Thriving Families Project

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.

What would it take to thrive?

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.

Our approach

✔ **evidence informed** – based on an extensive literature review, interviews with clients about their experiences of the service system, staff consultations and review of program outcomes

✔ **prevention and early intervention** - families are much more likely to be sustainably housed if tenancy issues can be addressed early

✔ **two-generational** - families do better when parents and children's needs are considered together, because the benefits are mutually reinforcing

✔ **trauma-responsive** - supporting healing and recovery through facilitating safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment

✔ **relationship-based** – relationships are the vehicle through which change happens

✔ **aspirational** – encouraging a positive future focus

✔ **multi-disciplinary** – a wide range of services delivered by a team of specialists.

Who is the program designed to benefit?

The program targets families with children aged 0-5 who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing it for the first time.

Intervening early in families' experience of homelessness gives children the best possible chance of growing up in a positive family environment.

Prevention and early intervention services are effective. People are much more likely to be successfully housed if tenancy issues can be addressed early.

Specialist Homelessness Service clients housed after support (Australia-wide)
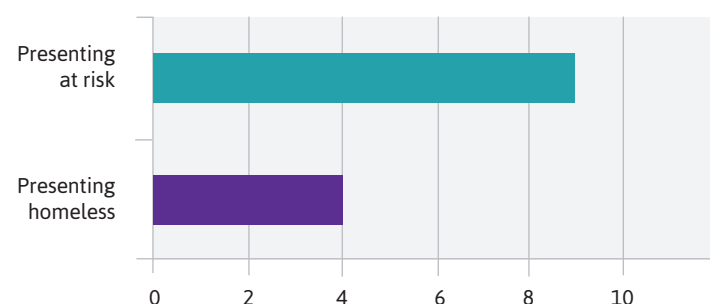
Housing and homelessness is a significant issue in Logan, accounting for approximately half of all contacts to YFS.[i] If unaddressed, homelessness is often repeated as families can cycle in and out of insecure and inappropriate housing.[ii]

54% of people seeking help from specialist homelessness services in 2017-18 in Australia had been previously homeless in the past five years.[iii]

Homelessness is very damaging for children. It can have a significant impact on children's physical and socio-emotional health and wellbeing and cognitive development.[iv] It is also associated with increased likelihood of child safety involvement.[v]

90% of brain development occurs during the ages 0-5. This is the period where there is the most opportunity to positively influence children's trajectories over the life course.[vi]
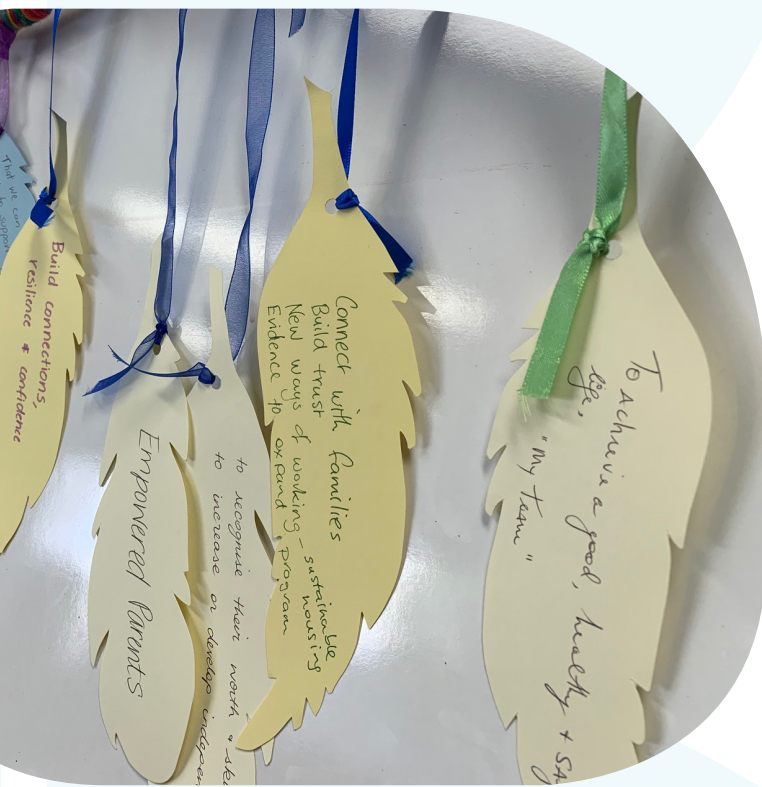
Training with Pathways to Resilience has helped the family coaches develop strategies to help people deal with trauma.

What works for homeless families to thrive?

The Thriving Families Project provides a fast response to the housing crisis coupled with ongoing support to address underlying and emerging issues.

Research shows that housing support is essential but not sufficient. Access to appropriate and affordable accommodation coupled with intentional support improves the likelihood that people stay housed in the long term.[vii] Families who are homeless may present with complex causal factors including past trauma, domestic violence, mental health issues and substance misuse.[viii]

42% of people accessing specialist homelessness services reported experiencing domestic and family violence in 2017-18. This is most commonly single mums with young children.

37% of these also reported experiencing either a mental health issue and/or problematic substance use.

Families need access to multiple and diverse services.

- **tenancy sustainment**
- **practical support**
- **money management**
- **employment pathways**
- **safety planning**
- **counselling**
- **parenting**
- **early childhood education**
- **community connections.**

Engagement and retention strategy

Program outcomes are greater when engagement and retention are high. Yet disengagement rates are high across the human services, and those who could benefit the most from services are often least likely to engage. In particular, there is a real risk of disengagement after housing has been stabilised and/or basic needs met – representing a potential fail point. The challenge is to maintain engagement so that clients move beyond practical support towards more aspirational goals.

Strategies to increase program retention

- appealing to families' interests to enhance intrinsic motivation
- offering choice and flexibility in how and when services get delivered
- establishing an aspirational focus and planting the seed for high expectations early on
- being relentless in engagement through regular contact and outreach
- forming trusting relationships as a foundation for more in-depth work.

Building resilience and sustaining change

Resilience, hope and self-efficacy are critical enablers of change on the pathway to thriving. They facilitate positive adaptation to adversity, the belief that goals are achievable, and the competence and confidence to work towards those goals, regardless of the challenges along the way.

One of the key elements of the Thriving Families Project model is the intentional skill building component designed to 'bridge the gap' and shift the emphasis from addressing adversity and crisis towards strengthening capacity.

The ability to regulate emotions, relate to others, and reason provides the foundation for enhanced executive skills - those that enable us to effectively manage the challenges of daily living, to make decisions, solve problems, and progress towards goals.[ix, x]

Neurosequential model of brain development

REASON
Make decisions
Solve problems

RELATE
Connect with others

REGULATE
Stay calm | Feel safe

A SAFE HOME
A GOOD LIFE
Thrivingfamilies
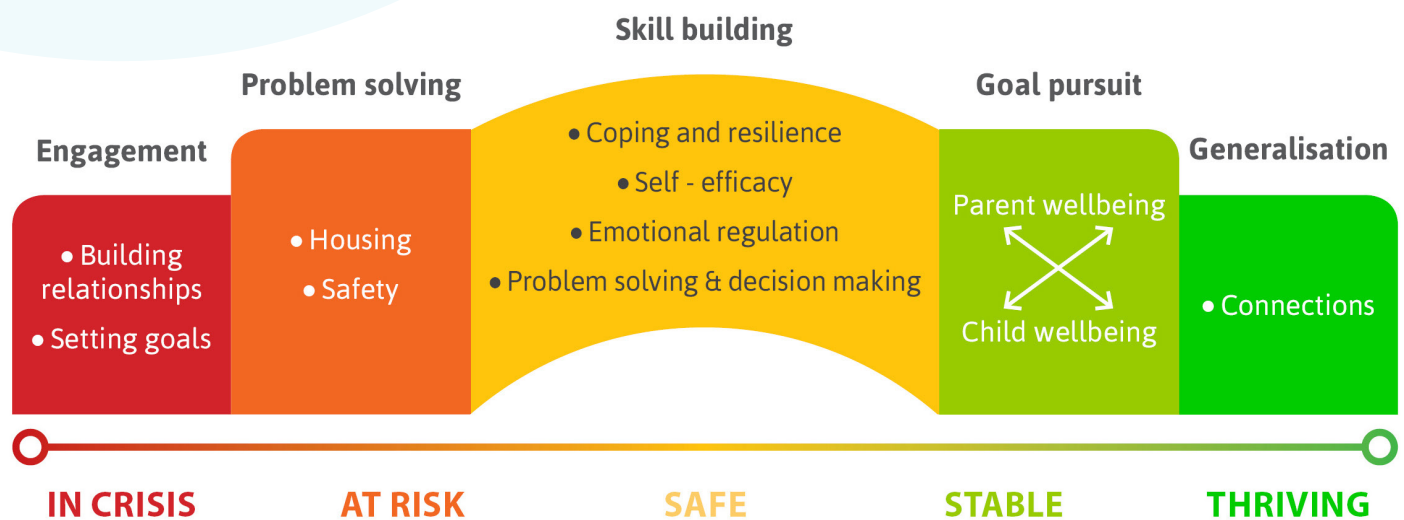A YFS INITIATIVE FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Social impact

The program aims to make a demonstrable social impact in key areas which, if unaddressed, are known to be costly to both families and the service system and promoting factors which are associated with positive life trajectories for children (and in turn future cost savings and tax revenue for Government):

✔ avoiding 'revolving tenancies' or churn in and out of the homelessness system by sustaining stable housing for 12 months

✔ avoiding child safety involvement or escalation, compared to population norms

✔ avoiding long-term welfare dependence by increasing financial inclusion and self-sufficiency

✔ promoting early childhood development through positive parenting and increased engagement with early learning.

Program outcomes

The Thriving Families Matrix, a tool custom-developed by YFS, will monitor families' progress along a ten-point continuum from 'in crisis' to 'thriving' across 12 key aspects of thriving. The Matrix will be administered throughout families' engagement to measure change over time.

Skill building

Problem solving

Goal pursuit

Engagement

Generalisation

- Coping and resilience
- Self - efficacy
- Emotional regulation
- Problem solving & decision making

- Building relationships
- Setting goals

- Housing
- Safety

Parent wellbeing

Child wellbeing

- Connections

IN CRISIS   **AT RISK**   **SAFE**   **STABLE**   **THRIVING**

Embedding learning

The initiative will inform future work in YFS, as well as hopefully future government policy, program design and commissioning.

Thriving Families provides a unique opportunity to test key service elements that appear to contribute to positive outcomes for families. Through this we can refine our understanding of what works for whom in the Logan context. We will use what we learn to improve our services across the board, incorporating the proven elements into existing and future programs.

The project also serves a demonstration project for the CSIA's Commissioning for Outcomes focus, an initiative to change the way government funds services so that better outcomes can be achieved.

For more information contact communications@yfs.org.au

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