dissemination and change.

A total of 27 families and 39 students participated in the project over the two years period. Approximately 60% of these families also participated in the evaluation of the project. In total 21 schools were involved at some point in the project, with seven of these schools having significant long term engagement.

The project worked at four levels: the individual student; the family; the school; and broader support agencies. This approach was taken recognising that a child or young person's experience of school involves encouragement and support from each of these areas.

Families have a crucial influence on their children's education. Therefore the project aimed to foster, within the family environment, a positive attitude towards school attendance; particularly in families where parents' own experience of school was negative and unfulfilling.

At the completion of the project, all but three of the twenty five students participating remained engaged with school.

Parents reported significant improvements in their child's school attendance, attitude to learning, reading and writing skills and how they got on with their teachers. Key school contacts all also reported improvements in their students' approach to and engagement with the school.

School factors that can contribute to poor attendance and a lack of interest in education include an unengaging curriculum, an unsupportive school environment for children and a rising level of education expenses. An important part of the role of the Education Development Workers was to identify and address these factors, in collaboration with teachers and welfare officers.

Stable housing also underpins success at school, however families experiencing homelessness may move house several times so their children may attend many schools. The Education Development Project focused on keeping families in the same neighbourhood so that children can stay at the same school.

About the participants

Forty five percent of the students involved in the project had moved schools four or more times during their schooling career. The most common reason for moving schools was fleeing family violence.

Parents indicated that they felt this had impacted on their children's academic and social development. Many of the students participating in the project also faced challenges such as mental and physical health issues and being young carers for either a parent or siblings.

Students were generally described by their teachers as being below the level of their peers in reading, spelling and writing. Some of the students participating in the project were described by their teachers as disruptive or displaying aggressive behaviour in class while others were described as quiet and withdrawn.

Despite negative school experiences themselves, parents considered it 'extremely important' their children complete high school. Only 23% of parents participating in the project had gone on to complete year 11 although 58% had gone on to attempt or complete short courses after leaving school. Parents felt it was extremely important for their children to complete school in order to get a job, undertake further education, achieve stability in their lives and not to waste their individual talent.

Key findings

Stronger collaboration is needed between schools and support agencies in order to improve educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. Through the Education Development Project, the Education Development Workers were able to provide focused support to individual students and their families as well as build relationships between schools and support agencies. Strong advocacy was required on the part of the Education Development Workers to develop an understanding within schools of the challenges facing families and issues underlying student behaviour. This advocacy work also involved working with schools to undertake student assessments and put in place relevant learning supports. The project has demonstrated the benefit of having better, more proactive systems of collaboration and exchange in place to enable both schools and support agencies to work more closely.

The need to develop better understanding of challenges facing disadvantaged families, and to develop better collaboration between schools and support agencies is particularly true for schools in areas of relative advantage. Schools in areas of high disadvantage are often better at making connections with local support agencies as it is a necessary part of



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the way they work. However, areas such as Cheltenham and Mornington, which are relatively affluent often have pockets of significant disadvantage and schools in these areas are not as familiar with local support agencies.

Feedback from participating schools has been that the level of support within this project has been an instrumental component in increasing positive communication with parents. Schools commented that the strategies engaged within the project could be adapted to many families who experience disadvantage and barriers other than homelessness.

The education needs of school aged children and young people need to be assessed and included in support plans for families accessing homelessness support services. Currently children and young people accompanying parents are not seen as clients in their own right within the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and education needs generally take second place to finding accommodation for those in need. Without an initial assessment of education needs and these goals being placed within the support plan, these needs can be lost within the other demands of finding stable accommodation, yet education is a key element in preventing a cycle of disadvantage and homelessness.

The generally transient nature of families experiencing homelessness presents some challenges for schools (and for families) in terms of funding. For one family participating in the project, the children in the family experienced four school moves in one year – requiring four different uniforms and four different sets of textbooks. One of the challenges for schools is that school funding follows each student. This means that if they put in place an integration aide for a student who then moves on, the funding goes with the student to the next school but the aide stays behind. Similarly, while the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is intended to move with the students, the funds are often exhausted by the demands of the start of the school year and there is nothing left to transfer. The brokerage funding provided as part of the Education Development Project was of significant benefit in covering costs for things like tutoring, computers and travel to and from school.

Building on existing relationships provides more positive outcomes. Positive relationships are critical to encouraging any change in behaviour for families and for students. In initially recruiting families the Education Development Workers found that as housing agencies already had existing relationships with families through their housing services, it was much easier to approach and engage with them around their children's education through this avenue. They could then build on this relationship to establish and work on the education goals for the children in the family. From this position of trust, they were also better able to build positive relationships between the parents and schools and to empower parents to engage in their child(ren)'s education.

Assisting parents to build positive homework habits at home as well as tutoring support in the classroom made a significant difference to educational development. The Education Development Workers assisted parents to create a supportive environment for homework, including a quiet space and dedicated time for homework to be done. Students participating in the tutoring were seen to be more engaged in class and more focused in their studies. One student who was receiving tutoring was particularly excited when he passed his first maths test.

Providing emotional support is also critical. For some students, their experiences of trauma were such that simply providing educational supports was insufficient to enable them to engage with school. Even during the life of the project 92% of families participating experienced three or more stressful life events including financial difficulties, mental or physical health issues, drug and alcohol problems and relationship breakdown. While there are programs available for students to support these needs, it requires greater action from schools and housing support agencies to identify the need and link them into the right service. Support is also needed for parents to help them understand the impact of these events on their child(ren)'s education and provide them with strategies to minimise this impact.

Empowering parents is critical to helping children achieve. While all parents want the best for their children, some face significant challenges to assisting them. The parents involved in the project were grappling with a multitude of complex issues that had contributed to the family's housing breakdown. Many of the parents had reduced capacity to encourage and nurture their children's learning, and to manoeuvre their way effectively through the school system. By assisting parents and building their understanding of the school system and confidence in approaching their child's school the Education Development Workers were helping them to become the strongest advocates for their children's education. One hundred percent of parents responding to the survey indicated that the Education Development Project had made them feel more comfortable about approaching their child's school.

Schools need to become better at communicating with parents from different language backgrounds. None of the three parents from refugee backgrounds participating in the project had any experience with formal schooling. This, coupled with their limited English language skills, made it extremely difficult for them to engage with their children's education. The project found that the schools had a limited understanding of how to address this issue and a general reluctance to make use of interpreter services.

Innovative approaches developed by some schools to assist families need to be shared and established more widely. The costs of education are a significant challenge for many parents and particularly so for the families participating in the Education Development Project. The Education Development Workers found that many schools have developed innovative approaches to assisting families through things like payment plans and text book loan schemes and being proactive in gathering information about their families so as to better understand how to assist them. These innovative approaches need to be encouraged and fostered in other schools.

Changing schools can be traumatic but can be greatly assisted by better transfer of information. For families experiencing homelessness, it is difficult to move schools and for parents to have to explain again the family circumstances and start from scratch in putting supports in place to assist their child(ren)'s learning. What the Project found is where schools made a concerted effort to transfer information to the new school, including meeting with the Welfare Coordinator and discussing the current supports in place for the student, this made a significant difference to the level of anxiety experienced by both parent and child and helped to ensure that a smoother transition.



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Stable housing and community connection is critical to educational engagement.

The Education Development Workers worked hard to assist families to address any issue that threatened the stability of their tenancy. Through the life of the project, 61% of families participating did not have any housing moves. For those who did, most moved from transitional housing into public housing. However, each of these moves was outside the area where the family was currently living (at least 30 km away), resulting in yet another school move for the students within those families.

Improving assessment and ensuring there is follow through ensures that the right supports are put in place. Through the project, workers found that at times school based assessments around learning and development needs were not being done or were not targeted to pick up underlying issues. At other times, they found that while an assessment may have been done, the supports that had been identified as needed had not been put in place. As part of the project, an education assessment tool was developed for parents to complete. This assessment tool was used to assist in identifying the support needs for the family and the individual students. The tool was also shared with other services as a model that could be adapted for use as part of the normal homelessness support program.

Summary of recommendations

These findings formed the basis of the following recommendations which can be found throughout the report.

Recommendation 1: Australian and State Governments consider the findings and recommendations in this report in developing the interventions designed to achieve the targets in the Australian Government's white paper *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*.

Recommendation 2: Homelessness specialist services providing support to families should ensure:

- initial intake and assessment includes an assessment of the education needs of school aged children and young people within the family;
- support plans include goals around the education needs of the children and young people. This could include empowering parents around advocating for the educational needs of their children, budgeting for education costs and providing support for homework.

Recommendation 3: Homelessness support workers include within case plans for parents assisting them to develop positive homework habits for their children as part of supporting students in education. This includes talking to parents about having set homework times and having a quiet space in which to do homework.

Recommendation 4: Schools and homelessness specialist service agencies consider means by which they can establish learning support, such as tutor programs, to assist students who are behind their peers in terms of skill development. These programs should be available either at school within schools hours or at agencies out of hours to reduce any stigma associated with accessing these programs.

Recommendation 5: Schools and support agencies recognise the challenges facing students who are also young carers (either of parents or siblings) and support their education through increased support and flexibility so students are able to attend class and other school activities such as excursions and camps.

Recommendation 6: School staff receive training in the use of telephone interpreters and effective communication with parents from different language backgrounds.

Recommendation 7: Schools assist parents to build a relationship with and better understand their child's school and the wider education system, using a range of informal approaches, particularly through personal contact. This could include:

- starting from the premise that all parents want the best for their child(ren) but that in some cases they may not know how to support them to achieve it
- coffee mornings and other informal activities for parents so they can meet school staff as they drop their children at school
- information packages in clear, concise language providing information on what is available at the school in terms of service and supports
- making contact with parents to introduce members of the staffing team so parents have someone they know and can approach when they have questions



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Recommendation 8: Australian and State Governments should work to reduce the costs of schooling including providing camps, excursions and other curriculum activities for free; removing subject contributions, levies and charges for consumables provided by schools and introduce free public transport for school children.

Recommendation 9: Recognising that there are currently costs to schooling, schools and homelessness specialist agencies should have active measures in place to assist parents with education costs which can't be met through existing programs.

Homelessness specialist agencies should assist parents to develop their budgeting skills, using education as a good example of the need to pre-plan to purchase items such as excursions and textbooks.

Positive approaches by schools observed through the project include:

- Providing information in the October prior to the beginning of the school year on assistance available to parents
- Putting in place a payment plan system for parents around things like second-hand uniforms and textbooks (see Appendix 4)
- Putting in place a textbook loan scheme.

Recommendation 10: Where students have to move schools, the transfer of information, particularly for students facing significant disadvantage, between schools should be as comprehensive as possible. Methods that could be used include:

- The Student Welfare Coordinator in the old school contacting the new school to provide an overview of the student's history and current supports in place. This could potentially be done as a joint meeting between the two Welfare Coordinators and the parents.
- Homelessness specialist support workers encouraging parents to ensure that the relevant information is transferred to the new school
- Homelessness specialist support workers facilitating a meeting with the new school for parents to help them establish a relationship.

Recommendation 11: The Australian Government should explore the possibility of Centrelink assisting in the transfer of information between schools, as they are often the first point of contact for families when they move.

Recommendation 12: State Housing Authorities reconsider housing priorities to ensure a school first approach for families so as to minimise school moves for children and young people. Where this is not possible, the number of moves should be minimised by placing families directly into long term housing.

Recommendation 13: Consideration be given to a student's need for space to study when placing families in housing so they have enough space to complete homework.

Recommendation 14: Homelessness specialist agencies should adopt an assessment tool (example at Appendix 6) to enable school age children's needs to be assessed and included in the support plan for their family. This should then contribute to the inclusion of education and connection to school as a key component of a family's support plan.

Recommendation 15: Accompanied children be recognised as clients in their own right within the homelessness support system and that the importance of meeting educational needs is central to their support. Agencies need to be funded accordingly.

Recommendation 16: Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to undertake an audit of school's compliance with Departmental policy on transparency of the use of the EMA. This should be followed up with information to schools on best practice in this area.

Recommendation 17: Brokerage dollars should be provided to support agencies to provide for educational items not covered by the EMA or State School Relief Fund. This includes tutoring, computers, internet access and travel tickets.

Recommendation 18: SAAP Children's Resource Workers in each region should develop a list of resources for both schools and agencies on the financial support available to families, who to contact within schools and the local agencies and the services they provide that might be helpful to schools.

Recommendation 19: Schools should identify someone on the school staff who is responsible for liaising with local homelessness and other support agencies. This person should also have a role in raising awareness amongst other school staff around homelessness and disadvantage and the impact on student engagement. They should also have responsibility for raising awareness of the agencies and support available to assist families.

Recommendation 20: Homelessness and other support agencies should develop policies and procedures around making connections and building relationships with local schools and nominate someone within the agency with responsibility for liaising with schools in each local area.

Recommendation 21: State education and housing authorities should work together to develop better systems of collaboration and exchange between schools and support agencies to enable them to work more closely to support students and their families.



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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report represents the culmination of the evaluation of the Education Development Project. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which the Education Development Project met its key objectives of:

- Improving educational engagement for children;
- Providing secure and stable housing;
- Enhancing support practices; and
- Practice dissemination.

This involves testing the overall hypothesis that education outcomes for children aged 10 – 15 years experiencing homelessness will improve with:

- additional direct support for the child;
- increased support for parents with respect to their child’s education;
- increased connection between service agencies; and
- increased awareness amongst service agencies.

It is hoped that the recommendations of the report will inform changes both within support agencies and schools as well as inform government policy.

1.2 Research methodology

The Education Development Project was designed as an action learning project, with information collected throughout the two year duration of the project to contribute to the evaluation.

The evaluation component of the project has been undertaken by the Hanover Research & Organisational Development Portfolio, with research staff meeting regularly throughout the project with the project workers to learn about the progress of the project as well as provide guidance on the collection of information relevant to the formal evaluation. This process was guided by the evaluation framework for the project which was developed in November 2007.

Information was collected across the four levels on which the project was operating using the realist and a slightly modified form of the KASA frameworks (measuring changes in knowledge, aspirations, skills and attitude).

Figure 1: Evaluation framework

Project component	Evaluating
Individual student	Increase in knowledge
Parents	Change in attitude / aspirations
School	Increase in skills
Community	Change in behaviour

Information for the evaluation was collected through a number of different mechanisms as set out in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Information collected for the evaluation

Evaluation tool	Approach
Secondary analysis of student assessments conducted as part of the project	As part of the implementation of the project, the Education Development workers met with individual students and their parents to undertake an analysis of their education needs. This involved talking with them about their educational experiences to date; their aspirations for the future; and what challenges they face. This information was then used to design the various interventions and supports put in place for each student.
Worker reflections	Throughout the project, information was gathered from the Education Development Workers on their experiences as part of the project through meetings with the project evaluators.
Parent surveys	Formal surveys were conducted with parents initially in October–November 2008 with follow up surveys in May 2009. The surveys explored parent’s experiences with the project. The surveys were administered both face to face as well as written responses, depending on the parent’s needs. In some cases interpreters were also used to assist the parent in understanding the questions.
School surveys	Formal surveys were conducted with the participating schools in December 2008 with a follow up survey in August 2009. In both cases, the surveys were completed in written form.
Workshop participants	Where workshops were held to share practice insights from the project, project participants were asked to complete brief written surveys exploring the strengths of the workshop, what they felt they had learnt from the experience and what they would take away and implement in their own practice.
Case studies	Qualitative case studies were also collated throughout the project to assist with practice dissemination. Case studies were used in project reference group meetings to provide a picture of the challenges faced by individual students. The case studies also highlighted the interventions that were used in help support young people and their families.

1.2.1 Ethics

All interviews and surveys of participants were conducted in the strictest confidence. No identifying data was recorded on the survey forms. It was explained to all participants that involvement in the evaluation component of the project was completely voluntary and in no way impacted on their participation in the rest of the project. Once the survey had been carefully explained verbally and an information sheet was provided, written consent to participate was obtained from all participants prior to conducting the surveys. In line with Hanover’s research approach, families participating in the surveys were provided with gift vouchers in acknowledgement of their time and effort.



1.3 Limitations of the evaluation

As the Education Development Project was a demonstration project, the activities undertaken during the two year timeframe changed to meet the needs of the participants. Evaluation tools were developed during the lifespan of the project and these were adapted to meet these changing needs.

Participation in the evaluation component of the project was voluntary and while most participants agreed to be involved, there were some who did not wish to participate. This is particularly true of those families who received offers of public housing during the life of the project. Families tended to disengage at this point in time, generally as a result of moving out of the area.

Figure 3: Surveys completed

	Number completed	Total possible	Response rate
Parent survey	12	18	66.6%
Parent follow up survey	9	16	56.2%
Parent surveys on progress of individual children	20	28	71.4%
Parent follow up survey on progress of individual children	18	28	64.3%
School survey	10	12	83.3%
School follow up survey	5	7	71.4%

* Please note, due to a change in participant recruitment process and a change in staff, it was not possible to complete surveys with the families who were initially recruited to the Frankston site. As such, surveys were completed by the nine remaining parents. Of these, five completed the initial survey and two completed the follow up survey.

The time limited nature of the project meant that the objectives of the project and the research needed amendment. While the original objective of the project was ‘to improve educational attainment of students’, it was recognised early in the project that this was not going to be feasible within the timeframe. As such, it was agreed that the objective would be amended to ‘improving educational engagement of students’ as engagement in school is a demonstrated key step towards improving attainment.

2 Background

2.1 What is homelessness?

Often when thinking about homelessness the stereo type image that comes to mind is that of the old man sleeping on the park bench. But homelessness isn't just about a lack of shelter. People 'sleeping rough' on the streets or in their cars is just one aspect of homelessness. Thousands of men, women and children in Victoria live in unsafe and inappropriate housing, with no cooking facilities, inadequate shared bathrooms and no security of tenure. They have a roof but not a home. (MCM, 2007)

The ABS official definition of homelessness includes three levels:

- Primary homelessness: people without conventional forms of accommodation
- Secondary homelessness: people living in forms of temporary accommodation
- Tertiary homelessness: people who live permanently in private boarding houses without their own bathroom or kitchen and without security of tenure (Chamberlain et al. 2007).

This definition is used to quantify the number of people experiencing homelessness in Australia. In the 2006 census the ABS estimated this number as 105,000 on any given night.

Hanover defines homelessness as not merely lack of shelter, but also the loss of the normal supports of home: personal security, familiarity and an environment in which self-confidence and personal skills can develop.

Homelessness can arise from a combination of factors, including a shortage of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and discrimination. Family conflict, with violence and abuse, social isolation, mental illness and breaks from formal education can also increase the likelihood of a person becoming homeless (AIHW 2005a).

2.2 Family homelessness in Victoria

It has been estimated that nationally 55% of people living below the poverty line are families with children (ACOSS, 2003a).

The latest release of data on Australian's use of homeless services shows that there were 34,000 Victorians aged over 18 years who received assistance in 2006-07 accompanied by 20,500 children. (DHS, 2009)¹ These figures do not however include the number of people requesting accommodation that were turned away due to a lack of accommodation and services. During the 2004-05 data collection period, on any given day approximately 255 accompanying children were turned away from services across Australia, an average of 52 per day in Victoria. Over the past few years, families with children have been the most common group to be turned away from SAAP services that were required within 24 hours (AIHW, 2006). (MCM, 2007)

For families with children, the main reasons for seeking assistance varies according to family type. For a couple with children, the most common reason (24.3 per cent) was being evicted or being asked to leave their accommodation, followed by experiencing financial difficulty (14.6 per cent). For males with children, relationship or family breakdown (21 per cent) was the main reason for seeking assistance, followed by being evicted or asked to leave their accommodation (15.5 per cent). For females with children, the vast

¹ The only clear picture we can get of family homelessness is that provided by the housing support sector. These statistics do not include those families who may be living with friends or relatives or on the streets and who have not sought assistance.



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majority (60.2 per cent) were seeking assistance due to family violence. The next reason (7.1 per cent) was relationship or family breakdown. (DEECD, 2009)

Families that are able to access support endure long waiting periods for long-term public housing or experience significant barriers to accessing the private rental market including poverty, poor credit ratings and rental histories. Furthermore, due to increasing prices and the complex needs of many clients, the rental market does not always provide the secure tenure and consequently stable home that all children require for healthy development.

The physical dislocation of people who access housing support from crisis accommodation to transitional housing and then, hopefully, to longer-term accommodation experience physical dislocation and there is minimal opportunity for people to become a part of their local neighbourhood. Experiences of discontinuity, uncertainty and instability as a result of frequent moves, have a major disruptive effect on children and their access to education and other services important for their well-being and development. (MCM, 2007)

While Australia is a wealthy country by international standards, some Australians remain at high risk of poverty. Children living in socioeconomically disadvantaged households are at greater risk of poor outcomes both in the short and longer term (AIHW 2005a).

There are strong links between poverty, poor housing and poor health. Good-quality, well-located and affordable housing has a key role to play in helping move people out of poverty and in ensuring the wellbeing of children. (DEECD, 2009)

2.3 Children's experiences of homelessness

Children and young people experiencing homelessness commonly face multiple forms of disadvantage, including poverty, poor access to health care, lower participation in education and poor employment prospects. (DEECD, 2009). They may also experience emotional and behavioural problems, learning difficulties, poor nutrition and social isolation (MCM, 2007).

Children and young people are adversely affected by both the causes and the impact of homelessness. In some cases they are experiencing significant trauma relating to the impact of family violence, in other cases they are young carers for a parent who may be mentally ill.

Parents can also experience multiple problems such as emotional and physical health issues, isolation and relationship difficulties, hindering the way they relate to their children and their capacity to fulfil their parenting responsibilities. (MCM, 2007)

2.4 Homelessness and education

Children and young people experiencing homelessness have lower school attendance, a higher prevalence of early school leaving and lower levels of educational attainment including post-compulsory schooling.

Ongoing and continued access to school is a problem for children and young people experiencing homelessness as reflected in reduced school attendance rates. One Victorian study concluded that chronic school absenteeism often begins in the preparatory year. In a review of the Youth Pathways Program (YPP) in Victoria, it was affirmed that young people disengaged from the educational process commencing in primary school or at least in the early years of secondary school. (Burgell, 2005)

The evidence suggests that homelessness reduces school attendance rates. Using SAAP national data for 2001-02, 17.6 per cent of young people aged 12-13 years were not a student immediately before accessing SAAP support. For the aged groups 14-15 years and 16-17 years, the respective figures were 39.4 per cent and 50 per cent, which

included non-attendance at post-secondary studies and employment training (AIHW, 2003).

Data from Hanover confirmed that over a third of young people assisted in 2003–05, as part of the 'Open Door' program, had not completed Year 10 schooling.

There is clear evidence regarding homelessness and developmental and educational disadvantage. The importance of the middle years is well established in education literature where average student achievement plateaus or can decline during this time. Critically, the middle years are also consistent with the age when children and young people experiencing homelessness begin to disengage from school.

2.5 Cost of education

The costs associated with education also contribute to difficulties for families experiencing homelessness. In 2007 the Brotherhood of St Laurence completed a survey of 58 low income families examining the costs of primary and secondary schooling.

From the survey, most parents reported having difficulty paying aspects of their children's education during the last year, particularly for sport/recreational expenses (69%), for camps (62%) and for books (60%). Almost half struggled to pay for equipment (48%) and excursions (47%).

Respondents were asked whether their children had missed out on equipment or educational activities during 2007 due to the cost. Some 56% of parents said that at least one child had missed out on uniforms and around 40% said their child had missed out on camp, sports or recreational activities and / or equipment for one subject. Thirty-six per cent of children had missed out on lunch while around one-third had missed excursions or books. One fifth said their children had missed out on one or more subjects.

Almost 40% of respondents said that their children had been absent from school due to the costs during the last 12 months. The main reasons were:

- extras – the additional cost of excursions, sport days, camps and end-of-year activities.
- transport – lacking the money for public transport fares, petrol or car repairs
- food insecurity – not having enough food to provide snacks and lunches
- uniform/equipment – lacking the correct shoes or compulsory uniform items (Horn, 2008)

2.6 National Homelessness Strategy

The National Homelessness Strategy (NHS), first released in 1999, aimed to provide innovation in policy development and service provision for the prevention and reduction of homelessness. Specifically, the NHS worked to:

- Provide a strategic framework that will improve collaboration and linkages between existing programs and services, to improve outcomes for clients and reduce the incidence of homelessness;
- Identify best practice models, which can be promoted and replicated, that will enhance existing homelessness policies and programs;
- Build the capacity of the community sector to improve linkages and networks; and
- Raise awareness of the issue of homelessness within all areas and levels of government and throughout the community.



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In the 2005–06 Budget the Australian Government provided \$10 million over four years to fund demonstration projects aimed at trialling and documenting new and innovative approaches that can prevent, reduce or respond to homelessness.

In 2009 the Australian Government released *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*. The White Paper provides a strong focus on education for children and young people experiencing homelessness. One of the interim targets in the White Paper is ‘the number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness provided with additional support and engaged in education is increased by 50%’. It is hoped that the recommendations within this report will contribute to the strategies Government puts in place to achieve this target.

Recommendation 1: Australian and State Governments consider the findings and recommendations in this report in developing the interventions designed to achieve the targets in the Australian Government’s white paper *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*.

2.7 About the project partners

This project has been a partnership between the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Foundation for Young Australians and its Education Foundation Division and Hanover Welfare Services.

The Foundation for Young Australians aims to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens by:

- Supporting innovative approaches
- Providing rich learning opportunities, and
- Developing resources that inspire and challenge young Australians and improve their wellbeing.

Established during the Great Depression, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) fights for an Australia free of poverty. The BSL delivers services, advocate to government and develops policy focusing on working with people at greatest risk during the four transition stages considered critical to future wellbeing:

- the early years, both at home and into school;
- the years from school to work and further education;
- the periods in and out of work; and
- retirement and ageing.

Established in 1964, Hanover Welfare Services (Hanover) is a leading agency that provides a wide range of services to people experiencing homelessness or housing crisis. Hanover believes that homelessness is not merely a lack of shelter, but is also the loss of the normal supports of home: personal security, familiarity and an environment in which self-confidence and personal skills can develop. Hanover helps people overcome their housing crisis so that they can live independently in the community.

3 About the project

3.1 Purpose of the project

The central hypothesis of the project was that any improvement in educational engagement for children experiencing homelessness in the middle years of school (Years 5-9) requires changes to current practices in the homelessness and education sectors.

Education literature has clearly established the importance of the middle years of schooling where average student achievement plateaus or can decline during this time. Critically, the middle years are also consistent with the age when children and young people experiencing homelessness begin to disengage from school.

The project aimed to demonstrate to the homelessness and education sectors the value of working differently with children and their families who are experiencing homelessness.

The project had four objectives:

5. To improve educational engagement for children experiencing homelessness;
6. To provide secure and stable transitional housing for the families and children during the two year demonstration period;
7. To enhance support practices; and
8. To develop practice insights that could be adopted by the broader homelessness and education sectors.

3.2 Methodology

The project operated for two years from September 2007 – September 2009 across two project sites. Hanover took the lead for the Cheltenham project site and BSL took the lead for the Frankston site (including the Mornington area).

Education Development workers were employed at both sites to undertake the work necessary to achieve the project's objectives.

At each of the two project sites a Project Reference Group was established to both inform and generate ideas on how to address issues that may arise as well as to enhance communication about the project and promote practice change.

Recognising that relationships are critical to children and young people achieving at school, the project worked at four different levels of intervention: the individual student, the family, the school and the community.

3.2.1 Project locations

The two sites were selected as areas of strategic interest for the participating agencies:

- Frankston, situated approximately 40 kilometres south of Melbourne CBD, exhibits high levels of disadvantage including issues of educational disadvantage, early- school leaving associated effects such as employment issues and reduced life opportunities. Disadvantage in the local area also extends down to Mornington, and given the connection between Frankston as a service centre and Mornington, participants for the project were also recruited from this area.



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- Cheltenham is located in Melbourne's south east, within the municipality of Kingston. According to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), a relative measure of socio-economic disadvantage, the City of Kingston, with an index value of 1,024, is less disadvantaged than the City of Frankston, which has an index value of 993. However, some pockets of Cheltenham are relatively more disadvantaged (index values: 967 to 1016). A serious gap in the local service system is a lack of crisis accommodation, which means that homeless families seeking accommodation assistance have to move out of their local area; often to the detriment of a child's education.

Hanover provides transitional housing program in the Cheltenham area and already had established links with a number of service agencies, making the site an ideal location. Similarly BSL had established services including Youth Connections, in the Frankston area, with connections to local schools.

3.2.2 Participant recruitment

Different recruitment practices were trialled, reflecting the strengths of the respective organisations.

At Cheltenham, families were recruited through Hanover's transitional housing service. A list of families with children in the middle years of schooling was compiled and each family was approached and invited to participate in the project. At initial recruitment, a total of nine families and 16 children and young people were engaged in the project.

BSL has a long history of supporting families, children and young people through education. As such, one of their strengths lies in their relationships with schools in the Frankston and Mornington area. The initial aim was to recruit participants at the Frankston site through local schools. It soon became evident that schools struggled to identify students who might be experiencing homelessness. This, coupled with the difficulty of making contact with those families through a school referral meant that a change in approach was required.

The second approach involved developing a relationship with the local homelessness support agency, Peninsula Youth and Families Services (PYFS) who were more able to successfully make referrals to the project.

At initial recruitment, a total of 9 families and 9 children and young people were engaged in the project.

Combined, at the close of the project a total of 15 families and 25 children and young people were engaged across both sites.

3.2.3 Support approach

One of the innovative features of this project was that the work undertaken by the Education Development Workers spanned four different levels, thus providing a more inclusive and comprehensive approach:

Individual

Working with individual students, the Education Development Workers identified their educational interests, experiences and aspirations. The workers then assisted the students in working towards their goals and to address any barriers.

Family

Children and young people cannot achieve their goals in isolation. One of the important elements of this project was working with the families to help them support and positively influence the education of the individual students.

School

The practices and supports available at school affect the quality of education and the nature of the school experience for students. The Education Development Workers worked with schools to identify any issues that could hinder the individual student's educational pathway and jointly developed support strategies help to address those barriers. The 'middle years' approach meant that interventions included a particular focus on the transition from primary to secondary school.

Community

A wide community of people and services have an impact on the educational engagement of students. Support from service providers including medical professionals, counselling and family support services and an opportunity to participate in activities outside of school has a major impact on a young persons' educational development.

The Education Development Workers established connections with this wider group of professionals to raise awareness of the benefits of education and the need to improve support practices. Local schools and service providers not directly involved with families of the project were also made aware of the project as part of a strategy to initiate broader practice change.

3.3 About the participants

3.3.1 Families and students

The families and students participating in the Education Development Project came from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences with one common element – they were all experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

During the life of the project there was some movement of participants, with five families receiving offers of public housing and moving out of the area and a change in the families participating in Frankston due to changes in the recruitment process. Similarly, some of the students participating in the project had siblings who moved into the middle years during the life of the project and became eligible for support.

The following provides a profile of all the families participating throughout the life of the project. The bulk of the report will focus particularly on those families who participated in the research element of the project.

Of the 27 families who participated in the project, 23 were single parent households (85%) and six families (22%) had four or more children living in the same household.

A total of 39 students participated in the project over the two year period, 56% of whom were female.

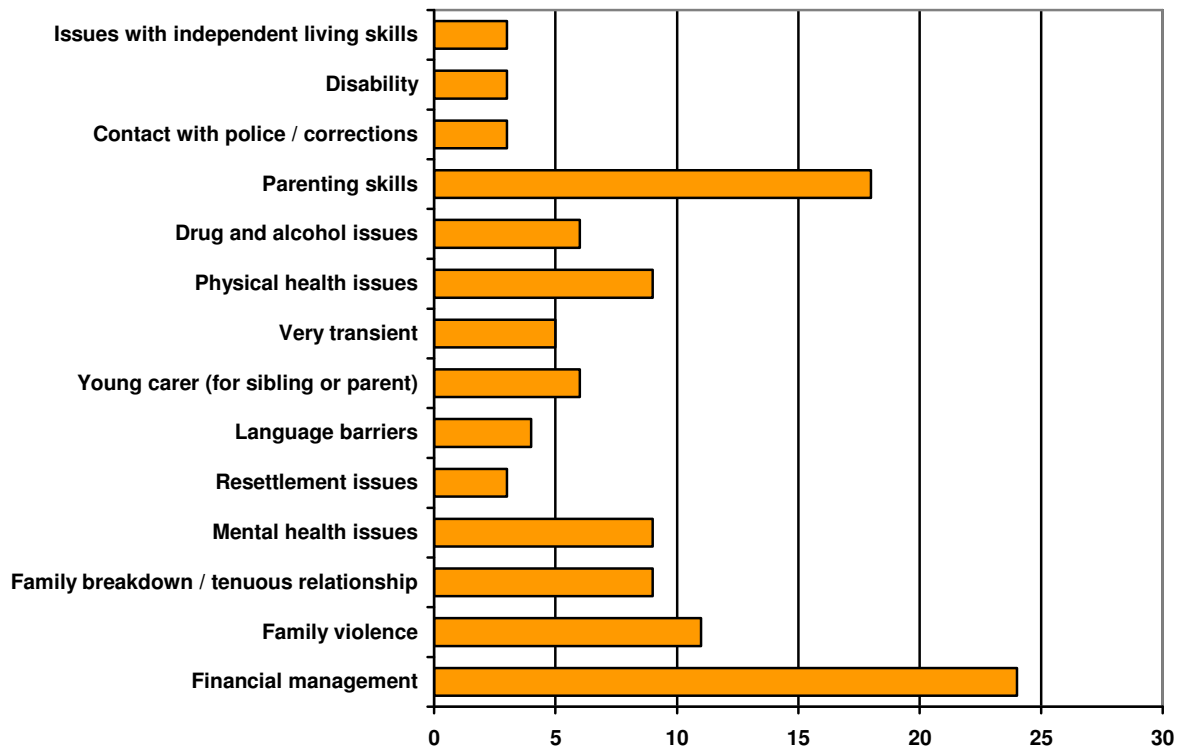
Figure 4 below provides a picture of the issues and challenges facing the families who participated in the project.

All families participating experienced multiple issues. Twenty two of the 27 families (81%) were experiencing four or more of these issues with five families experiencing seven of them (18.5%).



The most common issue facing families participating in the project was financial management, followed by parenting skills and family violence.

Figure 4: Number of families experiencing particular issues



* Note: For the purpose of this report, transience has been defined as multiple housing moves in a 12 month period some time in the previous five years.

3.3.2 Schools and support agencies

A wide variety of schools and support agencies were also involved as part of the project.

A total of 21 schools were involved during the life of the project, with seven of these having significant long term engagement. Approximately half of the schools were primary and half secondary schools around the Cheltenham and Frankston/Mornington areas. All were government schools.

A number of support agencies were also engaged as part of the project, either because they were already supporting the families or they were approached by project staff to provide additional support and assistance. Services engaged included tutoring, youth welfare support, mental health support (for both parents and students), family support services, housing support, financial counselling services, resettlement counselling, tutoring, transport, legal services.

Education Development Workers also engaged with a number of agencies to advocate for the project, raise awareness of the issues facing students experiencing homelessness, and assist in practice change. This included local and state government agencies, Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) Regional network, Local Learning and Employment network and Victorian Council of Social Services.

Further information on these schools and agencies is presented under section 4 below.

4 Findings

4.1 Project context

The context in which a program or project operates has a significant impact on the achievable outcomes. In particular, the background of those participating in the project strongly influences the outcomes achieved with those individual participants

4.1.1 About the students

The students participating in the project came from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience, their one common element was they had all experienced homelessness in some context.

The majority of participants in the project were engaged in the middle years of schooling. Those who were not were generally siblings of eligible students who were also provided support as part of assisting the wider family.

Figure 5: Year level of participating students

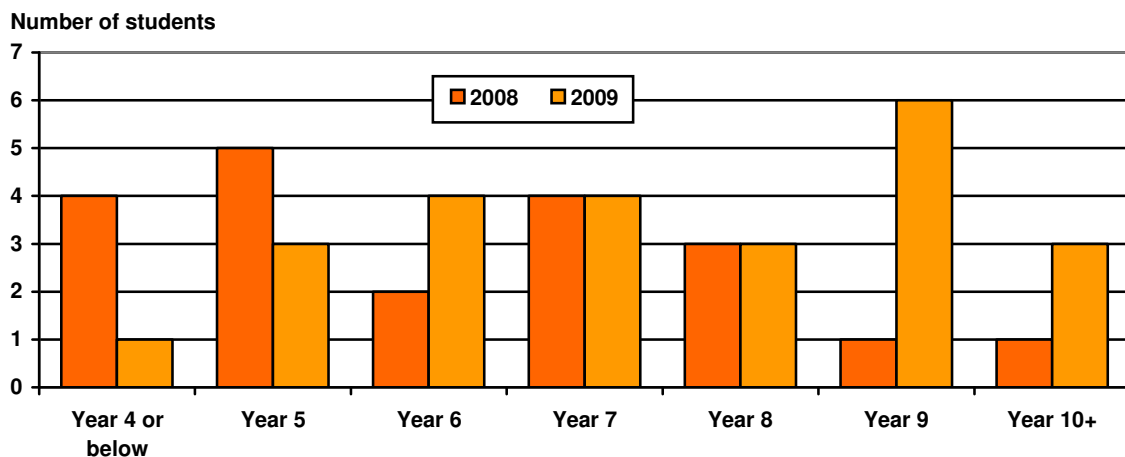
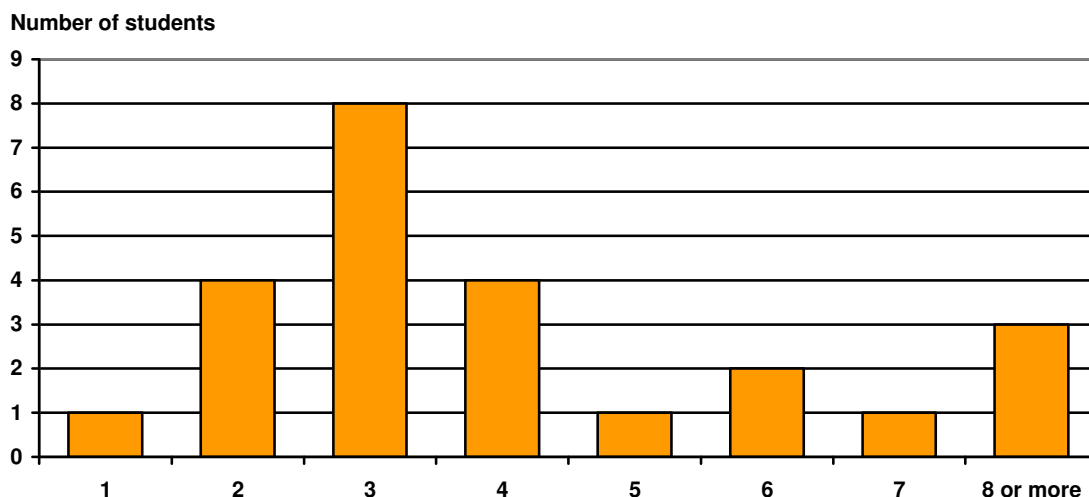


Figure 6: Number of school moves experienced by participants since they began school





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In all cases, students had changed schools at least once due to housing moves. Forty five percent of students had experienced four or more school moves throughout their years of schooling.

Through the parent surveys, parents were asked to indicate the reasons for the school moves. Those most frequently identified were:

- Fleeing family violence (3)
- Moved to Australia (2)
- Moved interstate (2)
- Behaviour difficulties (2)
- Unhappy with the school (2)
- Expulsion (1)

When asked about the impact that multiple school moves had had on their children, parents responded:

- They have lower literacy and numeracy skills (4)
- The moves have put their child(ren) behind (3)
- Their children have become socially or emotionally unstable / social skills have suffered (3)
- Hard to say (1)
- Didn't think their had been any impact (1)

In addition to their family circumstances including housing and school moves, many of the students faced individual difficulties such as:

- Learning difficulties (4)
- Young carer responsibilities, either for a parent or sibling (3)
- Mental health issues (2)
- Physical health issues (2)
- Physical or intellectual difficulties (1)

For those students from refugee backgrounds – most had not had any formal schooling experience before arriving in Australia.

Three students has moved schools eight times making it extremely difficult for them to engage in their education.

4.1.2 About the families

Family circumstance and environment has a significant impact on a child or young person's ability to engage and achieve at school. As stated in the participant profile, the families involved in the project had over time faced some significant challenges to their ongoing stability, interaction with each other and engagement with the broader community.

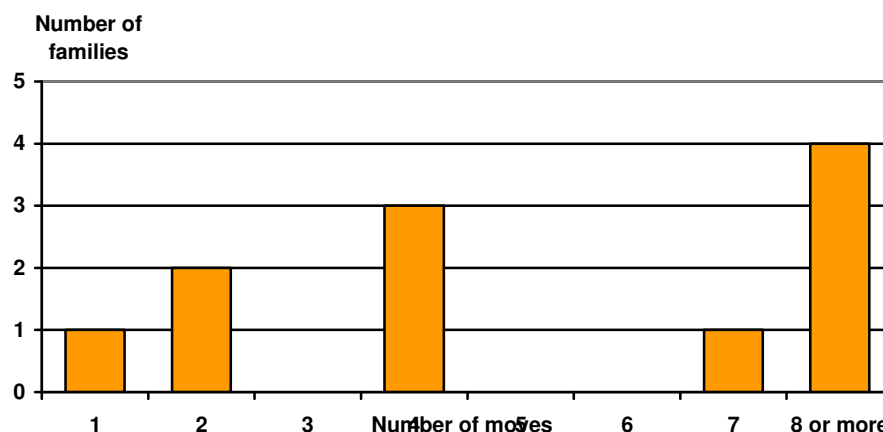
Over three quarters of the families participating in the project (n=14) were single parent families. One third (n=6) of the families have four or more children living in the same household. Three of the families (and eight of the students) participating in the project were recently arrived refugees.

Housing moves

As part of the initial survey, parents were asked to note how many housing moves their family had experienced since their eldest child started school. Forty five percent of families noted they had moved seven or more times during this period. A further 27% of families had moved four times, 18% had moved twice and 9% had moved only once.

Transience for the purposes of this project is defined as multiple moves within a period of 12 months some time in the last five years. Five families participating in the project met this definition. It is important to note that these moves are generally involuntary and are undertaken in response to a particular event (e.g. family violence, relationship breakdown, and financial difficulties). One family experienced four housing moves during their child's 5th year of schooling, resulting in four different schools that year.

Figure 7: Number of housing moves experienced by participants since their eldest child started school

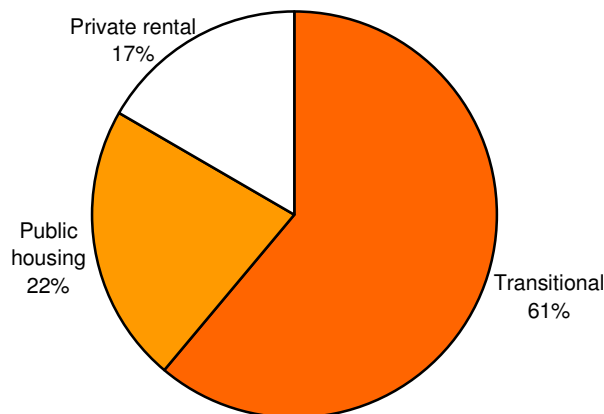


When asked about how important it was for their children to remain at the same school, parents rated it as 'important' (3) or 'extremely important' (6). Reasons provided were:

- The children and parents understand how things work at that school
- Teachers know the child's ability
- The children feel safe, stable and valued
- The children have had so many school changes already
- The children have stability within their current school
- The children have friends at their current school



Figure 8: Housing type for families participating in the project



At the time of the project, the majority (61%) of families involved were residing in transitional housing.

Because of the high proportion of families in transitional housing, part of the context for these families includes the policy around transitional properties. The transitional housing program provides secure, furnished short-term housing for people experiencing homelessness. The expectation is that while families are residing in a transitional property they will be working towards a long term housing outcome, whether that be in private rental or public housing. In broad terms, families are not expected to stay in transitional properties for longer than 12 months. The reality is, however, that due to a shortage of housing exit options families are often in transitional housing beyond this period and for up to five years. Whilst transitional properties provide a period of stability for a family, there is still pressure to find alternative accommodation and the response from the broader community (e.g. employers) is that families will not stay in their current house for long.

For the families participating at the Cheltenham site in particular, there is little in the way of public housing in the area and even less affordable rental options. As such, these families will generally need to move out of the area when they move from transitional property, with the likely implication that the children in the family will again have to move schools.

Stressful life events

As part of both the initial and follow up survey, parents were asked to note which of the following stressful life events their family had experienced over the previous year:

- Family member's mental health problems
- Family member's physical health problems
- Difficulties with the law/legal issues
- Financial problems
- Relationship problems/breakdown
- Alcohol/drug problems
- Gambling problem
- Death of a family member

As Figures 9 and 10 below demonstrate, 92% of families responding to the survey experienced three or more of these stressful life events over the past three years. Forty two percent experienced six or more of these events.

Relationship problems or breakdown was the most commonly consistent issue for families with 58% of families experiencing this in at least two of the three years. This was closely followed by physical health problems.

In 2009 financial problems was the most common event identified by parents.

One family experienced physical health problems, legal issues, financial problems and relationship problems across all three years.

None of the parents indicated gambling problems were an issue for their family over the last three years.

Figure 9: Number of different stressful life events experienced by families over the last three years (2007–2009)

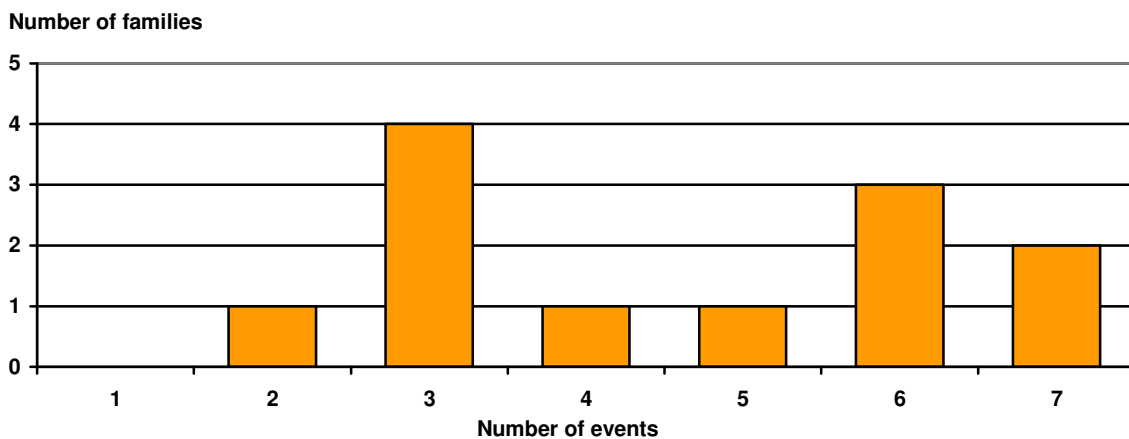
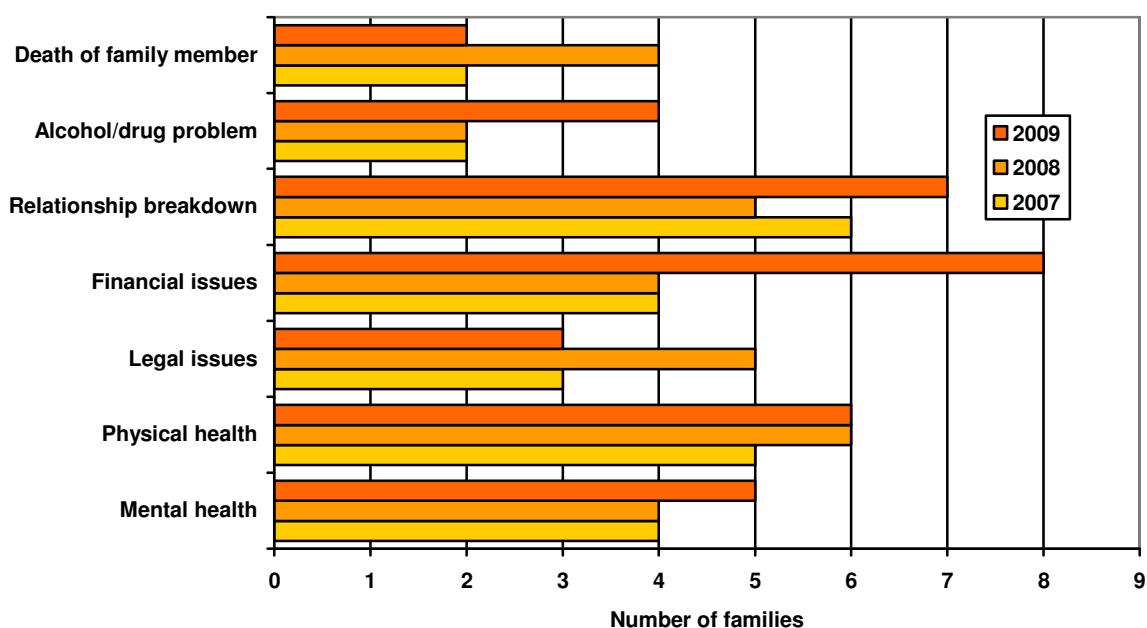


Figure 10: Number of families experiencing stressful life events in 2007, 2008, 2009



These events have a significant impact on the stability of the student’s home life and therefore their ability to engage in school. Throughout the project, attempts were made to lessen the impact of these events on participants.

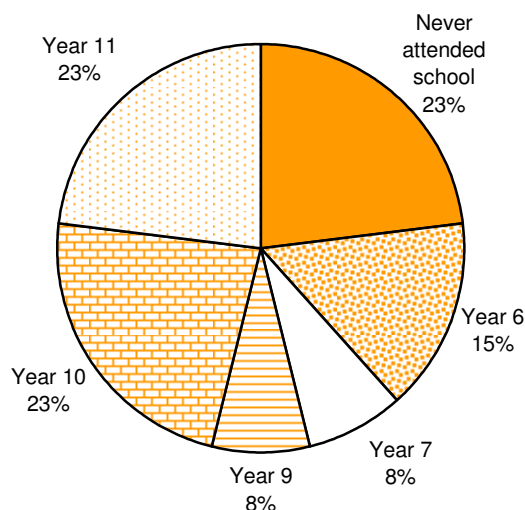


Parent's experience of education

Parent's experiences of school can have a significant impact on their children's education. The parents within the project who responded to the survey had had a wide variety of experiences with education. For those from a refugee background, the parents who responded to the initial survey indicated that they had never had any formal schooling. Other parents only completed year 6 while still more went on to year 10 and year 11. None of the parents who responded to the survey had completed year 12.

It should be noted, however, that 58% of parents (n=7) have gone on to attempt or complete short courses after leaving school, such as aged care, hospitality and personal care.

Figure 11: Highest level of education completed by parents



Parents noted a variety of different reasons for leaving school early. These ranged from bullying and illness to leaving to earn money for their own parents, acting out because of personal trauma or that they didn't enjoy it once their friends had left.

Such experiences impact on a parent's ability to support their children to complete their homework, and parent's expectations and support for their children to complete school.

Support for children in doing their homework

Parents were asked if anyone helps their child(ren) with their homework. Half of parents who responded indicated that their child receives some form of help at home. A further one third indicated that no one at home assists their children with their homework (n=4) and one parent wasn't sure.

The responding parents were asked to indicate if they were able to give this child as much help with school or homework as they would like. Three quarters (n=9) indicated no with reasons varying from never having been to school themselves (2), limitations on time in looking after other children (1), can't read or spell very well (3) or can't help with maths (1).

Parental expectations around schooling and further education

All except one parent participating in the surveys indicated they consider it ‘extremely important’ for their children to complete high school to provide for: getting a job, enabling them to undertake further education, providing stability in their lives and to not waste their individual talent. One parent had mixed feelings as they watched their child struggle with school and wondered how they were going to make it through to year 12.

When asked how important it was for their children to go on to further education after high school, most indicated it was either ‘important’ (3) or ‘extremely important’ (3) as it provides for a better job and income. One parent indicated having mixed feelings – that they wouldn’t know until the time and that it depends on whether there are jobs available at that point.

Parents were also asked to indicate what they would like to see their children do once they finish high school and also what their children would like to do. The responses are summarised in the following table:

Figure 12: Parent and child aspirations following school

Parent’s aspirations for their children	Children’s aspirations (as reported by parent)
Mechanical engineer	Pilot
Get a job	Go to university
Doctor	Go into the army like father
Engineering / building	Doctor (2)
To be happy and get a job	Vet or vet nurse
Go to university (5)	Centrelink
Too far away (2)	Don’t know (6)
Don’t know (2)	They haven’t said (3)

The children and young people participating in the project were also asked as part of their initial assessment what they would like to do. Around three quarters of participants provided a response. Only one said they didn’t know. The most popular choice was becoming a veterinarian followed by a mechanic, teacher, sports person or singer.



4.1.3 Comparing information

To provide a point of comparison for these results, in December 2008- March 2009 Hanover conducted a survey of clients accessing their Brief Intervention program which provides financial management support to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. A total of 25 surveys were completed, representing a 100% response rate.

Ninety-two percent of respondents were from lone parent households. The majority (87%) of children of these parents were in high school (62% in year 9 or above).

The most common housing type was private rental (44%), compared with the parents participating in the Education Development Project where the most common housing type was transitional (61%).

Figure 13: Housing type

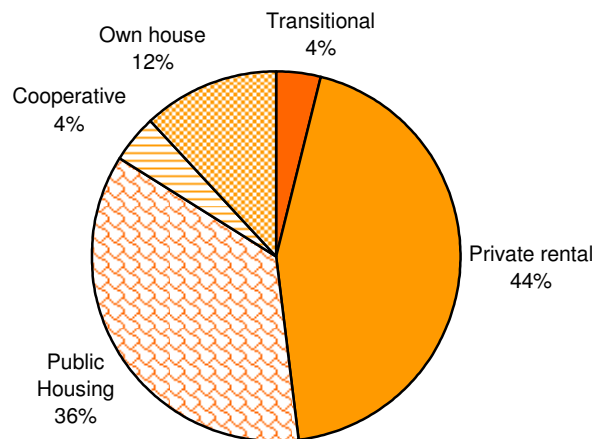
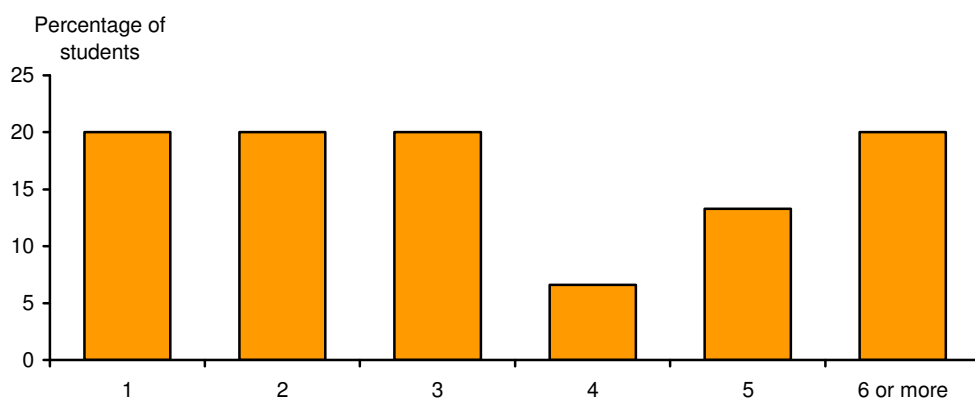


Figure 14: Number of school changes since their child had started school



Respondents were asked to indicate how many times their children had changed schools. As can be seen in Figure 14, 40% of children had changed schools four or more times since starting school, compared with 45% of those participating in the Education Development Project.

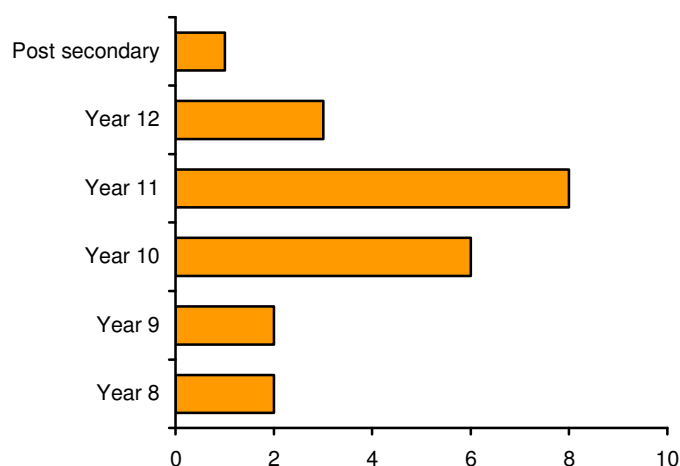
Reasons for changes included:

- Unhappy
- Moved a lot
- Suspensions
- Victim of bullying
- Expelled

Parental experience of education

Forty five percent of respondents had completed year 10 or below with a further 36% having completed Year 11. Eighteen percent had completed Year 12. This compares with only 46% of parents in the Education Development Project who had completed year 10 or 11.

Figure 15: Highest year level completed by parent



Seventy eight percent of respondents indicated that overall they had enjoyed school. Some had experienced difficult times relating to home trauma, financial difficulties, bullying, boredom and having to change schools.

Around three quarters of respondents indicated that they had completed education or training since leaving school including food handling, aged care, computing, welfare studies, photography and TAFE.

Assisting with homework

The majority (78%) also felt able to assist their children with their homework. For those who didn't feel able, reasons given were:

- low level of education
- other commitments
- clash of personalities
- changes in the way things are done



Future aspirations

Respondents were asked if it was important to them that their children complete year 12. Eighty six percent of respondents said yes, it was important to them because it enabled them to:

- set goals
- have more opportunities
- have a better life
- to get a good job

For those who said no, their reasons were that it depends on the job and that their child couldn't cope with the stress.

Respondents were also asked firstly what they would like to see their children do when they completed year 12 and what they thought their children would like to do. Figure 16 provides their responses.

Figure 16: Parent and child aspirations following school

Parent's aspirations	Children's aspirations (as identified by parent)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be happy • Post secondary study • Work • Excel at something • Apprenticeship • Whatever they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lawyer • Doctor • Entertainment • Child care • Chef • Designer • Oil rigs • University • Pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Apprenticeship • Sportsperson • Real estate • Environmental scientist • Sports psychologist • Journalist • Teacher

The Brief Intervention survey demonstrated consistency of experiences between the families participating in the Education Development Project and a broader group of families also experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Experiences of housing and school moves, parental experiences of education and aspirations for their children are all similar.

4.1.4 About the schools

Government policy

The context for schools includes the policies set at a government level for primary and secondary school education. Currently the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has no specific policy in relation to support for students experiencing homelessness. There are however, very specific guidelines around welfare support for students.

The Victorian *School Accountability and Improvement Framework* (SAIF) articulates three outcomes expected of government schools - improved student learning, enhanced student engagement and wellbeing, and successful transitions and pathways. There are a range of programs and tools available to schools to assist them to support students in their transitions. These include

- *Effective Strategies to Increase School Completion Report* and the *Guide to Help Schools Increase School Completion*
- *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools - Student Engagement Policy Guidelines* promoting student engagement, attendance, positive behaviours
- The *Student Mapping Tool*, a pre-formatted Excel spreadsheet to assist schools to identify students at risk of early leaving, to match them to support programs to monitor their progress over time.

In particular, the *Effective Schools are Engaging Schools – Student Engagement Policy Guidelines* published in March 2009 require all Victorian Government schools to develop a Student Engagement Policy which articulates the school community's shared expectations in the areas of student engagement, attendance and behaviour.

School welfare support resources

Welfare support resources are generally available in schools but vary from school to school depending on the philosophy of the school community. In larger schools, for example, it is possible to pool resources and have a larger welfare support focus than in smaller schools where the welfare role may be part of the Principal or Assistant Principal's responsibility.

The student support service program enhances the capacity of Victorian government schools to meet the additional learning and wellbeing needs of children and young people through the provision of access to school and community specialist support. Student support services comprise of visiting teachers, psychologists, guidance officers, speech pathologists, social workers, and other allied health professionals.

Funding for Primary Welfare Officers is provided to 573 primary schools across the state while all secondary colleges receive funding for Student Welfare Coordinators.

Participating schools

At the beginning of the project there were ten schools who had substantial involvement in the project, five secondary colleges and five primary schools. Over the life of the project, as students moved into secondary school or exited the project, the number of schools involved reduced to six.

At each school, a specific contact person was identified as best able to support the project. In the secondary colleges this was usually the Student Welfare Coordinator. In the primary schools the contact was generally the Principal. In some of the smaller secondary colleges and larger primary schools, the Assistant Principal was the contact.



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The culture at the participating schools varied significantly. In some cases, support for students experiencing disadvantage was very strong with a number of different resources provided to support the welfare of students. In other schools there were one or two strong voices of support who were working hard to achieve broader cultural change. There was only one school that when approached declined to participate in the project. In this particular case, a number of attempts were made to engage with the school but to no avail, indicating a lack of support for the objectives of the project within the broader school context.

The experience faced by BSL in initially recruiting students from schools clearly indicated that most schools have difficulty in identifying students who are experiencing homelessness. The experience of the Education Development Workers in talking to schools demonstrated that often staff in schools had a relatively narrow picture of what constituted homelessness which did not include families living with friends or relatives, or if families were in transitional housing.

4.1.5 Other agencies

As noted above, families experiencing homelessness generally face multiple barriers to stable housing including financial difficulties, mental or physical health issues and trauma resulting from family violence. This means they often have more than one different agency providing some form of support.

A number of different support agencies were involved in this project. In some cases they were already engaged with the families participating in the project, in other cases they became involved through the advocacy efforts of the Education Development Workers.

A number of key points should be noted in relation to the context for these agencies:

- While the majority of mainstream (non-homelessness specialist) agencies had a strong understanding of the issues faced by people with significant disadvantage, their understanding of homelessness was often limited;
- In general, homelessness specialist agencies are not funded to support children who accompany their parents as individual clients in their own right. While they may work with the family as a whole, support for children's education is generally a much lower priority than finding the family accommodation, supporting them to address any financial difficulties and connecting them into services such as counselling for mental health issues.
- All agencies involved face issues of limited funding and narrowly expressed performance targets in their government funding agreements. This can lead to maintaining a relatively narrow focus on their role. For example, a counsellor working with a mother on her mental health issues will not necessarily think about and support that mother in how those issues impact on her child's education.

Recommendation 2: Homelessness specialist services providing support to families should ensure:

- initial intake and assessment includes an assessment of the education needs of school aged children and young people within the family;
- support plans include goals around the education needs of the children and young people. This could include empowering parents around advocating for the educational needs of their children, budgeting for education costs and providing support for homework.

4.2 Improving educational engagement for children

The first objective of the project was to improve educational engagement for children and young people in the middle years of schooling. The outcomes sought were to:

- Improve access to school
- Improve school engagement, and
- Develop and support education pathways.

The main mechanisms to achieve this objective were support from the Education Development Workers and brokerage funds to provide financial assistance to families towards educational costs.

The activities of the Education Development Workers varied depending on the individual needs of the families involved. The first step was to build a relationship and trust with each family and to then work to assess their support needs. In particular to work with the child or young person involved to identify their aspirations around education and any barriers to maintaining school engagement.

In assessing their individual needs, students were asked about their experiences with school, how they perceive their achievement at school, their sense of self worth and their aspirations for the future.

Figure 17 provides a picture of student response on their school experience. While only a third of respondents indicated that they enjoy school, 89 per cent indicated that they look forward to going and 88 per cent indicated they get on well with their teachers. However, 44 per cent of students felt left out at school either 'always' or 'sometimes' and 15 per cent indicated that sometimes they do not feel safe at school.

Figure 17: Student's comments on their school experience

	Always	Sometimes	Never
I enjoy school	33%	66%	
I look forward to going to school	89%	11%	
I feel left out at school	11%	33%	55%
I have friends at school	66%	25%	8%
I like my teachers	50%	42%	8%
I get on well with my teachers	88%	12%	
I like my subjects	20%	80%	
I do my homework on time	33%	44%	2%
I feel safe at school	85%	15%	

When asked what they liked best about school, the most common responses from students were their friends (57%) and sport (50%). Other things listed included maths, writing, languages, excursions, art, science, playing, music and riding to school.

When asked about what they didn't like about school, the most common response was bullies (28%) and maths (28%). Others included getting up early, homework and reading.



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Students were also asked to rate their performance at school on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (fantastic). The majority of students (60%) rated their performance as 'good' with a further 30% rating their performance as 'very good' or 'fantastic'. Over 80 per cent of students also indicated that they did 'about as well as my classmates'.

However, students were generally described by their teachers as being below the level of their peers in reading, spelling and writing. Their vocabulary was limited and they often found it difficult to express, through language, their thoughts and emotions.

Some of the students participating in the project were described by their teachers as disruptive or displaying aggressive behaviour in class while others were described as quiet and withdrawn.

The majority of students were assessed as being well below their peers in terms of literacy and numeracy skills.

To help address these issues, the project provided a number of supports directly to the students and their families including learning supports, empowering parents, addressing education costs and assisting with the transition to new schools.

4.2.1 Learning supports for students

Teachers reported that students' poorly developed language skills restricted further learning, caused further damage to a student's depleted sense of self, severely curtailed student involvement in classroom activities and contributed to inappropriate behaviour being used as a means of communication.

Students often displayed trauma related behaviour. In almost all cases students had experienced some form of trauma either through experiencing or witnessing family violence, resettlement issues, parent incarceration or family breakdown.

In-class student supports

While teachers had identified these issues, the additional supports that the students required were often lacking. Through the project, the Education Development Workers were able to advocate for formal assessments to be completed to determine the level of support needed for individual students. The Education Development Workers also brought to the attention of the teachers and Welfare Coordinator the circumstances underlying the student's behaviour which enabled a greater understanding of how to support their learning.

In one case the Development Worker facilitated a meeting between a parent and teacher. While the teacher said very little in the meeting, she spoke with the Development Worker afterwards and said that simply listening to the family's story gave her a much greater appreciation of where her student was coming from and the supports he might need.

As a result of these assessments, some students received integration aides in the classroom while others received additional support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS).

The often transient nature of students experiencing homelessness presents challenges for schools, particularly when resources are designed to follow them to different schools. This is particularly the case for integration aides where a school may hire an aide for a student who then moves on in the next term. The funding is transferred with the student but the aide is not.

Case study 1: *Support in the classroom*

When the Education Development Project started Lucy was in year 5 and had been at her local primary school for about two years. Her teacher described Lucy as manipulative, disruptive and that she didn't participate in class. Whilst an initial assessment had been completed, the assessor had concluded that there was insufficient information to deem Lucy eligible for integration support.

Concerned about the underlying causes of Lucy's behaviour and armed with the knowledge of the family's experiences, the Education Development Worker arranged a meeting between Lucy's mother, the principal and the school welfare officer. Following this meeting, the school agreed that further supports were needed for Lucy to help her development.

Unfortunately both the principal and welfare officer left the school soon after the meeting and nothing was followed up for Lucy. The Education Development Worker then met with the new welfare officer who agreed to follow up on Lucy's case. However, a further change in staff meant that Lucy case was again left to linger.

It wasn't until a meeting with the new principal occurred that action was finally taken. Lucy was deemed eligible for an integration aide to assist her in the classroom and funding was approved for this support.

Because of a greater understanding at the school of Lucy's needs, assistance has been appropriately targeted, Lucy's behaviour has improved and she is participating more in class.

This process, however, required significant persistence from the Education Development Worker to ensure Lucy received the help she needed. With four other children and a lack of understanding of the education system, Lucy's mother was simply unable to advocate effectively with the school to enable this to happen.

The work of the Education Development workers demonstrated a real need for advocacy on behalf of students to enable them to access the supports they need. As discussed in the following section, part of this should involve empowering parents to undertake this advocacy work but it also needs someone who understands the schooling system to champion the needs of individual students.

Homework and tutor support

Outside the classroom, the Education Development Workers assisted parents to reflect on their children's attitudes to homework and suggested ways in which parents could support healthy homework habits.

Seventy percent of parents indicated that their children received homework. In the initial survey parents were asked where their children usually completed their homework. The most common response was 'in their room' (n=4) followed by 'at school' (n=3), 'on their bed' (n=2), 'at the kitchen table' (n=2) and 'in the lounge room' (n=1).

Education Development Workers talked with parents about the importance of students having a quiet place to do their homework, restricting TV watching until after completing their homework, sitting along side them as they worked and signing off homework in their student diaries.

In addition, recognising that the majority of students were significantly behind their peers in learning development and some parents felt unable to assist with homework, the project arranged and paid for tutoring assistance for a number of students.



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This tutoring assistance took a number of forms, including homework club and Even Start Tutoring program. The most successful model, however, was the recruitment of a tutor with teaching experience, including experience in working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

With the parents' and schools' permission, the tutor worked with four secondary school students, in pairs, for an hour a week. After three terms of tutoring, teaching staff commented on the increased levels of homework completion, student understanding and participation in class. One student in particular was ecstatic after passing his first maths test.

An assessment of the impact on one particular student by a separate support service noted that '[the student] really enjoyed this program and his participation has definitely assisted in his learning as well as his feeling 'connected' to the school.

The elements of the tutor program that assisted in this success include:

- **Providing tutoring at the school:** this assisted with students feeling more connected to the school community.
- **Providing tutoring during class time:** so as not to make the students feel stigmatised, the Education Development Worker negotiated with the school to determine which particular classes the students could miss out on in order to receive tutoring assistance. In one case this involved skipping Japanese which, for the student from a refugee background struggling to develop his English language skills, was not of particular benefit.
- **Recruiting a tutor who understands the developmental needs of students:** the experience of the tutor meant that he was well able to support the students in their learning. In some cases he also accompanied his students into the classroom to observe their behaviour and encourage them to participate more.

Recommendation 3: Homelessness support workers include within case plans for parents assisting them to develop positive homework habits for their children as part of supporting students in education. This includes talking to parents about having set homework times and having a quiet space in which to do homework.

Recommendation 4: Schools and homelessness specialist service agencies consider means by which they can establish learning support, such as tutor programs, to assist students who are behind their peers in terms of skill development. These programs should be available either at school within schools hours or at agencies out of hours to reduce any stigma associated with accessing these programs.

Young carers

In a small number of cases students participating in the project were young carers either for their parent, who might have a mental or physical health issue, or their siblings.

In order to assist these students, the Education Development Workers facilitated access to the young carers network. They also assisted by talking to the schools about the challenges these students faced and negotiating how best to accommodate these needs (for example, having some flexibility about school start times, homework completion and camp attendance).

Recommendation 5: Schools and support agencies recognise the challenges facing students who are also young carers (either of parents or siblings) and support their education through increased support and flexibility so students are able to attend class and other school activities such as excursions and camps.

Emotional support

For some students, their experiences of trauma were such that simply providing education supports was insufficient to enable them to engage with school. For these students the Education Development workers provided emotional support and connected them into additional support services such as counselling. Of particular assistance in this regard was the SHINE program through Family Life and the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who were able to conduct assessments, provide transitional programs and other support services.

Case study 2: *Sometimes support just isn't enough*

Julie lives in a public housing property with her daughter Rebecca who is fourteen. Julie and Rebecca have had a long history of homelessness and Julie has ongoing physical and mental health problems.

Rebecca has had a difficult childhood. Her parents separated because of her father's alcoholism when she was young. Her mother had a de-factor relationship for a number of years with a violent man and Rebecca witnessed a number of serious attacks against her mother. In the past twelve months Rebecca has lost two cousins in a car accident, a grandfather and two friends to suicide. Her mother has also been hospitalised on several occasions after suicide attempts.

When referred to the project, Rebecca was attending a local Catholic School. She wasn't happy at the school and as a result her attendance was sporadic. Rebecca desperately wanted to attend a local secondary school; however she lived 1 kilometre outside the catchment zone. The Education Development Worker was able to negotiate with the school to provide a place for Rebecca and initially she was attending school regularly and enjoying the more relaxed environment a public school offers. However, due to her family issues Rebecca's attendance again began to decline. When Rebecca and Julie moved to their current public housing property, Rebecca refused to change schools but was also unwilling to catch public transport.

A number of support services have worked to assist Julie and Rebecca over the years. However, because of the family's transient living arrangements Rebecca has had to change support workers a number of times and now believes there is no point in receiving help. At the end of the project Rebecca was no longer attending school nor was she attending appointments arranged for her as part of the project at youth mental health services. She also refused to speak to family support workers.

Julie and Rebecca's situation demonstrates the impact that extreme transience can have on a young person's development. Continually moving means that they have no connection to the local community, to schools or to support services. A number of the students participating in the education project have had supports put in place for them over the years only to have them fall apart when the family have to move again. One of the challenges, as outlined in section 4.4 below is how do we transfer this knowledge about individuals so they don't feel they have to start from scratch each time and the progress of the past can be built on.



4.2.2 Empowering parents

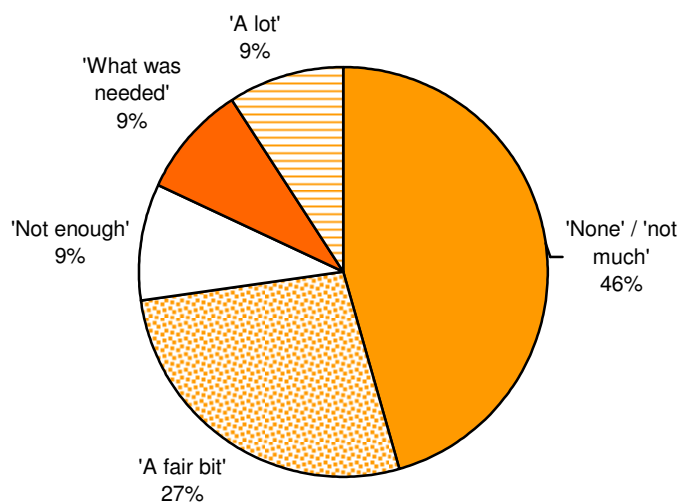
The parents involved in the project were grappling with a multitude of complex issues that had contributed to the family's housing breakdown. Many of the parents had a reduced capacity to encourage and nurture their children's learning, and to manoeuvre their way effectively through the school system.

Stimulation in the home was often lacking from books and written materials, from conversation and discussion and from a positive learning environment.

Many parents also had either a lack of understanding or a fear of the school system. Some parents felt anxious about approaching the school because of their own damaging experiences. Parents from refugee backgrounds often had no formal schooling themselves and also faced a significant language barrier, which created a challenge in understanding what they needed to do to support their children in school.

Through the project it quickly became apparent that one of the most important tasks for the Education Development Workers was to assist the parents of students to have confidence in working with schools. In this way they could become the strongest advocates for their children's education.

Figure 18: Parental contact with their child(ren)'s school in 2007



In the initial survey, parents were asked to identify how much contact they had in the last year with their child(ren)'s school. Forty six percent of parents indicated 'none' or 'not much'. Thirty six percent indicated 'a fair bit' or 'a lot'.

Exploring the type of contact parents had, two parents indicated really positive contact with their child's school – participating in the fete, parent teacher interviews, the school performance, chatting with teachers and in one case the school encouraged parents to stay for coffee after dropping the children off.

One parent indicated they would like more contact but the school was too far away. Another two parents indicated that they only have contact when they requested it.

Other parents indicated they had contact with the school because (individual responses):

- their child was often late or not attending
- their child was fighting as a result of racist comments
- developmental problems
- stalking issues
- child 'acting out'

Half of the parents indicated that they felt comfortable with the contact they had with the school (n=6). The other 50% indicated they:

- were not at all comfortable (2)
- had difficulties due to language barriers (3)
- some of the hierarchy was condescending (1)

Parents were also asked if they had attended any parent teacher nights. Two thirds (n= 8) of parents indicated that they did not attend parent teacher interviews in 2008. Another 17% (n=2) attended for two of their children but not for the third.

Of those who did not attend, three parents did not attend because of language barriers and a lack of understanding of the 'process' – they relied on their children to explain the forms which didn't always happen. One parent indicated they did not attend because their ex-partner did and another parent indicated they had had a car accident the day before and arranged an alternative appointment.

Education Development Workers provided emotional assistance to parents to help them cope with stressful life events as well as linking them into support services they might need. But more particularly, workers focused on developing the relationship between the schools and the parents.

Understanding family context

In most families the Education Development Workers facilitated meetings between the school and parents to assist them in understanding the schooling system and empowering them to talk about their situation. For one mother who suffers from severe anxiety, simply attending this meeting was a significant step forward.

For schools, these meetings provided valuable information on the family's situation and helped them target their limited support resources to enable the best possible impact.

For parents, understanding who they can talk to in the school about what issues and having a familiar person to contact has significantly increased their comfort in talking to the school about any concerns they might have.

Case study 3: *Reducing the anxiety around transitions*

Ruth is in her mid-forties and lives with her two sons and partner in transitional housing. Ruth's son Rick is 12 years old and Ruth was particularly anxious about his transition into secondary school. The Education Development Worker arranged a meeting between Ruth and the Student Well-being Coordinator at the secondary school. This gave Ruth an opportunity to express her concerns and to hear about the programs and supports that may assist her son. The meeting meant that if issues arose in the future, the coordinator already had some background about the family situation and the family had a familiar person to contact.



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Tackling language barriers

Language barriers are particularly challenging for both schools and parents. Parents feel misinformed and teachers misunderstand the parent's inability to communicate as a lack of interest. In the initial parent surveys, all three of the parents from refugee backgrounds participating in the project indicated that they didn't attend parent teacher interviews because they didn't feel able to communicate. In two instances, they also didn't understand the process and relied on their children to explain it to them.

One of the surprising findings from the Education Development Project, however, was the lack of use of telephone interpreter services by schools to help overcome these issues. Schools in particular during the early period of the project were contacting the Education Development Workers to relay messages rather than communicating directly with the parents.

Through the project Education Development Workers were able to assist schools with communication strategies – including using interpreters and either sending letters or texting using simple language. An example of a simplified permission slip to assist parents in understanding what they are signing can be found at Appendix 2.

As one principal, in the follow up school survey commented:

'[The Education Development Worker] clarified the folly in assuming that messages from School to Home are transferred effectively and understood.'

Case study 4: Overcoming language barriers

Nina is a sole parent in her mid-thirties. Having fled the Sudan, she and the youngest five of her six children arrived in Australia in June 2005 and now live in transitional housing.

Nina is very supportive of her children's education. However, she has never had any formal education herself and she has minimal understanding of the Australian education system.

Nina speaks limited English and her reading level is very low. At the time of referral to the Education Development Project, both the primary and secondary schools that her children attend had limited direct contact with Nina. Communication was generally through the children or written notices sent home. There was no attempt to use telephone interpreters. This resulted in many instances of miscommunication, missed appointments and poor return of consent forms.

Nina also didn't understand the process of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and simply signed over the family's half of the payment when the school requested it. She also didn't understand that when the school asked for additional money from her for particular items, she could request that it come from her EMA payment.

Both the schools and Nina asked the Education Development Worker to assist them with communication. The worker assisted Nina to understand and complete the various forms that schools required. The worker encouraged the schools to use telephone interpreters and assisted the schools to develop simplified written material to send home.

The worker also arranged for meetings between the Nina and the school. Nina was able to explain her situation and both the school and herself were able to come to an agreement about how to work together to support her children.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provides a central pool of funding for schools to access for the use of interpreters (including telephone interpreting) to communicate with parents. However, the Education Development Workers found a general lack of knowledge and reluctance to use this service within participating schools.

Recommendation 6: School staff receive training in the use of telephone interpreters and effective communication with parents from different language backgrounds.

Outcomes

As part of the follow up survey 100% of parents who completed the survey indicated that the project had made them feel more comfortable about doing each of the following:

- attending meetings at school
- asking the school for help to pay for school things
- contacting the school if you are unhappy about something
- contacting the school if you don't understand something
- filling in forms and consent requests from the school
- contacting the school if you're worried about your child's behaviour or progress
- talking to the school about school costs
- I now know who I should talk to at school when I have concerns
- applying for financial assistance

Parents were also asked about how comfortable they were with 'going to parent/teacher nights' (67% n=6) and 'budgeting for school expenses'. In these cases 67% (n=6) and 89% (n=8) respectively indicated they felt more comfortable as a result of the project. Some parents indicated they still weren't able to attend parent teacher nights because of child care responsibilities, too many commitments or other demands, and too inflexible. One parent did not feel more comfortable about 'budgeting for school expenses' as their income was too low.

Since being part of the project, 77.8% of parents (n=7) indicated they now had increased contact with their child(ren)'s school with two parents indicating they now feel more comfortable in making this contact. Reasons for the contact included (multiple reasons per respondent):

- meeting with the school about education costs / financial assistance (6)
- health problems / child's medication (4)
- behaviour management (4)
- learning supports (3)
- child's progress (3)
- attendance (3)
- excursions (2)
- other (4)

Parents were also asked if the project had helped them to gain a better understanding of how the school system works. All but one of the parents indicated yes. Specific comments made by parents include:

'Yes – I understand more about how the school works and what to do about returning consent forms, picking up children on time and who I should talk to'



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'Yes – I understand more about school expenses, consent forms, special activities and who to talk to at school'

'Yes – lots of things have been explained and I feel the school system cares about my son'

'Yes – school newsletter is important for communication and important for me to read it regularly; use of school diary to monitor homework completion; communicate one on one; explained assessment process for son with a disability who will be transitioning into year 7 in 2010'

'Yes – insisting on transfer of information; knowledge about support and key people'

'Yes – because of [the education development worker's] time given to myself and my daughter I find a much better communication with the school e.g. attendance etc.'

The Education Development Project found that parents experiencing homelessness have often had negative experiences of school themselves and struggle to understand the school system. Teachers at times misunderstand this and interpret it as a lack of interest in their child's schooling.

Recommendation 7: Schools assist parents to build a relationship with and better understand their child's school and the wider education system, using a range of informal approaches, particularly through personal contact. This could include:

- starting from the premise that all parents want the best for their child(ren) but that in some cases they may not know how to support them to achieve it
- coffee and other informal activities mornings for parents so they can meet school staff as they drop their children at school
- information packages in clear, concise language providing information on what is available at the school in terms of service and supports
- proactively making contact with parents to introduce members of the staffing team so parents have someone they know and can approach when they have questions

4.2.3 Addressing the costs of education

Having a low income and lacking sound budgeting skills, the parents participating in the project were constantly challenged by the financial demands of educating their children.

As part of the initial survey parents were asked what particular school costs they found difficult to afford. Responses included:

- School uniforms (5)
- Everything (4)
- Camps and excursions (2)
- Books and fees (1)
- School concert tickets (1)

The majority of parents indicated that they seek out second hand uniforms and books and financial assistance for other items. Two parents indicated that they see school as a priority and so purchase the necessary items but have to go without other things in order to do so. Even so, 25% (n=3) of parents indicated that their child(ren) missed out on school activities in the year due to cost.

It quickly became apparent through the project that many parents also had difficulties in affording the costs associated with getting their children to school – whether this be in terms of the cost of petrol or of public transport tickets. Furthermore, few families had

access to a computer or the internet in the home. A list of school related expenses, options for reducing the impact of these costs and a list of financial resources developed as part of the project can be found at Appendix 3. This can be used as a resource for both schools and support agencies.

The Education Development Project worked to address these issues in four ways. Firstly, through brokerage dollars available to both Hanover and BSL direct financial assistance was provided to purchase uniforms, stationery, books, tutoring and in some cases computers and desks.

Secondly, working with families, schools and support agencies to raise awareness of different funds available to assist with education costs – including the EMA, State School Relief Fund and the Education Tax Refund. As part of the project Hanover, in partnership with Kingston Bayside School Focused Youth Service, held an education costs workshop designed to share information amongst schools and agencies. Further details on this workshop can be found under Section 4.4.

Thirdly, working with parents to help them improve their budgeting skills and advised parents where to look for alternatives such as second hand uniforms and books

Finally, assisting schools to look at things like payment plans and book loan schemes to assist particularly disadvantaged students.

Some of the innovative approaches taken by schools involved in the project to financially support their families included:

- **Orientation packs** that help families understand what is available at the school, including brief surveys that families return to help the school understand a bit more about their situation. A one page breakdown of expected costs for the school year and what assistance is available from government.
- **Payment plans** that enable parents to pay small amounts regularly for things like camps and excursions. An example of a payment plan proforma can be found at Appendix 4.
- **Textbook loans** where parents pay a small deposit (\$20) at the start of the year and students are provided with a set of textbooks that are returned at the end of the year.
- **Discounts for disadvantaged families** for things like camps and excursions
- **Transparency** about the use of the EMA so parents understand how the school spends their portion and what happens if the parent signs over their half to the school.
- **Second hand uniforms and books**

Case study 5: *Developing budgeting skills*

Ben currently lives with his two sons Matt and Troy in transitional housing. Until recently Ben only saw his sons on the occasional weekend. However, circumstances changed and Ben became the primary carer.

Although his own lifestyle was fairly chaotic, Ben felt strongly that his sons' education was very important. The Education Development Worker worked with Ben to help him plan for education expenses, particularly for Matt who was moving into year 7.

By planning ahead, Ben was able to budget for and afford the various items he needed to buy. He worked hard to purchase uniforms and textbooks well in advance of the school year commencing. He also entered into a payment plan for the year 7 school camp.

Ben said that he normally did things at the last minute or forgot entirely. This way he was much less stressed and he stated that he was very proud and relieved that he had planned everything well in advance.



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In the follow up survey, no parents indicated their child(ren) had had to miss out on any activities due to cost. They indicated that the project had helped them to purchase:

- Textbooks (8)
- Uniforms (8)
- Stationery (7)
- Camp fees and excursions (5)
- Tutoring (3)
- Computer (4)

Parents were asked if the project had helped them to have a better understanding of the financial assistance available through the school system. Eight of the nine parents indicated yes. Some specific comments:

'Yes – helped set up payment plan; know who to ask for financial assistance; raised my awareness of my responsibility and how much school helps. Schools don't tell you much and the project has filled in the gaps and informed me of what I can ask for'

'Yes – now I know what EMA is used for and how school can help with uniforms, text books and who I need to talk to'

'Yes – what I can tap into (eg education tax relief); important dates; payment options; who to talk to'

Recommendation 8: Australian and State Governments should work to reduce the costs of schooling including providing camps, excursions and other curriculum activities for free; removing subject contributions, levies and charges for consumables provided by schools and introduce free public transport for school children.

Recommendation 9: Recognising that there are currently costs to schooling, schools and homelessness specialist agencies should have active measures in place to assist parents with education costs which can't be met through existing programs.

Homelessness specialist agencies should assist parents to develop their budgeting skills, using education as a good example of the need to pre-plan to purchase items such as excursions and textbooks.

Positive approaches by schools observed through the project include:

- Providing information in the October prior to the beginning of the school year on assistance available to parents
- Putting in place a payment plan system for parents around things like second-hand uniforms and textbooks (see Appendix 4)
- Putting in place a textbook loan scheme.

4.2.4 Outcomes for families and students

Of the 25 children and young people involved at the project's end, all but three continued to be engaged with school. This represents 88% of the students, a significant achievement given 17.6% and 39.4% of all young people in the SAAP program aged 12-13 years and 14-15 years respectively were not students immediately before accessing SAAP support. (AIHW, 2003).

The achievements of the project for families and individual students were highlighted in the follow up parent survey. Parents were asked if, in general, they felt more positive about their child(ren)'s education because of their involvement in the project. Eight of the nine parents surveyed indicated yes. Specific comments included:

'Yes – son is doing better, happier, more organised. He is learning more.'

'Yes – my children are doing well as they seem happy to go to school.'

'Yes – I hope my son will now stay on at school.'

'Yes – children settled quickly into [their new school] when made the [offer of public housing]. [The] project helped me realise I can resource things myself and so I feel more positive about my children'

Parents were also asked if they thought the school had a better understanding of their family's situation as a result of the project. All parents responding to the follow up survey said yes. Some specific comments:

'Yes – school understands impact of housing instability; putting strategies in place to reduce impact of them; school more flexible'

'Yes – school more aware of resettlement issues, gaps in learning, financial difficulties, difficulties with reading school notices'

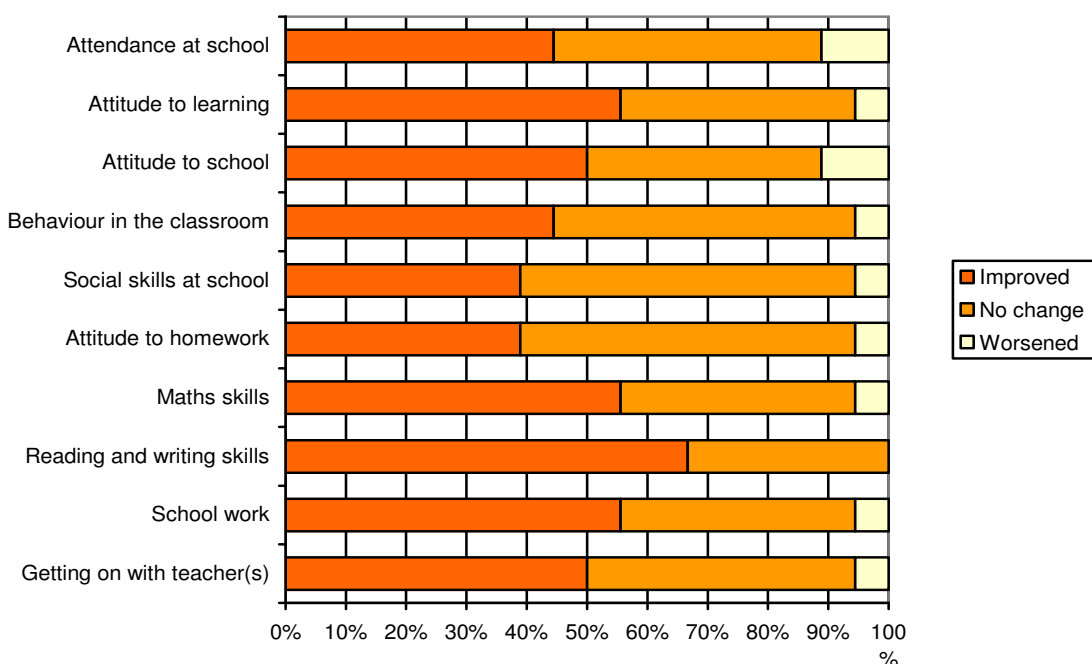
'I am able to articulate myself and seek help and explain'

As outlined above, 92% of families (n=11) had experienced three or more stressful life events over the last three years. Forty two per cent (n=5) had experienced six or more.

Parents were asked to indicate how being involved in the project had helped them deal with the impact this may have had on their child(ren)'s learning. The support identified varied enormously from family to family. Some specific supports identified included:

- 'Explaining the situation to the school'
- 'Supporting me so I could parent effectively and prioritise education'
- 'Provided additional support to [my child]'
- 'Advocated for additional monitoring of my son's progress through Alfred CAMHS, the health nurse, year level coordinator [and] student wellbeing manager'
- 'Giving me information, ideas and encouragement'
- 'Increased school awareness of the impact of parental mental health issues and special health needs of son.'
- 'Setting up payment plans'

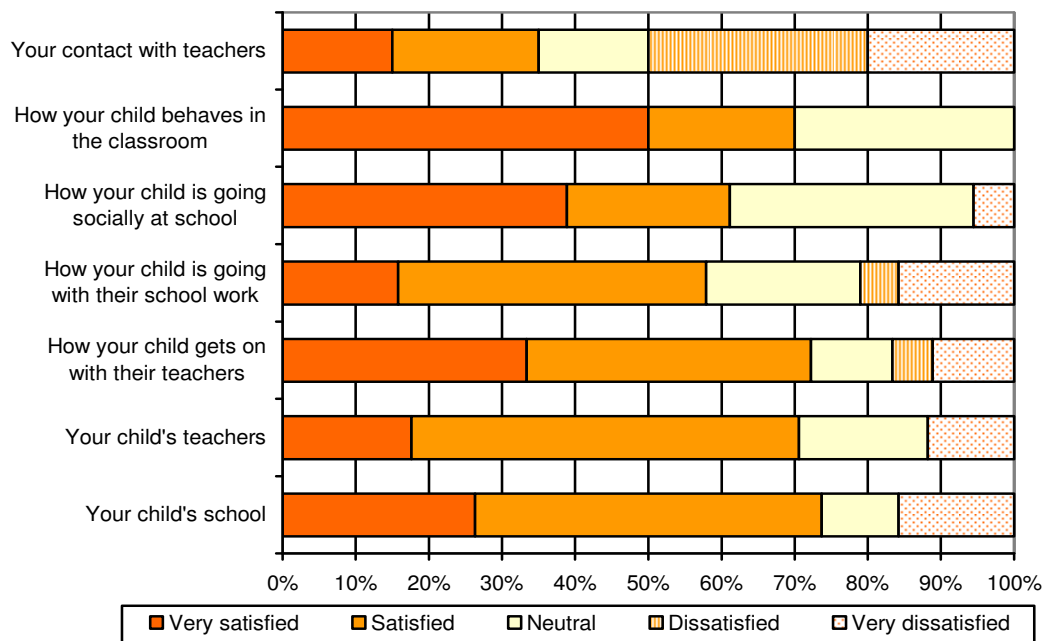
Figure 19: Parent's perception of improvements with child's school and learning (follow up survey)





On six of the ten indicators, parents perceived that 50% or more of the children had improved on that indicator since being involved in the project. For Two thirds parents had perceived improvements in reading and writing.

Figure 20: Parent’s satisfaction with their child’s school (initial survey)



* Note: Parents were also asked to comment on their satisfaction with class size. As nine of the twenty respondents indicated 'don't know' this question was removed.

Sixty percent or more of parents were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' in each of the seven areas indicated with the exception of how their child was going with their school work (58%) and their (the parent's) contact with their child's teacher (35%).

Parents were asked to indicate if their child found school more enjoyable and meaningful since being involved in the project. Thirteen (out of a possible 18 responses) parents indicated yes. Of those who said no three indicated that their child had always enjoyed or done well at school and another one indicated that assistance was still waiting to be put in place.

For those who had noticed an improvement the most common response (38%) was that their child felt more confident and engaged with school. Some specific comments:

'Yes – really feels he is learning and fitting in'

'Yes – seems more confident and relaxed; engaging more in his learning; responding to behaviour management strategies'

'Feels more confident; asks questions [in class]'

'Still having difficulty making friends but attends every day'

'Feels more confident so enjoys school more; clearer vision of what he wants to focus on at school'

'Yes – increased stability at home has reinforced the importance of school'

'Yes – feels more confident because basic skills are improving'

'Yes – has really started to find her feet and achieve'

Two thirds of students however (n=12), were still not participating in extra school activities such as sport, music or drama. The reasons given included:

- Family commitments (3)
- Live too far from school (2)
- Health concerns (1)

Parents were asked if their child's attitude to school or learning changed in any way as a result of the project. Parents indicated two thirds (n=12) of students had improved attitudes to school or learning. Of those who did not note an improvement, 17% (n=3) indicated that their child had always enjoyed or had a positive attitude towards school and that this had not changed. One parent indicated that their child was still hampered by their health problem. Some specific comments:

'Tries harder, does homework'

'Feeling more comfortable at school, having a go because he believes that he can do it'

'Better equipped, greater participation, understanding and self confidence'

'Enjoys school; sees school as a pathway'

'Yes happier to go to school, but not to learn'

'Yes – trying harder at school'

'Has always had a positive attitude but enjoys the classroom more'

'Feels more confident about completing year 12'

Parents were also asked if their child's behaviour at school had changed as a result in of the project. Parents reported just over 44% (n=8) of students had improved behaviour at school as a result of the project. Thirty eight percent (n=7) of parents indicated their child had always behaved well at school and that this had not changed. Two parents indicated that their child's behaviour had deteriorated during the life of the project with one parent reporting that '[he has] more contact with older, disruptive students; increased attempts and truanting and is more openly disruptive in class'.

Some specific comments:

'Yes – attendance has improved; has responded well to behaviour management strategies'

'Linked into welfare coordinator and chaplain to better manage anger and racial slurs'

'Seems very comfortable around peers. Improved relationship with mother is leading him to be more settled at school, increased attendance and completing homework.'

'Really engages with staff and integration aide. Attendance has improved as child is not kept at home as much'

'Yes – less stubborn at attempting weaker subjects.'

'Yes – more cooperative and motivated'

The key contact for the project at each of the schools was also asked what changes they had seen in the students participating in the project in their approach to and engagement with the school. All had noted some improvement. Some specific comments:

'Greater confidence and ability to integrate into the school community'

'They have appreciated the extra support and in some cases their disruptive behaviour has lessened in severity and frequency'

'Far more settled, less time in the office, made friends'



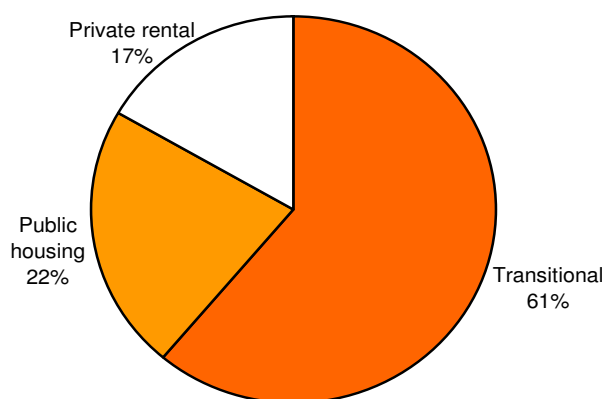
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Feedback from many of the schools has been that the level of support within this project has been an instrumental component in increasing positive communication with parents. Many schools commented that the strategies engaged within the project could be adapted to many families who experience disadvantage and barriers other than homelessness.

4.3 Providing secure and stable housing

The second objective of the project was to provide secure and stable housing for the two year period of the project. As noted under section 4.1, 61% of the families participating in the project were residing in transitional housing.

Figure 21: Housing type for families participating in the project



The majority of families (61%) did not have any housing moves during the life of the project. This is a significant achievement given the level of transience that many of the families experienced prior to the project (45% of families had moved seven or more times since their eldest child started school).

Of those who did move house:

- Five families received and accepted public housing offers out of the area
- One family moved into a more appropriate transitional property in the same area
- One family moved from living with one friend to living with another friend and then taking over the lease of the private rental property.

For four of the five families who received public housing offers, the housing was not in the same area as the transitional housing property they were previously living in. The Education Development workers assisted three of these families in identifying new schools for their children, meeting with new school staff and filling in paperwork to enrol. They also advocated for the transfer of documentation between the schools so the new school was clear on the progress that had been made for these students and what their support needs were.

Parents were also asked as part of the follow up survey if their children had moved school since their involvement in the project. Only two of the fourteen children whose parents responded to the survey had changed schools and this was from primary to secondary school. For these two students the Education Development Worker assisted by:

- Arranging meetings with staff at the new school to reduce parent anxiety
- Assisted with the documentation involved in changing schools
- Assisted with the costs of new uniform, text books and camp fees

As one parent commented:

'Visiting [the] school and meeting staff before and after the move really helped to reduce anxiety and helped me to prepare my child as I know what to expect and what I needed to organise a budget for'

In one case, a young person had attended CAHMS transitional group and developed friendships with some of the other students in that group. The Education Development Worker advocated with the school to place these students in the same year 7 class so they could support each other.

What the Education Project found was that often documentation was not transferred between schools when students moved. This could be due to any number of factors including parents not informing the school of where they were going or where they had been or school staff not having the time to be able to put together the right material. Moving to a new school placed significant challenges on the students in terms of making new friends and adjusting to a new approach. This is compounded when they again have to provide evidence and explanations of their development needs.

Recommendation 10: Where students have to move schools, the transfer of information, particularly for students facing significant disadvantage, between schools should be as comprehensive as possible. Methods that could be used include:

- The Student Welfare Coordinator in the old school contacting the new school to provide an overview of the student's history and current supports in place. This could potentially be done as a joint meeting between the two Welfare Coordinators and the parents.
- Homelessness specialist support workers encouraging parents to ensure that the relevant information is transferred to the new school
- Homelessness specialist support workers facilitating a meeting with the new school for parents to help them establish a relationship.

Recommendation 11: The Australian Government should explore the possibility of Centrelink assisting in the transfer of information between schools, as they are often the first point of contact for families when they move.

As highlighted in Case Study 6 below, for one family they were lucky to receive a public housing offer in the area of their choice. However, the nature of housing support is such that they had been moved out of that area initially to the next available transitional property, to the detriment of the young person.

Case study 6: *The impact of moving out of area*

Michael and his daughter Jackie were, until recently, living with Michael's mother. Because of Michael's health issues and problems with gambling, Michael's mother had had enough and asked them to move out. They approached a homelessness specialist agency and were provided transitional housing approximately 30 km away. It was not long after this that they were referred to the Education Development Project.

Jackie had recently started year 7 at the local school and was keen to continue there. However, the trip to school was now more than 20 minutes by car or up to an hour by public transport. Michael simply couldn't afford to travel that far each day to get Jackie to school.



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The Education Development Worker facilitated meetings between Michael and Jackie's school. The school were very supportive and offered lifts to school and to after school activities for Jackie. However, Michael is very protective of Jackie and unwilling to take up these options. As a result Jackie started missing school.

Eventually Michael and Jackie were lucky enough to receive an offer of public housing back in the area they were originally from. Unfortunately though the damage had already been done. Jackie at this stage was down to attending school two days a week and had fallen significantly behind her peers. Jackie has fallen into a cycle of poor attendance which will take significant effort to break.

The Project also found that some parents experiencing homelessness go to great lengths to try and keep their children engaged in school. This is not just because of the perceived benefits of education but also parents recognise that often school is the only stable element in that child's life during a period of housing crisis.

The housing system, however, does not take into account community connection when placing families in crisis, transitional or public housing.

In applying for public housing in Victoria, applicants must select three 'broadband areas' made up of a number of adjoining suburbs all linked by public transport. Decisions on allocating public housing are made on the basis of need and matching the first available property to the next eligible person on the list. This becomes particularly problematic for families who may have first been allocated to a crisis property for six weeks then a transitional property for up to a year to then have to move once more into a public housing property which is generally a significant distance away. This is highlighted in Margaret and David's situation in Case Study 7.

Case study 7: Making community connection a priority in allocating public housing

Over time, Margaret and David Smith have faced numerous barriers to maintaining their housing. Margaret has two children from a previous relationship and four with David. Two of the six children have intellectual and physical disabilities. In 2007 the Smiths moved from Western Australia back to Victoria as they believed the supports for their disabled children were better. As most of the children had experienced up to six changes in schools over their schooling careers, their parents felt it was important to try and provide them with stability. So when they were provided with a transitional property in Cheltenham, they made a significant effort to keep their children in school in Frankston, almost 30 km away, as they had applied for public housing in this area.

Unfortunately, when the offer for housing did come through, the property was located in Dandenong, again almost 30km from Frankston (almost an hour by bus). Concerned that they wouldn't receive another offer, the Smiths accepted the property, even though it meant once again having to move their children to new schools just as they were becoming settled.

The Education Worker linked the family into a local family support agency and requested that the agency assist the family with the school transition. The new schools were very supportive of a family transferring midway through the school year. They provided uniforms, textbooks and emotional support to all of the children.

It is expected that once Opening Doors, the new front door approach to crisis and transitional housing allocation, begins across Victoria that it will become even harder to take community connection into account in allocating properties unless this becomes a criteria within the allocation process.

With increasing numbers of families coming to Australia from Africa, overcrowding is becoming an issue in the housing system. There are simply not enough transitional or public housing properties available for families with five or more children. Further, properties in the private rental market of appropriate size are often unaffordable. Nya's situation as outlined in Case Study 8 below is not unique. Overcrowding makes it very difficult for students to focus on their homework. For newly arrived refugees, the challenge is even greater as they struggle to adjust to all the cultural changes as well as studying in a new language.

Case study 8: *The impact of overcrowding*

Nya and seven of her family members moved to Australia as refugees in February 2006. After living in their sponsor's house in Springvale for three months, they were offered a four bedroom transitional property in Cheltenham. While this provided them with a bit more personal space, with eight people in the house it was still significantly overcrowded. Nya, currently in secondary school, had to share a bedroom with her step sister, Amel, who was eight years old. There was no room for a desk and working at the kitchen table was noisy and distracting. Nya often sat on her bed to complete her homework but would be regularly interrupted by Amel. Amel's earlier bedtime also meant that homework ceased early every night. In addition, Nya was expected to take on many of the household chores including cooking and cleaning for the rest of the family, leaving even less time for homework.

As part of the Project, the Education Development Worker assisted Nya to move into another transitional property with another family member, where she was better able to focus on her studies. Nya was also provided with her own computer and desk, and with travel tickets to enable her to continue at her present school.

The Education Development Workers also worked hard to assist families to address any issues that threatened the stability of their tenancy. This included linking them into additional support services, such as mental health or financial counselling as well as providing emotional and financial support.

In one case a family had already been issued with an eviction notice for their council owned property when they were referred to the project. The Education Development Worker advocated for the family to stay in the property and paid part of the overdue rent, with the parent agreeing to pay the remainder through CentrePay.

In another case the Education Development Worker identified that both parents were facing significant issues, and advocated for individual homelessness support workers to be allocated to each parent to assist them in addressing their separate issues.

Recommendation 12: State Housing Authorities reconsider housing priorities to ensure a school first approach for families so as to minimise school moves for children and young people. Where this is not possible, the number of moves should be minimised by placing families directly into long term housing.

Recommendation 13: Consideration be given to a student's need for space to study when placing families in housing so they have enough space to complete homework.



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4.4 Enhancing support practices

The third objective of the project was to enhance support practices in order to:

- maintain and further develop relationships between support workers in the homelessness sector and local schools
- identify best practice and transfer these practices across the different sectors
- increase awareness of homelessness and education issues by homelessness specialist agencies and schools.

There were a number of challenges facing the Education Development Workers in enhancing support practices.

From a homelessness specialist agency perspective, children who accompany their parents are not seen as clients of the agency because of the way Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funding is provided. As such, generally only limited support is provided to children and young people and almost always this is in the context of supporting the wider family.

Further, homelessness support workers are focused on ensuring the family has a roof over their heads. This means that in the initial stages of finding accommodation very little consideration is given to location or educational needs.

From a school perspective, class sizes and resources mean that school staff often struggle to provide the level of individualised assistance that many students need.

Finally, from a wider support agency perspective, funding structures do not encourage support services to look beyond what they are specifically funded for. A mental health service, for example, will focus on supporting someone with their mental health issue but will not necessarily consider that their client might be a parent and that their illness has implications for their children.

However, through the support provided by the Project and the active dissemination of ideas and different practices undertaken by the Education Development Workers, the Project was able to both achieve changes in support practice as well as identify ideas for how they could be further enhanced.

Appendix 5 provides an overview of the types of supports homelessness specialist services and other support agencies might be able to provide to families with school aged children.

4.4.1 Improving assessment (and follow through)

Assessing the needs of an individual and their family is critical to ensuring they receive the right supports.

The project identified that the provision of educational support for children was generally not central to support case plans developed by workers within the homelessness sector. The assessment and provision of support was often limited to schools attended, academic ability and financial assistance for education costs.

The project developed a comprehensive assessment tool to guide the nature of education support provided to students and their families. The tool was used to explore students' attitudes to school and learning, parental contact with the school, reasons for school changes, parental capacity to manage education costs, reasons for school absences, and parental aspirations for their children.

The assessment process revealed that many students were keen to attend school but became anxious once there. There was also a reluctance to participate in class, and to complete homework. It also showed that contact with parents was usually initiated by the school and centred on concerns around behaviour management, poor academic

performance, or unpaid monies. Further exploration revealed that students and their parents often found it difficult to seek assistance and often felt unsupported by the school. The assessment tool became an effective template for identifying education related support needs, for devising support plans, and for collecting and analysing education related client data.

The project also advocated on behalf of a number of students for school based assessments to be done in order to determine the need for additional supports. This led in one case to an integration aide being allocated to one student. In other cases it meant that the student received additional supports from outside the classroom including access to CAHMS.

However, simply undertaking an assessment is not sufficient and, as demonstrated in Case study 1, the Education Development Workers occasionally found that an assessment had been done for a particular student and no action taken to address the issues identified. Again this required a significant amount of advocacy on the part of the worker to ensure the right supports were put in place.

Recommendation 14: Homelessness specialist agencies should adopt an assessment tool (example at Appendix 6) to enable school age children's needs to be assessed and included in the support plan for their family.

This should then contribute to the inclusion of education and connection to school as a key component of a family's support plan.

Recommendation 15: Accompanied children be recognised as clients in their own right within the homelessness support system and that the importance of meeting educational needs is central to their support. Agencies need to be funded accordingly.

4.4.2 Improving communication

One of the most important achievements of the Education Development Project has been around improving communication. This included communication between students and their parents with the school, communication between the families and the various support agencies, communication between the schools and support agencies and communication between the agencies themselves.

Through communication the Education Development Workers were able to build understanding – for parents of the education system, for schools of the challenges facing families experiencing homelessness and through this the underlying causes of student behaviour, and for support agencies of the importance of considering children's education in providing support to their parents and the family.

Through the initial assessment, Education Development Workers were able to develop a picture of the challenges facing the students and their families and what supports they might need to assist them through these challenges. They were then able to talk to schools and other support agencies about these needs as well as advocate for changes in practice to support them.

For many parents, simply helping them to identify a key contact person at the school and arrange a meeting provided significant benefit. The parent then felt they had a familiar face at the school and were more confident about contacting them if they had any concerns.

For the schools, the workers talked about different strategies for communication, particularly for parents from diverse language backgrounds. These strategies included the use of telephone interpreters and written material in clear, simple language. They also emphasised the importance of meeting with parents to get a better sense of the context for



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their students and what might be underlying any behaviour or development concerns. As demonstrated by the parent survey, all parents who responded believe that education is important and want to see their children achieve. Sometimes however, they don't know how to assist in this because of their own negative experiences and need some direction and assistance.

This success is demonstrated in the responses to both the parent and school surveys. In the school survey the key contact at the schools were asked to identify if the Education Development Project had helped the school in the way it responds to students who are experiencing homelessness. The answer was yes in all cases. In particular schools noted that the project had assisted with improving communication. Some specific comments made included:

'Communication – bridging the gap between families and schools'

'Definitely. Connectedness. Better relationships with the families. Better staff understanding'

'Increased awareness of the need for improved communication with target families.'

Improved appreciation for their context and history. Increased awareness of avenues for financial and practical assistance to supplement those already known.'

4.4.3 Financial assistance

Many families struggle with the costs of public education. There are the direct costs of uniforms, books, excursions, camps, school sports days and school concerts. Then there are the indirect costs of transport to and from school, lunch and after school activities. As one parent commented in the parent survey, while they manage to pay for all school expenses, they prioritise those expenses which means going without other things.

There are many forms of assistance available for families experiencing disadvantage and homelessness but most parents find them difficult to understand and the application processes can be quite complex. In fact, the project found that many of the schools and support agencies were also not completely familiar with the different forms of support available themselves.

While some schools are proactive about informing parents of things like the EMA and State School Relief Fund, others are not and parents don't know who to ask for help.

The EMA in particular can be a point of difficulty between parents and children. In 2009 the EMA amounts to \$443 per year for secondary school students and \$221 per year for primary school students. The current government policy is to provide half of the EMA to the school and half to the parents. Schools will often ask parents to sign over their half of the EMA to provide for excursions and other activities. In some cases, students will not receive things like school diaries or access to computers etc if their parents will not sign over the EMA.

While Victorian Government guidelines around the EMA are very clear about transparency and providing information to parents on how the school is expending the funds, some parents report the didn't know how their child's EMA funds were being expended.

The project found that some families, particularly those who had not been in Australia for long, did not understand what the EMA was for or that the school received half of the payment. They were therefore unable, when the school asked for additional funds, to say that the EMA should be used for this purpose.

For transient families, the EMA represents a further problem. While the portion of the EMA that is paid to schools is intended to be transferred with the students, the small amount of funding means that it is often spent on essentials early in the year with little left over for any new uniforms or books that need to be purchased for the new school.

One of the activities undertaken as part of the project was to inform the various participants (parents, schools and agencies) of the different supports available to cover educational costs. Assistance was given to families to access the EMA and State School Relief Fund as well as find second hand books and uniforms.

One of the added benefits of the Education Development Project was access to brokerage funds to assist students and families. Funds were used to pay for things like computers, internet access, tutoring, books, stationary, school bags, uniforms, travel tickets and petrol. As noted under section 4.2, parents were encouraged to access existing funding sources where possible, but the Education Development Workers found that there were limited options available particularly for tutoring, computers and internet access as well as funds for travel tickets to assist students to get to and from school.

Recommendation 16: Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to undertake an audit of school's compliance with Departmental policy on transparency of the use of the EMA. This should be followed up with information to schools on best practice in this area.

Recommendation 17: Brokerage dollars should be provided to support agencies to provide for educational items not covered by the EMA or State School Relief Fund. This includes tutoring, computers, internet access and travel tickets.

As part of the project, Hanover organised an education costs forum to enable participants to share their knowledge of the supports available. This forum is outlined in more detail under section 4.5.

Recommendation 18: SAAP Children's Resource Workers in each region should develop a list of resources for both schools and agencies on the financial support available to families, who to contact within schools and the local agencies and the services they provide that might be helpful to schools.

4.4.4 Holistic support (partnerships)

Another benefit of the project was the additional capacity, through the Education Development Workers, to connect services and encourage everyone to work together in a more holistic way.

The workers identified and met regularly with key contact people in the schools – welfare coordinators, principals, year level coordinators. They talked to them about the project and about the families and students who were participating. These conversations, along with meetings with the parents and students themselves led to strategies being developed to jointly support the students and their families. All but one of the schools approached through the project were supportive of the actions being taken.

Parents and students were encouraged to participate in this process. For some parents it was a significant achievement simply meeting with the school contact and discussing their situation and concerns for their children. They commented on how important and valued they felt, that they felt included and actively involved in their children's education. Through the parent survey, parents reported they were now more confident in talking with staff at the school.

School practices become more responsive to individual student need, and support agencies worked more closely with schools to provide an extensive package of support.

Schools reported an increased awareness of other agencies and resources available to support students experiencing homelessness as a result of the project. One school had made space available for agencies to meet with parents and students at the school in order to provide the support they needed.



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Both agencies and schools also reported a greater understanding of the supports available for students experiencing homelessness and a greater awareness of how they might support these students.

One of the benefits of the project was having someone within the school that had an understanding of homelessness and who could be a conduit or support for both the student and the parent. Similarly, it was of benefit for agencies to be actively engaging with schools so that they were familiar with the various school processes and better able to assist clients when they came into the service.

Recommendation 19: Schools should identify someone on the school staff who is responsible for liaising with local homelessness and other support agencies. This person should also have a role in raising awareness amongst other school staff around homelessness and disadvantage and the impact on student engagement. They should also have responsibility for raising awareness of the agencies and support available to assist families.

Recommendation 20: Homelessness and other support agencies should develop policies and procedures around making connections and building relationships with local schools and nominate someone within the agency with responsibility for liaising with schools in each local area.

Case study 8: *Coordinating support*

Jane and John live in public housing with their son Luck who is ten years old. Jane has ongoing serious health issues including emphysema, a serious blood disorder and an acquired brain injury from a violent attack when younger. John also has health issues including an acquired brain injury from substance abuse. The family's history of transience means that Luke has been to three different schools over the last six years. His literacy and numeracy skills have been assessed as being at grade 3 level despite him being in grade 5. Luke tends to observe what is happening in class rather than participate and is often in trouble for wandering around the classroom and distracting other students.

In order for the family to maintain their tenancy and for Luke to achieve at school, a number of supports have been put in place including the local community health service, parenting support, CAMHS, tutoring, disability services and support for John as Jane's primary carer. While the family were already accessing some of these supports, the Education Development Workers engaged them with others and raised the awareness of each agency and the need for them to work together to provide the family and Luke in particular with the best possible opportunities.

One of the more systemic issues that became evident through the project is that schools that have a higher number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have, through necessity, a greater understanding of the supports available within the area to assist their students and families. They also have a greater amount of funding to provide support to these families due to economies of scale.

Both Mornington and Cheltenham provide good examples of areas that are considered to be more affluent, however they still contain pockets of significant disadvantage. Schools in these areas tend to have less funding available and less knowledge of local supports to assist families who are homeless or disadvantaged.

Recommendation 21: State education and housing authorities should work together to develop better systems of collaboration and exchange between schools and support agencies to enable them to work more closely to support students and their families.

4.4.5 Outcomes

In the follow up survey, 100% of schools reported either a significant (75%) or slight (25%) improvement in their contact with welfare agencies and the school's ability to access resources available to support students experiencing homelessness. Eighty percent also reported a significant improvement in understanding how homelessness affects a child's education. As Figures 22 and 23 demonstrate, there was an improvement in each of the indicators from the initial survey, conducted in December 2008 to the follow up survey conducted in August 2009.

Figure 22: Changes in school understanding of homelessness and ability to support students experiencing homelessness – initial survey

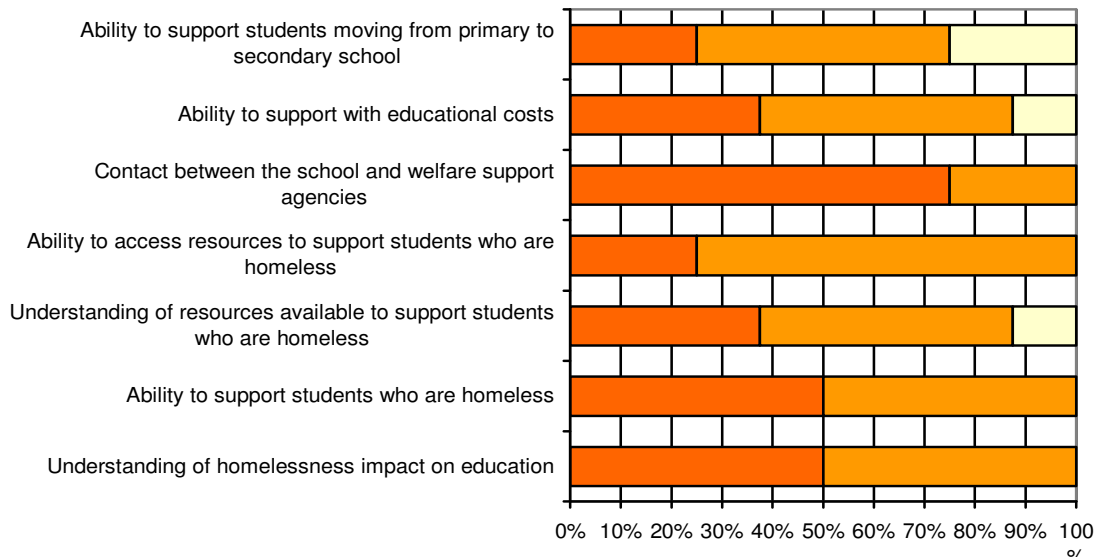
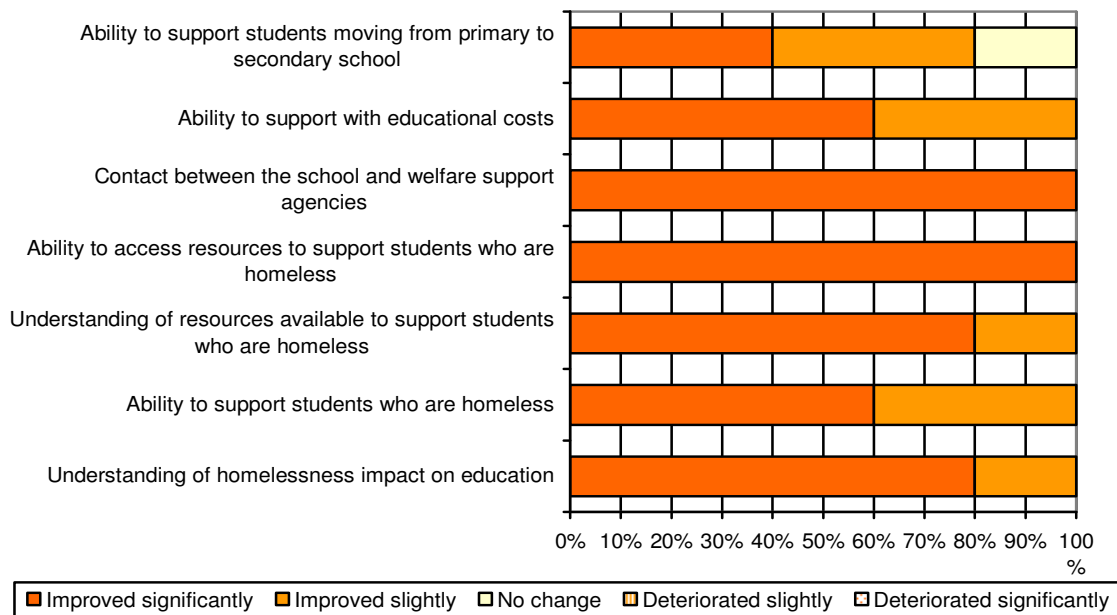


Figure 23: Changes in school understanding of homelessness and ability to support students experiencing homelessness – follow up survey





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Schools also reported an improvement in working with the students and families participating in the project. In the initial survey, engagement with parents had improved 25%. By the follow up survey, engagement was reported to have improved 40%.

Figure 24: Changes in the school’s approach towards students and families participating in the project – initial survey

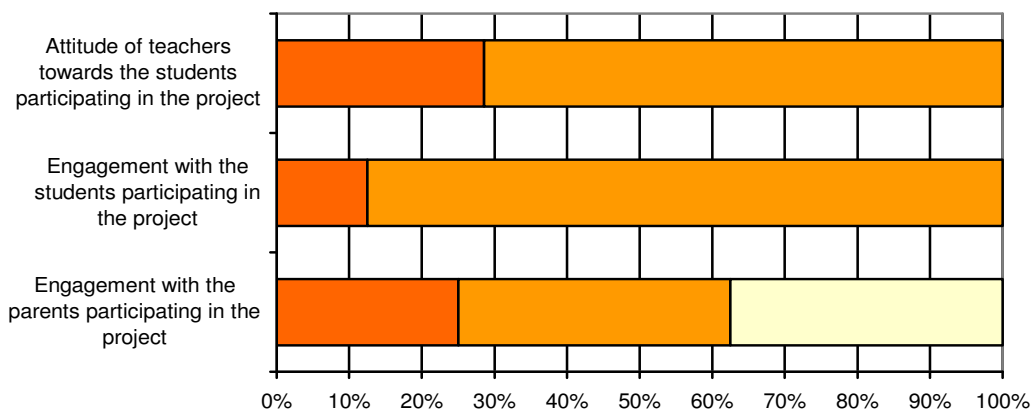
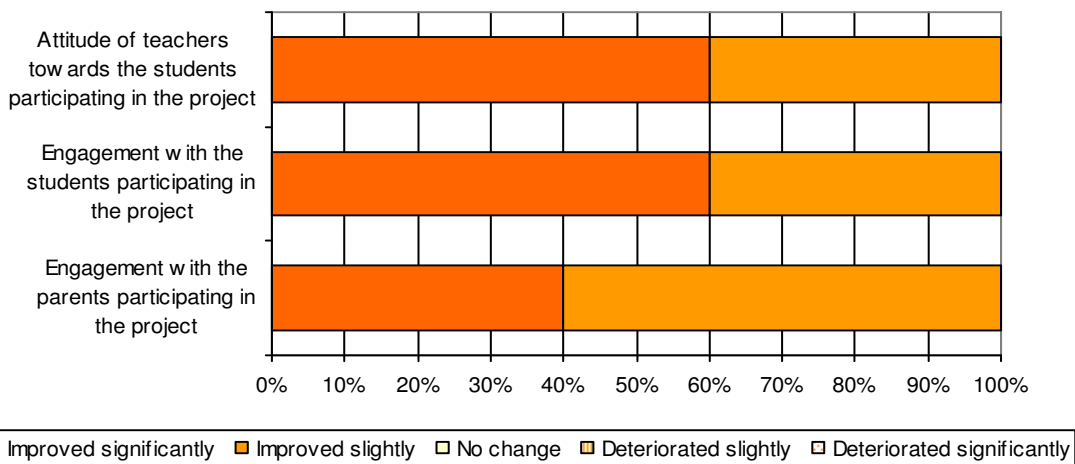


Figure 25: Changes in the school’s approach towards students and families participating in the project – follow up survey



Schools were also asked to outline what changes had occurred at the school in supporting students experiencing homelessness that would continue beyond the life of the project. In particular, schools identified:

‘Awareness of financial difficulties – will provide ongoing financial assistance – books, uniforms, lunch, excursions’

‘The leadership team has increased intellectual property in relation to homelessness and the impact on schooling’

‘Understanding the extent and effects of homelessness and increased awareness of what to look for to detect homelessness. It is a subject that is not usually discussed with us at school.’

‘Increased awareness of agencies / services available to assist schools in supporting these families and others. Greater appreciation for context, rather than acting upon incorrect assumptions. Improved communication from school office to home and class teachers to home.’

4.5 Practice dissemination

[what was provided; what was the outcome]

The fourth and final objective of the project was practice dissemination.

In part, this was done through the work done in the project in supporting the children and young people involved in the project. In addition to this the Education Development Workers designed and conducted as well as presented at and attended a number of workshops and forums designed to disseminate the learnings from the project and encourage practice change. A list of these activities can be found at Appendix 8.

Different groups were targeted through this process with different objectives in each case, as set out in Figure 26 below.

Figure 26: Practice dissemination

Target group	Communication objective
State government	To increase understanding of the impact of homelessness on education
Local government	To increase understanding and build the engagement of local government services in the project
Schools	To increase understanding and encourage practice change
Welfare agencies	To increase understanding and encourage practice change
Advocacy bodies	To increase understanding and encourage further advocacy work on this issue

At each key workshop, participants were asked to rate the workshop and comment on what they had learnt, including outlining what they would take away with them to implement in their own practice.

In addition to this, an article was published as part of Parity, a journal for the homelessness sector, to raise awareness about the project. A copy of the article can be found at Appendix 7.

The following provides an overview of the major workshops that were designed and conducted by the Education Development Workers.

Hanover workshops

One of the target groups for Hanover in particular was the Hanover staff to encourage practice change in supporting children and young people experiencing homelessness.

At each of the five workshops run for Hanover staff, participants were asked to rate the workshop overall. Over 90% of participants rated the workshops as 'very good' or 'good'.

Participants were also asked if the workshop had increased their understanding of the impact of homelessness on a young person's ability to learn. Three quarters of participants indicated 'yes significantly' (18.5%) or 'yes a little' (55.5%).

Participants were also asked to identify three things that they would take away from the forum to implement in their own practice. The most common responses were:

- Ensuring education is kept at the forefront of practice – included in assessments, case plans and support (10)
- Information on services and funding available to support families and students (8)
- Assisting parents with communication with schools (7)
- Increasing information exchange between all parties (7)



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Understanding Poverty Forum

The Understanding Poverty Forum was conducted in partnership with Anglicare and was designed to raise awareness within schools of the challenges facing families and particularly students in poverty. The focus of the forum was on improving communication between schools and families.

Feedback from the forum was extremely positive. Participants were asked what they learnt about families experiencing poverty. Some of the comments made included:

'The importance of relationships'

'The complexity of issues and the importance of positive relationships'

'The different ways in which poverty is created and the domino effect that it has on the generations following'

'All [parents] want what is best for their children, often do not know how to achieve this'

Teachers in particular were asked to comment on how this forum would help them identify and work with students experiencing poverty and homelessness. Comments included:

'Understand them and their actions/reactions better and explore what may work for them'

'A better understanding of how these children live and respond to stress in the classroom'

'Knowing not to interfere but listen if they want to talk without judging...'

Half way there – practical responses to homelessness and education

The Education Development Workers were invited to present at a conference on education and homelessness as part of Anti-poverty week 2009.

The aim of the workshop was to explore the presenting issues of children and young people in the middle years and offer practice insights.

Again feedback from the forum was very positive. When asked what they would take away and implement in their own practice, participants made the following comments:

'Looking for more signs in students as to difficulty on the home front'

'Confirmation that we need to offer further training regarding disadvantaged students.'

'Importance of identification of at risk students & engaging families'

'Knowledge of service sector re children's needs. Lack of linking between DEECD & DHS, not only at state and regional level but especially at class teacher level'

'Renewed interest, because as workers we can get bogged down with immediate client issues'

Education Costs Forum

The Education Costs forum was put together as part of the Project, in partnership with the School Focused Youth Service, because of the emerging evidence that many staff working in schools and support agencies were unaware of the different financial supports available to families through government and agencies themselves. Participants were asked to come along armed with their own knowledge of different supports that they could share with others.

Over 90% of participants indicated that the forum significantly increased their understanding of the impact of education costs on a young person's ability to learn.

Again, participants were asked to identify what they would take away to implement in their own practice. Comments included:

'Expanding the membership of the Equity in Education Alliance' (Advocacy body)

'Undertake research to track costs of education' (Advocacy body)

'Sharing more information and making use of networks' (Service provider)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Acronyms

BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DHS	Department of Human Services
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SEIFA	Socio Economic Index for Areas

Appendix 2: Permission form in plain English

Permission Notification Form

Name of School:

Telephone:

Fax:

Email:

NAME OF ACTIVITY/EXCURSION:

Destination/Venue:

Date of Excursion:

Purpose of Excursion:

Specials Needs:

Please bring snack, lunch and a drink (no cans or glass) in a NAMED plastic bag. Please put snack in a separate NAMED bag. Please also bring a jacket/coat.

Transport Method:

Adult Responsible:

Cost:

Student Name:

Tear off slip

Please check details on this slip, sign and return to the school no later than _____.

NAME OF ACTIVITY/EXCURSION:

Date:

Cost:

Family Telephone ---

Home:

Mobile:

Business Hour Telephone ----

Adult A:

Adult B:

:

Medical Condition/s:

Emergency Contact for this Excursion

Name :

Address :

Family Doctor ---- Name::

Telephone:

Medicare Number:

I consent to my child taking part in this excursion and where the teacher in charge of the excursion is unable to contact me, or it is otherwise impracticable to contact me, I authorise the teacher in charge to:

- Consent to my child receiving such medical or surgical attention as may be deemed necessary by medical practitioner,
- Administer such first-aid as the teacher in charge may judge to be reasonably necessary.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____ Date: _____

NOTE: The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development requires parents to give written consent **BEFORE** their child can take part in any excursion.



Appendix 3: Minimising the impact of school related costs

Areas of Education Expense

1. **Booklists** – think about distributing book lists early so parents can start to budget and plan for purchases; establishing a class set of books available on loan; look at identifying second-hand supplies for books.
2. **Uniforms** – second-hand supply, cheaper shops
3. **Camps** – when & how advised, payment plan
4. **Transport** – yearly tickets, living far from school
5. **Excursions** – when & how advised, payment plan
6. **Stationery** – class sets, school supplier, individual purchase, recycling
7. **Electives** – payment plan, reduce exclusion
8. **Swimming lessons** – how & when advised, payment plan
9. **Incursion** - Visiting artists, performers, speakers
10. **Extra – curricular** activities e.g. sport, music
11. **“Voluntary contribution”** – how much?, when due?, what does it cover?, what are the consequences for family of non-payment?

School Contact Person re financial matters

1. Principal
2. Assistant Principal
3. Finance Manager
4. Student Well-being Coordinator
5. Admin /Reception staff
6. Form Teacher

Methods of Communication

1. Letters
2. Newsletter
3. Parent handbook
4. Orientation process
5. Specific Forms
6. School Websites
7. Text Messages
8. Emails
9. Information Sessions

Sources of funding

1. **Education Maintenance Allowance**

- Parents must submit application to school by end of February each year.
First Instalment - \$77.35 to parent & to Primary school
\$155.05 to parent & to Secondary school
Second instalment - \$33.15 to parent & to Primary school
\$66.45 to parent & to Secondary school
- School should inform parents that EMA is available & how EMA is used e.g. for textbooks, stationery, elective materials, outside specialists, camps & excursions, photocopying etc
- EMA does not usually cover camp costs & swimming lesson fees
- Parent must be receiving Centrelink benefits & have valid Health Care Card.

2. **School Start Bonus**

- \$300 pa is available to parents of students entering Prep & Year 7 for start up costs.
- In December, school provides eligible parents with a Payment Voucher. After mid-January, parent presents voucher & photo ID at any Post Office for the cash redemption of \$300.
- Students enrolling after Term 1 are not eligible.

3. **State School Relief funding**

- Assists with clothing & footwear ONLY.
- Principal submits application to the committee after consultation with the parents. No direct contact between parent & committee.

4. **Counting the Kids Brokerage Fund**

- Auspiced by Odyssey House through the Commonwealth's National Illicit Drug Strategy – Strengthening Families initiative.
- Grants of up to \$4000 pa per child. Applications to be completed & submitted by workers only – no direct contact between client & Odyssey.
- Aims to create opportunities for children whose lives are impacted upon by parental drug or alcohol problems **and**
- To help engage children in activities & services that will enhance their healthy connectedness.

5. **Education Tax Refund**

- Available to parents whose children attend primary or secondary school and the parents receive Family Tax Benefit A or their children receive Youth Allowance or some other payment or allowance.
- For expenses that support their children at school, parents can claim up to 50% of the amount. This means a refund of up to \$375 for primary students and up to \$750 for secondary students.
- Parents are to keep their receipts from July to June each year. Receipts are then attached to their income tax return.
- Parents who not required to complete an income tax return, can complete a separate form which is available from any Taxation office.



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6. **Medicare Teen Dental Plan**
 - Eligible teenagers between 12 -17years may receive up to \$150 per calendar year towards the cost of a dental check up.
 - Vouchers can be redeemed at participating dentists.

7. **Centrelink Internet Allowance**
 - Anyone who receives an account for internet access and who is also eligible for the Centrelink telephone allowance is eligible for the internet allowance.
 - Once client has advised Centrelink of their internet account, they will receive an allowance of approximately \$10 per quarter towards their internet bill.

8. **Saver Plus Education Program**
 - Available to Health Care Card holders over the age of 18yo who have some regular income from work and who parent or act as guardian of a child attending school.
 - Every dollar saved for education related expenses will be matched dollar for dollar by participating ANZ banks – up to \$1000.

9. **WorkVentures – Low Cost Computers**
 - Available to all Centrelink Concession Card Holders
 - Opportunity to purchase a computer package for \$250(plus \$40 delivery fee).
 - Package includes: screen, mouse, keyboard, tower PLUS operating system, software, warranty AND **FREE PHONE TECHNICAL SUPPORT.**
 - To purchase, simply ring **toll free** WorkVentures number 1800 112 205 and place your order.
 - Allow 21 days for delivery.

Agencies referred to for additional assistance

1. Community Information & Referral bureaus – ex CABs
2. Financial counseling services
3. D&A services e.g. Taskforce
4. School well-being staff member
5. Centrelink

Models of Financial Assistance

1. Application to State Schools Relief fund
2. Application for EMA
3. Application to “Counting the Kids” brokerage fund
4. Distribution of School Start vouchers
5. Referral to support agencies
6. Discounts e.g. for early payment
7. Progressive payment plan
8. Repayment plan
9. Pay as you go plan
10. Second Hand goods
11. Class sets on loan
12. Waiving of payment
13. School discretionary funds
14. Apply for Education Tax Refund

Appendix 4: Payment plan template

INSTALMENT/PAYMENT PLAN

Name of School:
Fax:

Telephone:
Email:

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Payment Details

1. **Payment For:** _____

2. **Total amount Owning:** \$ _____

3. Payment Agreement

I, _____, agree to pay the total amount owing by the following payment schedule:

Payment Schedule: Weekly \$ -----
 Fortnightly \$ -----
 Monthly \$ -----

Commencement Date: _____

Payment Option: Cash Cheque Direct Debit

4. Parent / Guardian details:

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

(signature)

Telephone: Home: _____

 Business: _____

 Mobile: _____

If Applicable, Direct Debit Details:

Card Number: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Card Type: Bankcard Mastercard Visa Expiry Date: ___ / ___

Cardholder's:

Name:

Signature:



Appendix 5: Education-related support for families

The following is a list of support suggestions for homelessness specialist services supporting families with school aged children.

Assisting Parents with:

1. developing stronger links between them and the school
2. attending meetings at the school
3. working out who to talk to at school
4. asking for assistance at the school
5. gaining further confidence so that they can approach the school when they are unhappy about something or do not understand something
6. budgeting for school expenses and knowing how to apply for financial assistance
7. supporting their children in gaining a worthwhile education (prioritising regular attendance, facilitating homework completion, aspirations)
8. validating parent's own school experiences and its impact on their children
9. addressing health issues (e.g. hearing, eyesight, dental) which may be affecting their child's learning
10. completing forms and applications and consent requests
11. increasing their understanding of the school system (student reports, P/T interviews, consent forms, EMA, codes of conduct, school newsletter)
12. addressing other issues which may be impacting on their child's learning (e.g. legal, mental health, addictive behaviours, family violence, parenting style).
13. their child's transition to their new school

Assisting the Students with:

1. additional learning support
2. homework completion
3. textbooks, uniforms, camp fees, excursion costs, computers
4. attending school more regularly
5. finding school more enjoyable and meaningful
6. feeling part of the school community and feeling important and valued
7. reducing disruptive behaviour
8. taking part in extra school activities e.g. sport, music, drama
9. increasing their willingness to learn
10. reducing illness due to anxiety about school
11. with moving to their new school
12. increasing school's understanding of special support needs
13. improving their literacy and numeracy skills
14. additional emotional support

Assisting the Schools with:

1. effective communication with parents
2. meetings with parents
3. informing and involving parents in behaviour management strategies
4. using telephone interpreters
5. understanding the family situation
6. developing strategies to ease the burden of education costs
7. additional learning support programs
8. referrals to community supports
9. parental completion of documents, applications, consent forms
10. addressing health-related matters
11. the transition of students to their new school

Appendix 6: Assessment tool

The following assessment tool has been designed for parents to complete to assist support workers identify the challenges families face in keeping children engaged with school.

Background Details

1. Housing type: **please tick** ✓
.... Transitional housing; Private Rental; Office of Housing;
.... Shared housing; Other (please explain):.....
2. What suburb do you live in? :
3. For everybody living in your household:
Age:..... Age:..... Age:..... Age:.....
 M/F M/F M/F M/F

School Details

4. **For your children who are attending school in 2009:**
 - a) What are the names of the schools?
.....
.....
 - b) What year levels are your children in for 2009?
5. **For each child at school,**
 - a) Do you think they are happy at school?.....
 - b) Do they usually complete their homework?.....
If not, what are the reasons?
.....
.....
 - c) Are you able to assist them with their homework?
If not, why is it difficult?
.....
.....
 - d) Do you have any concerns about their schooling?
If so, what are they?
.....
.....
6. **Since starting school:**
 - a) How many times have your children changed school?
 - b) What were the reasons for the changes?
.....
.....
7. During 2008, how much contact did you have with the schools and for what reasons?
.....
.....
8. Do you usually attend Parent / Teacher interviews?
If **YES**, how were they helpful?
If **NO**, what prevented you from going?
9. What education costs do you find difficult to afford?
.....
.....



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10. Have you spoken to the school about your financial difficulties?
If **YES**, whom did you speak to and how did they help?
.....
.....
If **NO**, what prevented you from talking to the school?
.....
.....
11. Which of the following have you ever received? Please **tick** ✓
..... EMA Medicate Teen Dental Scheme
..... Centrelink Internet Connection Allowance School Start bonus
..... State Schools Relief Committee assistance Education Tax Refund
12. During 2008, how many times were your children absent from school?
.....
13. What were the reasons for those absences?
.....
.....
14. Thinking back to your own school experiences:
a) How much did you enjoy school?
.....
b) Did you experience any difficult times? Please explain
.....
c) What is the highest year level you completed?
15. What education or training have you completed since leaving school?
.....
16. Have you been employed since leaving school?
a) If **YES**, please describe your jobs.
.....
b) If **NO**, what were the reasons?
.....
17. Is it important to you that your children complete Year 12?
a) If **YES**, why is it important?
.....
b) If **NO**, why is it not important?
.....
18. What would you like to see your children do when they have completed Year 12?
.....
.....
19. What would each of your children like to do when they have finished Year 12?
.....
.....

Appendix 7: Parity article

Homelessness, Impoverished Language and Educational Engagement:

What's the link?

Linda Davis, Project Coordinator Education Pilot

Hanover Welfare Services

As published in Parity Volume 22, Issue 6 July 2009

It is widely known that students experiencing homelessness are more likely to disengage from school, to have lower school attendance, to leave school before year 12, and to have lower levels of educational attainment. Disengagement is particularly linked to lack of success in the middle years of school (Black 2007). It is also well documented that growing up in poverty can continually compromise a student's readiness to learn, particularly in the domain of language development (Hilferty and Redmond 2009).

The unfortunate consequences of these combined circumstances are likely to be reduced life opportunities, lower levels of social inclusion, and language skills that struggle to cope with the demands of communication, self-expression and information processing.

Impoverished language skills have emerged as a major issue for students participating in a pilot project funded by a grant from the National Homelessness Strategy. The 2 year pilot is a joint initiative of Hanover Welfare Services, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and the Foundation for Young Australians.

The aim of the project has been to explore ways of enhancing educational engagement. The participating students are in the middle years of schooling from years 5 to 9 and they live within families experiencing homelessness. The project workers collected information from participating students and their families, their schools and community supports. In addition to impoverished language skills, the data revealed that many issues were impacting on educational engagement. The issues include high levels of learning difficulties and trauma related behaviours and of inadequate resources to assist, ineffective communication channels between schools and parents, and difficulties meeting the rising cost of public education.

This article will focus on project strategies aimed at reducing the impact of impoverished language on the educational engagement of students experiencing homelessness.

The project workers found that stimulation in the home was often lacking from books and written materials, from conversation and discussion, and from a positive learning environment. The experience of transience was usually accompanied by frequent change of school. For many students, this resulted in gaps in learning, poor access to teacher aides, lack of continuity of support, and poor transfer of student related information to the new school. Most students had experienced some form of learning-inhibiting trauma - family violence, resettlement, incarceration or family breakdown. Parents were grappling with a multitude of complex issues that had contributed to the family's housing breakdown. So many of the parents had a reduced capacity to encourage and nurture their children's learning, and to manoeuvre their way effectively through the school system. Being on low incomes and lacking sound budgeting skills, the parents were constantly challenged by the financial demands of educating their children.

Against this family backdrop of homelessness and the resulting disruption, the students were generally described by their teachers as being below the level of their peers in reading, spelling and writing. Their vocabulary was limited and they often found it difficult to express, through language, their thoughts and emotions. Their capacity to process information was limited in speed and quantity. Students seemed more responsive to visual than verbal modes of conveying information. Teachers reported that students' poorly developed language skills restricted further learning, caused further damage to a student's depleted sense of self, severely



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curtailed student involvement in classroom activities, and contributed to inappropriate behaviours as a means of communication.

In order to ameliorate the impact of homelessness on language skills and educational engagement, the project mobilised the following strategies.

Assessment Process

The project identified that the provision of educational support for children was generally not central to support case plans developed by workers within the homelessness sector. The assessment and provision of support was often limited to schools attended, academic ability, and financial assistance for education costs. The project developed a comprehensive assessment tool to guide the nature of education support provided to students and their families. The tool was used to explore students' attitudes to school and learning, parental contact with the school, reasons for school changes, parental capacity to manage education costs, reasons for school absences, and parental aspirations for their children.

The assessment process revealed that many students were keen to attend school but became anxious once there, There was also a reluctance to participate in class, and to complete homework. It also showed that contact with parents was usually initiated by the school and centred on concerns with behaviour management, poor academic performance, or unpaid monies. Further exploration revealed that students and their parents often found it difficult to seek assistance and often felt unsupported by the school.

The assessment tool became an effective template for identifying education related support needs, for devising support plans, and for collecting and analysing education-related client data.

Learning Support for Students

Learning support presented as a major focus of project support for students. The project assisted schools to mobilise additional support for students (e.g. remedial support), to tailor support to the needs of the student within their family context, and to access community resources for a wider suite of supports (e.g. tutoring, homework support).

Student well-being, self-expression and resilience were enhanced, attitudes to

learning and classroom behaviours improved, and trauma related barriers to learning were addressed within individual learning plans.

Partnerships

The project identified and met regularly with key contact people in the schools – welfare coordinators, principals, year level coordinators. The project parameters were explained, information was shared about the students and their family situation, and strategies were developed to jointly support the student and their family. Parents and students were nurtured and encouraged to participate in the process and to have a voice. They commented on how important and valued they felt, that they felt included and actively involved in their children's education. School practices became more responsive to individual student need, and support agencies worked more closely with schools to provide an extensive package of support.

Empowering Parents

The project found that parental experiences of school played an important part in parents' involvement in and support for their children's education. Some parents felt anxious about approaching the school because of their own damaging experiences. Others who had left school early felt inadequate to assist their children with homework or to articulate their needs to teachers. Parents who had fled to Australia as refugees had very little, if any, exposure to formal education. They were often illiterate in their first language and in English. They found it extremely difficult to process and respond to written information sent home from school.

The project worked in partnership with schools and parents to enable parents to feel more comfortable approaching the school, and to enable schools to become more welcoming. Parents became more familiar with school practices and resources, and more confident about communicating and engaging with the school, and became more involved in school activities.

Addressing Education Costs

Parents reported to the project that education costs were a constant source of stress. They said it was often necessary to cut back on other expenses so that money could be found for camps, uniforms, excursions etc. Students said that they

worried about not being like everyone else but at the same time they knew that the family budget was under strain. Sometimes they stayed away from school on excursion days or didn't even bring home the notices.

The project advocated for schools to offer parents and students the option of payment plans, textbook loans, discounts, second hand goods and access to financial assistance. Schools were assisted to develop sensitive procedures for financially assisting students.

The project identified that there were many pockets of available education funding – in the form of refunds, vouchers, bonuses, scholarships, allowances, material aid, grants, offers and concessions. However, access was often difficult because of cumbersome procedures and lack of knowledge. The project developed and distributed a database of funding resources, and encouraged schools and parents to seek out available assistance. Parents were also encouraged to budget for predicted education expenses, to seek out retail specials, to reuse stationery, textbooks and uniforms, and to sell unwanted items.

Parents began to feel more confident about managing school costs and they felt less stressed knowing their children would not miss out. Students were able to purchase textbooks and to complete homework. Schools and agencies began to work with parents and students to reduce the burden of funding education.

Transitioning to Other Schools

Many students have experienced multiple school moves. This has resulted in gaps in learning, fractured friendship groups, low levels of inclusion in the school community, and disruption to specific support programs. For those students changing schools after an Office of Housing offer or transition to year 7, the project has advocated for the transfer of more comprehensive information to the new school and for higher levels of support for the students and their families.

Students and their families have felt acknowledged and welcomed, and support has been mobilised by the schools with concern and sensitivity.

Conclusion

The project implemented a wide range of case work practices to reduce the impact of impoverished language and other issues and to enhance the educational engagement of students within families experiencing homelessness. The project clearly demonstrated that to provide effective and targeted education related support within the homelessness sector, services require:

- a strong commitment to the provision of education-related support
- policies and procedures that enable children to be supported in their own right
- a comprehensive education assessment tool,
- strong coalitions with schools and community agencies to enable effective and sustainable networks and partnerships,
- relevant knowledge and skills to enhance education related support,
- targeted resources - staff, funds, tools, children's resource workers and
- a commitment to advocate and influence at a systemic level.

References

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Appendix 8: Dissemination workshops

Practice dissemination was a key element of the Education Development Project as was advocacy for practice change.

The Education Development Workers organised and presented at numerous different workshops as well as meeting one on one with staff from state government departments, local government, schools, welfare agencies and particularly housing support agencies.

The following is a list and brief description of some of these workshops.

(Note those forums marked with an * were evaluated and the data included in this report)

Workshops organised as part of the project

Half way there*	A workshop organised and facilitated by the Education Development Workers as part of a broader conference during Anti-Poverty week on education and homelessness. The workshop focused on raising awareness of the challenges facing families experiencing homelessness and what the project was doing to assist them.
Education Costs Forum*	This workshop was developed in response to an identified need to share across schools and agencies information on what financial assistance is available to families to meet the costs of education.
Hanover service workshops*	Workshops were held at the various Hanover sites to share the learnings arising from the project and assist in practice change.
Understanding Poverty forum*	The Understanding Poverty forum was conducted in partnership with Anglicare and was designed to raise awareness within schools of the challenges facing families and particularly students in poverty.

Workshops presented at as part of the project

- DEECD team meeting
- Family support network meeting
- SAAP regional meeting*
- Allied Health and Homelessness Forum
- City of Kingston Team meeting
- DEECD homelessness guidelines reference group
- Connections Team Meeting*

Workshops and forums attended

- Crossing the Divide Conference
- Ardoc Forum
- School based mentoring forum
- ACER Conference

Hanover 
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Improving educational
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for children experiencing
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