

Homeless families continue to struggle

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An alarming number of families have their rights denied, struggle to obtain and keep affordable housing and have their human rights and dignity diminished when accessing services, according to a new report based on the personal accounts of parents dealing with homelessness.

The report, *Fighting for my Family*, was prepared by researchers from Swinburne University of Technology, Professor Kath Hulse and Dr Andrea Sharam, with Hanover Welfare Services.

Its findings are based on 152 in-depth interviews with 57 families - from Melbourne and regional Victoria - experiencing homelessness over an 18-month period. Interviews were held with parents and some [teenage children](#).

"The evidence indicates that even when the families' housing situations improved they remained vulnerable to future homelessness as being homeless often left them with debts that were hard to address," Professor Hulse said.

"Many of the families were re-traumatised by violence, predatory behaviour and coercion, especially when referred or offered accommodation which was unsafe."

Despite this hardship, the families were adamant about being a part of the mainstream and resisted being marginalised. They did not feel that their children received the kind of assistance needed to protect them from harm, which affected their sense of belonging.

Tony Keenan, Hanover's Chief Executive, said the research showed that while a lot of work had been done to increase the support available to families many still struggled due to a lack of affordable housing.

"As the affordable housing crisis deepens we're seeing an increasing number of families doing it tough," Mr Keenan said.

"The research showed the underlying causes of family homelessness were unemployment, poverty and a shocking lack of affordable housing. Domestic violence remains a big factor in family homelessness, but for many families, falling behind in rent, being evicted and locked out of the private rental market are significant factors contributing to family homelessness.

"In spite of significant adversity, the research showed that families doing it tough are resilient, and they remain committed to getting housing and supporting their families."

Mr Keenan said that Hanover is involved with a number of successful

programs focussed on reducing family homelessness, and with continued investment, more families could be prevented from experiencing homelessness.

The report makes a number of recommendations including a renewed focus on anti-poverty strategies, increasing the supply of affordable housing for families with children and ensuring that programs and practice work in a way that mean families are not marginalised.

It also recommends that approaches to family homelessness respect and support the family as a unit and empower parents to care for their children, and a more explicit strengths-based approach to [family](#) homelessness be applied - utilising mainstream agencies and services.

More information: sirs.net/flagships/sustainable/pdf/Fighting%20for%20my%20family%20REPORT_ONLINE_for%20publication%2013%20Aug%202013.pdf

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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