

A Call for Contributions for the November 2009 edition of Parity

Rethinking Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Introduction

This edition of *Parity* is based on the premise that it is now time to open up for examination and discussion, the conceptual, public policy and programmatic nexus between domestic/family violence and homelessness in Australia.

The reality is that women and children leaving domestic/family violence are categorised as a sub-set of the homeless population. With great regularity in both official discourse and advocacy, the victims of domestic and family violence are counted as the single largest group within the wider homeless population; or domestic and family violence is conceptualised as the single greatest cause of homelessness in Australia.

Clearly in the Australian social policy context, there remains a close linking of domestic violence and homelessness. This conjoining goes back at least to the establishment of the SAAP Program in the early 1980s if not before. Indeed an argument can be made that this linking is itself the product of specific historical and public policy circumstances and imperatives.

Despite this linkage, it could be argued that domestic and family violence has often fallen off the radar of some in both government and parts of the NGO sector when responding to homelessness. As a result, it is sometimes said that there has not been sufficient coordination between a range of service systems that impact on homelessness that is driven by domestic and family violence.

Some Questions

Programmatic Relationships

The question might therefore be asked as to whether the historical, social, political, public policy and service delivery circumstances have now changed sufficiently to bring this conjoining, this linking of domestic (or family) violence and homelessness, into question. This is especially the case in the context of the proposals for change contained within the recent Commonwealth Government White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*. The creation of State and Territory Homelessness Implementation Plans under the part of the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Homelessness, as well as the development of a Homelessness Action Plan in NSW and the redevelopment of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, only highlight the need to consider the questions connected to the policy and program linkage of homelessness and domestic violence.



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To put it another way, does the current linking of domestic (or family) violence and homelessness do justice, on a whole range of levels, to the needs and requirements of those leaving domestic (or family) violence, and as importantly, does it do justice to the needs and requirements of those (especially women) who are homeless for reasons (or causes) other than domestic (or family) violence?

Alternatively, does the White Paper's strategy of 'turning off the tap' and the development of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children and the National Child Protection Framework provide further opportunities to strengthen integration between the multiple service systems that women and children who are homeless as a result of domestic and family violence interact with? How could meaningful integration be achieved?

What have been the benefits and advantages of the historical connection between domestic (or family violence) and homelessness? What are examples of good policy/practice that have evolved throughout the history of this linkage in SAAP that provides benefits to SAAP clients? Would these kinds of responses have been able to develop in the absence of such linkage?

What are some of the lessons from the history and development of the SAAP system, the domestic and family violence and child protection systems that impact on the relationship between the service systems?

Given the existing strong link between family violence and homelessness, what might separate systems for "homelessness" and "family violence" look like? Is there a model that might be proposed to stimulate further discussion/consideration of this possibility?

If there were separate systems how could we keep homelessness driven by domestic and family violence visible?

Given what we already know about the numbers of people being turned away from SAAP services, should not this fundamental linkage between domestic (or family) violence and homelessness in terms of policy and program and service development and delivery, be put on the agenda for examination and debate?

Service Delivery Models

How does the core business of family violence organisations — the safety of women and children — differ from core business of homelessness organisations?

Are the specific skills, knowledge, understandings that DV workers require that ensure quality practice and service delivery qualitatively different from those that are required by those working in the general homelessness system?

Are these differences significant and if so why? How do these differences shape the policy, procedures and practices of family violence organisations and therefore, the options and outcomes available for women and children?

What is the best way to ensure that we retain a strong gendered response to family violence?

How can/should we conceptualise the relationship between women's homelessness, domestic violence and indeed, other forms of men's violence against women?

More specifically, what do women's homelessness and domestic violence services share — both in terms of the women accessing their services as well as their service response and advocacy?

Furthermore, to what extent do generalist homelessness services adequately respond to the needs of women's particular experiences of violence and homelessness?

Meeting Client Needs

Could the needs and requirements of those seeking refuge from domestic (or family) violence be better met and served if they were considered the victims of crime rather than as "homeless"?

Likewise, could the needs of those whose homelessness is not connected with domestic (or family violence) be better met if the conceptual and public policy linkages were broken?

Or given that we know children who experience homelessness, many of whom may have experienced domestic and family violence, are more likely to experience adult homelessness could these links be used to strengthen homelessness prevention and early intervention strategies?

Similarly, a question might be asked as to whether the current DV and family violence policy and program arrangements adequately meet the needs of the large numbers of women who are homeless but who are (for whatever reason) not eligible for assistance from domestic (or family) violence services.

Following on from this, a question can be asked about how well current arrangements meet the needs of women who experience violence within the homelessness system? For these women, what if any are the advantages and disadvantages of family violence being incorporated/situated within the homelessness service system?

What has been the impact of linking domestic violence and homelessness on our response to children who experience or witness domestic violence?

How have domestic and family violence services responded to the needs of 'accompanying' children? What are the current opportunities are there to continue to strengthen responses to children?

Does the fact that women experiencing domestic violence become homeless because of their violent partner's behaviour and not other factors, mean that a domestic violence and family response should be very different to a homelessness response?

What should a specialist women's housing response to women experiencing domestic and family violence look like?

How would such services incorporate the need to understand women's issues around security of address and where they need to be located and the need for flexible responses where women are tracked down by their violent partners?

What types of safe and secure accommodation would make up a specialist women's housing response to women experiencing domestic and family violence?

NB: The questions posed above are only offered here as starting points for an examination and discussion of the relationship between domestic/family violence and homelessness.

The ambition of this project is to open up rather than close off any possible issues and themes for discussion and debate. If potential contributors have topics not covered in any of the above questions they should still feel welcome to contribute to this discussion.

Contributing to this edition *Parity*

Deadline

All contributions are welcome and need to be submitted by **Friday, November 20th**.

Submissions

All contributions should be submitted as Word attachments to an email addressed to parity@chp.org.au

Contributions are usually between 900 words, (single page) and 1800 words (double page). If additional space is required please contact the *Parity* Editor. Please send submissions as a MS Word attachment to parity@chp.org.au or ring (03) 9419 8699 to discuss. Images and artwork are welcome.

Assistance

Feedback and input can be provided with drafts. If prospective contributors have any questions at all they should contact Noel Murray, *Parity* Editor at parity@chp.org.au or (03) 9419 8699.

This Call for Contributions has been developed by Domestic Violence Victoria, the NSW Women's Refuge Movement, Domestic Violence Resource Centre, WESNET and the Council to Homeless Persons.

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