

## What is Thriving Families?

The Thriving Families Project aims to create sustainable change for families experiencing homelessness so that they can create stable homes and nurturing family environments where all family members can flourish.



### Background

YFS backs vulnerable people to overcome adversity and to thrive. Underpinning this goal is the recognition that integrated ways of working are required to address issues and barriers that cut across program boundaries and funding streams. A joined-up approach to service delivery can improve access, efficiency and effectiveness – ultimately resulting in a more seamless experience and better outcomes for clients.

The YFS Board has funded the project from reserve funds for two years from 1 July 2019 as a way for the organisation to trial an integrated approach to services for families. The initiative is supported by Logan Together, the Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA) and Pathways to Resilience.



### Project evaluation

The first nine months of implementation (from 1 July 2019 to 31 March 2020) were reviewed to discover insights from the initial implementation phase, identify early outcomes and inform the future direction of the project. The interim evaluation drew on program data and staff interviews.<sup>1</sup>

### Participating families

**32** families have engaged with the program so far, including:

- 23 young parent families (under 26)
- 24 single parent families
- 6 Indigenous families
- 2 culturally and linguistically diverse families
- 22 homeless families
- 10 families at risk of homelessness

### Key Findings

While still early in its implementation, the interim evaluation indicates the program:

- is effective in engaging and meeting the needs of families
- is cost efficient and effective in providing integrated housing and family support services
- could potentially reduce the burden on government services through intervening early and preventing further entry into tertiary services.

### Housing outcomes

Participating families have a much greater likelihood of accessing and sustaining housing than they would without support or with the usual supports available. At end March:

**27** families housed

**84%** housing success rate (compared to 64% for specialist homelessness services nationally)

**94%** housing sustainment rate (compared to 80-90% typical sustainment rates for tenancy support programs)

**8 in 10** families housed within one month.



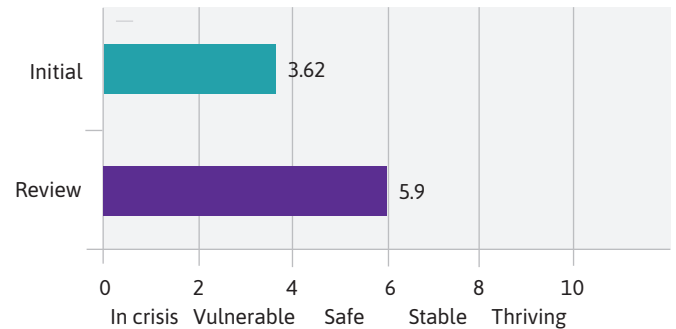
<sup>1</sup> Client interviews were postponed due to COVID 19 but are scheduled for later in 2020 to inform a full evaluation report.

## Moving beyond crisis to thriving

Thriving Families aims to move people beyond crisis and into thriving. Progress is measured along a ten-point continuum across 12 key aspects of thriving.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, families presented in crisis or vulnerable, with an average rating of 3.62 out of 10. This has subsequently increased to 5.90 out of 10, as families' circumstances stabilised, providing them a stronger foundation from which to thrive over time.

<sup>2</sup> Using the Thriving Families Matrix, a tool custom-developed by YFS.



**94%** of families have progressed towards thriving

## Strengths

The integrated, long-term, flexible and aspirational approach adopted by Thriving Families offers a significant value-add over traditional short-term housing work, enabling the program to rapidly stabilise housing and to:

- ▶ address underlying issues contributing to housing instability
- ▶ identify and address emerging issues before they escalate
- ▶ build skills to help prevent or manage any future crises
- ▶ resource parents to pursue aspirations for themselves and their children
- ▶ reduce the likelihood of repeat cycles of homelessness.

*“Short, sharp interventions may prop a family up for a little while, but then they’ll fall over and services have to start from the beginning... Instead we invest upfront and then withdraw slowly as we build independence and community connectedness.”*

*“Getting people housed is easy, but sustaining tenancies, that’s the hard part. That’s where the team work comes in. If there is an issue, we get in early and address it.”*

*“Having both the coach and the housing specialist working alongside helps families to overcome any bumps.”*

## Challenges

Maintaining an intentional focus on skill building and converting parental aspirations into concrete plans proved challenging at times, in part due to:

- a longer than anticipated settlement period once housed
- disruptive life events, such as episodes of mental health and domestic and family violence
- other destabilising factors, particularly harmful relationships.

Several strategies have been adopted to address these issues and enable progress even during difficult circumstances.

## Learnings

The Thriving Families initiative has provided significant learnings to inform the ongoing development of Thriving Families and possible application within YFS more broadly.

### Key success factors for service integration

- reconciling cultural differences between housing work and family support work
- anchoring the work around housing (which requires urgency for effectiveness)
- adopting a dynamic approach where roles and responsibilities are fluid rather than fixed
- sharing information transparently across the team.

These strategies would not work in all circumstances.

### Key success factors for resourcing families to overcome adversity and thrive

Being truly responsive to families' needs requires:

- a balanced approach that is both structured and flexible and combines practical and aspirational support
- agility and mastery of different tools and techniques at different stages in the change process
- a deep understanding of the impact of trauma and poverty
- an openness to learning and different ways of working.

For more information contact [communications@yfs.org.au](mailto:communications@yfs.org.au)