

Breaking the cycle between family violence and homelessness

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Women who become homeless as a result of family and domestic violence are also facing legal and financial issues that make it hard for them to make a fresh start, according to an evaluation report on the Safe

as Houses pilot program.

Released to coincide with Homelessness Week 2019, the report by a research team from The University of Western Australia's School of Population and Global Health, evaluated the impact of Safe as Houses (SASH).

SASH is a partnership of three established community legal centers: Tenancy WA, Women's Legal Service WA and Street Law Centre WA. The service was set up in 2017 to integrate legal and non-legal support for women who face the challenges of family and [domestic violence](#) and homelessness.

It provides [legal assistance](#) and wraparound case management to help clients with complex legal, financial and [social issues](#).

Lead researcher Associate Professor Lisa Wood said for many women, leaving a violent relationship meant leaving your home and losing financial and housing security.

"Assisting women with family law property matters and tenancy issues is one of the most common forms of support provided by SASH," Associate Professor Wood said.

Since it started SASH has helped 133 women, all of whom were homeless or at high risk of homelessness. Nearly two-thirds were caring for dependent children.

As part of the evaluation, the research team interviewed some of the women supported by SASH, and gained feedback from community and health organizations that had referred clients to SASH.

"Many of the SASH clients have a complex mix of legal, financial and

housing issues, and are very vulnerable," Associate Professor Wood said. "Before SASH it was hard for them to find a single program that could help them with legal needs, while also providing other wrap around support.

"One client told the research team: "He was trying to get me evicted, by stopping paying the rent but he was also hitting me with property settlement and all these other legal issues that I couldn't respond to because I couldn't afford a lawyer."

"SASH not only helped her navigate these legal issues, but also provided vital emotional and practical support."

SASH complements the work of other homelessness services in the community as it can provide critical legal advice and support for housing, tenancy and property law matters, while also connecting clients to other community support.

The evaluation found that the SASH program also made good economic sense. Associate Professor Wood said homelessness and family and domestic violence placed a huge economic burden on the health system, courts and community services.

Executive Manager of Tenancy WA, Carmen Acosta, said the average cost of providing specialist legal and case management support through Safe as Houses was about \$3000 per client.

"This is tremendous value when you consider that the cost of someone sleeping rough is approximately \$25,000 a year to the community, but of course we know the human and emotional cost is far greater," Ms Acosta said.

"There is no doubt that the SASH program is providing essential and

unique wrap around services to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. This [evaluation report](#) highlights the benefits of the program while demonstrating the impact for individuals and the community when appropriate programs don't exist.

"We call upon the government to recognize the effectiveness and value of this program and provide the necessary ongoing funding so that Safe as Houses can continue to provide the vital legal and non-legal supports these [women](#) deserve."

More information: Safe as Houses: Preventing Homelessness for Women and Children Affected by Family and Domestic Violence: [www.safeashouses.tenancywa.org ... Report-June-2019.pdf](http://www.safeashouses.tenancywa.org...Report-June-2019.pdf)

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