

SAFE AS HOUSES

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFECTED BY FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



EVALUATION REPORT

JUNE 2019

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SAFE as HOUSES
Preventing Homelessness for Women & Children



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AUSTRALIA**



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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Safe as Houses or any of the partner agencies more broadly. No responsibility is accepted by Safe as Houses or any of the partner agencies for the accuracy or omission of any statement, opinion, advice or information in this publication.

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List of Acronyms

AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CLASS	Community Legal Assistance Services System
CLC	Community Legal Centre
DCPFS	Department of Child Protection and Family Service
FDV	Family and Domestic Violence
FINWA	Family Inclusion Network WA
FVRO	Family Violence Restraining Order
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
UWA	University of Western Australia
SASH	Safe as Houses
WA	Western Australia
WAAEH	WA Alliance to End Homelessness
WAPOL	WA Police
WHFS	Women's Health and Family Services

Executive Summary

Background

Family and domestic violence (FDV) and homelessness are both pervasive societal issues with substantial human, social, health and financial consequences at the individual and community level. Homelessness and FDV also intersect, and among women in Australia, FDV is the most common driver of homelessness and precarious housing circumstances. Whilst the imperative to keep women and children safe from FDV is of highest priority, the reality is that even when women have left the violent relationship in question, they can be left with a litany of other stresses and challenges, often relating to financial insecurity, legal issues and risk of homelessness. Conventional legal and homelessness services are often only able to address part of the intertwined issues encountered, and having to retell one's story, or seek help from multiple agencies can be confusing and overwhelming. It is against this backdrop that the Safe as Houses program was conceived.

Safe as Houses (SASH) is a unique program that supports women and children who have experienced FDV and are either experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. SASH is a partnership of three established community legal centres, Tenancy WA, Women's Legal Service WA and Street Law WA, who collectively identified the need for integrated legal and non-legal support for women who face the challenges of homelessness and FDV. SASH aims to provide legal assistance coupled with wraparound case management to assist clients with their often complex legal, financial and social issues.

Since its inception and subsequent launch in March 2017, SASH, with Tenancy WA acting as the lead agency has comprised a program coordinator (who provides case management support) based at Tenancy WA and legal representatives from each partner agency. The program coordinator assesses clients' requirements and eligibility for the program and directs them to the partner agency with the relevant expertise. SASH has assisted 133 clients from March 2017 -February 2019.

This evaluation report describes the SASH program and its impacts to date from the perspectives of clients, the partner agencies delivering the SASH program, and external organisations who either refer clients to SASH, or have assisted SASH clients to address issues beyond the SASH remit.

Key Findings

Demographics and Client Profile

All SASH clients assisted to date were female with an average age of 40 years. The majority of SASH clients had children with the number of dependent children amongst these clients ranging from 1-7. Congruent with the sobering over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the prevalence of both FDV and homelessness in Australia, they comprised one quarter of SASH clients.¹ Just over one in five clients were of a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

At time of first contact with SASH, clients are often experiencing multiple, complex and intersecting legal issues. There has been a breadth of legal issues, including matters arising from FDV, child custody, family court matters, fines and infringements as well as tenancy, separation and property disputes. Financial issues were extremely common amongst clients at the time of their first contact with SASH. These included debts, infringements and unpaid fines, and mortgage issues, which were often a direct consequence of their experience of FDV, for example, property damage to rental property during a violent incident. Unpaid rent has substantial negative implications for maintaining housing security and was a major challenge for over a

quarter of SASH clients. All SASH clients were either homeless or at serious risk of homelessness when they entered the program. Recent evictions were common, affecting two in every ten clients. These precarious housing circumstances coupled with the repercussions of FDV and legal/financial stressors, in turn leave many clients vulnerable to stress, mental health problems and social isolation.

Client Perspectives

Overall the clients shared that they felt SASH provided personalised support in a range of ways, including legal advice, tenancy support, financial assistance, referral to counselling services and general living needs. The advocacy that SASH provided on their behalf was an important aspect of the service, particularly when concerning more complex matters. Clients perceived this as something that was lacking from other services they had been involved with previously. For some clients, SASH enabled them to leave an FDV situation, whilst for others SASH assisted them to address legal and tenancy issues that put them at risk of homelessness.

Partner Agency Perspectives

The SASH pilot program represents a new type of collaboration between the three community legal centres. A key benefit of SASH is the more coordinated response it can provide for women with multiple legal issues that extend beyond the remit of a single legal service. Partner agencies also noted that while clients present with prima facie legal matters, these are invariably intertwined with a myriad of other housing, social and financial issues, hence case management was seen as a critical pillar of SASH when it was conceived. The demand for SASH and the complexity of multiple legal and other needs has undoubtedly stretched program capacity at times, greater security in funding would assist an effective management of resources.

Stakeholder Perspectives

The SASH Program has a wide variety of stakeholders whom both refer clients to SASH and have clients referred from SASH, ranging from community-based outreach centres, community services organisations, health organisations and refuges for people who have experienced FDV. Many stakeholders identified the strengths of the SASH model and the critical void it has provided where clients have a multiplicity of legal and non-legal needs that put them at risk of homelessness. Significant benefits to clients of legal coupled with wrap around support were noted.

Recommendations and Conclusion

There were a number of suggestions for greater clarity around referral pathways, eligibility criteria and prioritisation of client needs as well as strengthening the case management model. Sharpening the focus on SASH's point of difference relative to other service providers, and securing sustainable funding are crucial going forward along with raising awareness of the program in other sectors such as WAPOL.

The SASH model offers a unique and essential program that will support women and children who are at risk of homelessness and have experienced FDV. This evaluation report provides an overview of the SASH organisation model of case management, initiatives, client demographics, utilisation of external support, and stakeholder collaborations to improve outcomes for this cohort. It includes insights from SASH clients, partner agencies and stakeholders and identifies opportunities to strengthen future service delivery and sustainability.

...it's like I said, I was amazed to find there was even something out there like that where they deal with you emotionally and they deal with your legal matters, just everything. – SASH Client

I Introduction

Family, domestic and sexual violence has a range of consequences for victims, perpetrators, families, workplaces, the community and the economy—they can be wide ranging, profound and enduring.^{2(p68)}

Whilst the imperative to keep women and children safe from family and domestic violence (FDV) is of highest priority, the reality is that even when women have left the homes in which this occurred and/or the violent relationship in question, they can be left with a litany of other stresses and challenges, often relating to financial insecurity, legal issues and risk of homelessness. Safe as Houses (SASH) is a pilot program that commenced in Western Australia (WA) in March 2017, in response to the fact that the consequences of FDV are multifaceted, and conventional legal and other services are often only able to address one part of the issues encountered. This is a barrier to seeking help for many women left vulnerable by FDV, as having to retell one's story, or seeking help from multiple agencies can be confusing and overwhelming. It is against this backdrop that the SASH program was conceived. SASH brings together three community legal services (Tenancy WA, Street Law Centre WA, and Women's Legal Service WA) to offer statewide wrap-around services for women experiencing FDV and who are currently, or at risk of becoming homeless.

This evaluation report describes the implementation and impact of the SASH pilot project over its first 23 months. This evaluation of SASH was conducted by a multidisciplinary team located within the School of Population and Global Health at the University of Western Australia (UWA) and draws on interviews with clients, staff and stakeholders, the Legal Health Check and Community Legal Assistance Services System (CLASS) data.

The evaluation report that follows comprises six chapters. **This Chapter** provides background to the homelessness, FDV and political context currently in Australia, with the evaluation aims and methodology described in **Chapter 2**. Baseline demographic data and the legal, financial and social challenges facing SASH clients are outlined in **Chapter 3**, with a comprehensive overview of the SASH pilot program provided in **Chapter 4**. **Chapter 5** evaluates the impact of the SASH program across client, partner agency and stakeholder domains and **Chapter 6** concludes the evaluation and provides recommendations to strengthen future service delivery. The SASH program addresses two overlapping priority issues in Australia; homelessness and FDV, hence the current context for these is provided below by way of background.

1.1 Homelessness in Australia

In Australia, 2016 Census figures estimate that over 116,000 people experience homelessness on any given night, with over 9,000 of these individuals residing in WA.³ While there is no commonly agreed upon metric to define homelessness, Chamberlain and MacKenzie's 1992 definition is widely used, breaking the definition of homelessness into three broad categories (Figure 1).⁴

Primary Homelessness

- Rough sleeping or improvised dwellings (e.g. tents, caves)
- No access to conventional accommodation

Secondary Homelessness

- Temporary shelters or accommodation (e.g. couch surfing or emergency accommodation)

Tertiary Homelessness

- Accommodation that falls below minimum standards (e.g. overcrowded dwellings, boarding houses, caravan parks)

Figure 1: Types of Homelessness

Whilst primary homelessness or 'rough sleeping' is the most visible form of homelessness, it only accounted for 12% (n=1,038) of people who reported being homeless in WA on census night.³ People who become homeless following FDV can be found in all three categories of homelessness. The substantial shortage of affordable housing and lengthy periods to enter public housing in WA, compounds this problem, with an average wait of 153 weeks to be housed extending to over five years for 20% of the people on the WA Housing Authority wait list.⁵

1.2 Family and Domestic Violence in Australia

FDV can refer to violence between family members as well as between current or former intimate partners. It also refers to behaviour where one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear and intimidation.^{2,6}

Acts and behaviours associated with FDV vary in type, duration, intensity and frequency.² While acts of FDV can be 'one-off' events, more often there are patterns of sustained violence and threat, often escalating in severity and regularity.⁹ The box to the right provides examples of types of FDV.

Whilst FDV can occur to men, in the majority of reported cases it is predominately women who experience FDV. In Australia, it is estimated that 1 in 6 women and 1 in 16 men have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15.¹⁰ Additionally, FDV is a major driver of police call outs in WA, with nearly 19,000 family assaults and nearly 3,000 incidents of family threatening behaviour recorded and over 11,000 breaches of Family Violence Restraint Orders (FVRO) in the 2017-18 period.¹¹

Family violence can include, but isn't limited to:^{2,7,8}

- Physical violence, sexual assault and other sexually abusive behaviour;
- Economic abuse (i.e. limiting access to finances);
- Emotional and psychological abuse;
- Preventing contact with family and friends;
- Stalking;
- Kidnapping or deprivation of liberty;
- Damage to property or an animal (the victim doesn't have to own either);
- Behaviour by the person using violence that causes a child to be exposed to the effects of any of the above.

1.2.1 Intersection of Family and Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Internationally and in Australia, FDV is recognised as a key driver of homelessness, particularly among women.^{12,13} As observed through our research, homelessness in turn can render women vulnerable to relationships that may also place them at risk of FDV.¹⁴ In 2008, the Commonwealth Government released a

seminal white paper on homelessness entitled *The Road Home; a national approach to ending homelessness*,¹⁵ which identified FDV as one of the key drivers of homelessness. *The Road Home* set out a range of strategies to support people who have experienced FDV, including one initiative that supported individuals to stay safely in their own homes.¹⁵ More than a decade later, the confluence of FDV and homelessness has not abated, and FDV was the most common reason provided by people seeking support from specialist homelessness services in Australia in 2017-2018.¹² This represented a nine percent increase in the number of individuals requesting assistance for FDV compared to the previous year.¹² This pattern of increasing demand on specialist homelessness services as a result of FDV underlines the relationship between these issues. In 2017/18 in WA, FDV was the most common reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services, and proportionally this was higher in WA (43%) than nationally (39%). Also of relevance to SASH, the second and third most common reasons for seeking homelessness assistance were financial difficulties (37% in WA compared with 39% nationally) and relationship or family breakdown (23% in WA compared with 21% nationally).

The number of refuges for women (and children) affected by FDV in WA also attests to the magnitude of this issue – the most recently available data indicates that there are at least 41 refuges in metropolitan, rural and remote WA at present.^{16,17} These refuges for women and children escaping FDV provide a critical service, but earlier intervention and refuge alternatives are also essential.

The relationship between FDV and homelessness is complex and intertwined. While not all women who experience FDV are at risk of homelessness or become homeless, those who have to physically leave their place of residence and who have fewer or less access to resources (such as income or housing) and who are often isolated from support networks are more likely to require assistance from homelessness services.¹² Factors that predispose women impacted by FDV to homelessness often mirror factors that contribute to homelessness among women, including poverty, gender inequality in income, socioeconomic disadvantage, absence from workplace to care for children, and poor access to income support and housing.^{13,18}

Additionally, when a woman leaves a FDV situation they can be burdened with a complex tangle of legal issues, including issues of family law, child support, child protection, debt, injuries compensation, criminal proceedings, tenancy, business and employment issues.¹⁹ This constellation of legal and financial issues further contributes to risk of homelessness, and requires targeted coordinated legal and support services for resolution to provide a foundation for safe secure housing and a fresh start; this is where the SASH program seeks to intervene.

1.3 Legislative and Policy Context Relevant to SASH

Since the SASH program commenced in March 2017, there have been a number of legislative changes and development of policies relating to both homelessness and FDV, acknowledging the linkages of these issues at both a national level and at a Western Australian level.

Homelessness Policy

Prior to July 2018, specialist homelessness services and affordable housing initiatives were jointly funded by Commonwealth-State/Territory agreements; the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) which commenced on 1 January 2009.²⁰ In 2018, NAHA and NPAH were replaced by the new \$4.6 billion National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) that includes \$375.3 million over three years to fund front-line homelessness services.^{20,21} Women and children affected by FDV are a national priority cohort listed within the NAHA.²⁰ One of the requirements of the

new agreement is that all states and territories develop a contemporary and dedicated homelessness and housing strategy.²⁰

Family and Domestic Violence Policy

Coinciding with the commencement of SASH, there have been a number of recent developments at the federal level relevant to FDV, and these are summarised below in Box 1.

Box 1: Recent Federal Government Initiatives Relating to FDV

- amended the Family Law Act, to prohibit direct cross-examination in family law proceedings where violence has been alleged, funded additional family specialists to assist in the early management of family law cases to facilitate mediation where relevant, as well as new funding for Community Legal Centres, a national Domestic Violence Order (DVO) scheme to ensure DVO's issued in one state will be recognised in all others and introduced legislation for 5 days unpaid FDV leave per year for an additional 6 million employees covered by the Fair Work Act²²
- extended the early release of superannuation to victims of FDV as well as expanding the Good Shepherd Microfinance's No Interest Loan Scheme to 45,000 women experiencing FDV and their children for better financial security²³
- expanded the role of the e-Safety Commissioner to tackle online abuse and created a national system for online complaints. This office now takes responsibility for online safety issues affecting adults, as well as children²⁴
- introduced a \$30 million national campaign to change young people's attitudes to women and violence to help drive cultural change. The first phase of the Stop it at the Start campaign was viewed more than 43 million times online⁸

1.3.1 Western Australia

Homelessness Policy

As required by the new NHHA for all states and territories to develop a homelessness strategy, this process has been underway in WA since the latter half of 2018, led by the WA Department of Communities. The *Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness in Western Australia 2019-2029* was disseminated for comment early April 2019.²⁵ Feedback on the *Directions Paper* will be used to inform the 10 Year State Strategy, it is expected that this Strategy will be in place and publicly available by 1 July 2019.²⁶

In addition, the WA Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) released their 10-year plan to end homelessness in April 2018.²⁷ The WAAEH is an organisation of CEO's, executives and community leaders who believe that homelessness can and should be eliminated. This 10-Year Strategy provides a framework informing the process of ending homelessness in WA, making specific calls to action.²⁷ Within the WAAEH Strategy, there are a number of key recommendations explicitly related to FDV, including the need to:

- Amend the Residential Tenancies Act (1987) to include FDV provisions; (since addressed in legislation amendments, see Box 2)

- Invest in the capacity of human service systems to deal in a systematic and coordinated way with the key underlying causes of homelessness including FDV; and
- Extend safe at home programs to support women and children to stay in the home and support women's refuges to access rapidly permanent housing for those women and children they support.

Family and Domestic Violence Policy

The State Government is developing a *10 Year Strategy for Reducing FDV in Western Australia* with a focus on access and inclusion, the consideration of the unique and diverse needs of Aboriginal people, people with disability, people from CALD backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ people, and people in regional and remote WA.²⁸ To inform development of the strategy, the Department of Communities is undertaking consultation between December 2018 and June 2019 on preventing FDV, improving victim safety and wellbeing, supporting perpetrator accountability and behaviour change, and creating a safe, accountable and collaborative service system.

Recent Amendments to Residential Tenancies Legislation

The WA State Parliament passed the Residential Tenancies Legislation Amendment (Family Violence) Act 2019 in February 2019. This is a reform that has been strongly advocated for by Tenancy WA along with other community legal centres. Tenancy WA in partnership with the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Service is also responsible for delivering education to a range of target groups including women's refuge workers, tenant advocates and solicitors across WA. The second stage of this program provides Tenancy WA with the ability to run test cases to assist in the informed development of effective practices and procedures relating to the new legislative reforms.

The amendments are aimed at providing individuals escaping FDV better choices, including whether to stay in the tenancy or have opportunity to move to another residence which may afford better safety. Previously, being contracted into a tenancy was a barrier to leaving a violent relationship.²⁹ See Box 2 for a list of recent amendments to the residential tenancies legislation.

Box 2: Recent Amendments to Residential Tenancies Legislation

- terminate a tenancy quickly and legally with a landlord, when providing the required documentation such as an FVRO or a Consumer Protection form signed by a medical professional, police officer, social worker or a refuge manager;
- remove an alleged perpetrator from a tenancy agreement and stay in the rental home if they choose, through an application to the Magistrates Court;
- access improved mechanisms to assist with disputes around property damage, unpaid rent and bond disbursement to ease the financial burden when leaving a tenancy;
- change locks without a landlord's permission, to prevent a perpetrator re-entering the property,
- improve security at the rental home at their own cost, for example installing CCTV or external lights;
- have their name removed from a tenancy database if the reason for the listing was caused by FDV.

1.4 Overview of SASH

Safe as Houses (SASH) is a pilot program that commenced in early 2017 and supports women who are experiencing FDV and are at risk of homelessness. The SASH program is a collaboration between Tenancy WA, Women's Legal Service WA and Street Law Centre WA, with Tenancy WA acting as the lead agency responsible for all administration and contractual aspects of the program. The SASH program has a wide variety of stakeholders, ranging from community-based outreach centres, community services organisations, family support agencies and refuges for people who have experienced FDV.

Tenancy WA provides legal services to residential tenants across WA through advice, education, support and advocacy and within the SASH program takes responsibility for tenancy disputes.

Women's Legal Service WA specialises in assisting clients with family law settlements, child support and protection and violence restraining orders.

Street Law Centre WA assists clients with issues including debts, bankruptcy, fines, minor crime, criminal injuries compensation and guardianship applications.

The SASH program aims to provide a wraparound case management approach and legal assistance to support clients' to address their complex legal, financial and social issues and therefore their capacity to obtain or maintain stable accommodation. To date, 133 clients have been supported by SASH. The positive impact of SASH has been recognised through the Attorney General of WA Community Services Law Award and through being named as a finalist in the Human Rights Awards' Law Award in October 2018.

The program has three key focus areas:

Preventing Homelessness

- Assistance with legal, social and other issues

Keeping Women and Children Safe

- Assistance with obtaining stable, secure housing
- Legal protection

Health and Wellbeing

- Safe and secure housing can lead to improved health, employment and education

Figure 2: Key Focus Areas for the SASH Program¹⁹

The establishment of SASH came about following a particular case that Tenancy WA had, where they assisted with a young mother's tenancy issue, but it was clear that more needed to be done for women escaping FDV. Box 3 presents an excerpt from the speech given by Kate Davis (Principal Solicitor at Tenancy WA) at the launch of SASH (24th January 2017, K&L Gates).

Box 3: The Case Study that led to the Establishment of SASH*

A young mum was 8 months pregnant, had a 7 year old daughter, and her violent partner had recently lost his job, and left her without any way to meet the rental payments. They fell into arrears and the **Landlord was seeking eviction and payment of the debt.**

Tenancy WA opened a file and represented her at Court, and sought to settle the matter by negotiations with the real estate agent. The proceedings were adjourned, and the client gave **birth to her baby, and became unwell with post-natal depression.**

Tenancy WA settled the tenancy matter, and arranged temporary accommodation. They identified a number of area's she required legal assistance including taking a FVRO out on her partner, child support, family court parenting orders, reports to police for assaults, compensation for injuries, assistance to resolve debts as well as tenancy support.

She required immediate mental health and parenting support to enable her to continue to care for her young children and recover from post-natal depression, and the trauma of the abuse and assaults she suffered. She needed affordable and safe long-term accommodation.

Tenancy WA made referrals for her to a range of services. **But as the file was closed** (having settled the tenancy matter), it was clear that she needed more than what was currently available, and that the tangle of legal issues she was burdened with after leaving the violent relationship would continue to put her at risk of homelessness, until they could be resolved.

*Case study based on speech made by Kate Davis at the Launch of SASH, 24th January 2019.

Initial funding for SASH was provided through the Criminal Property Confiscation Grants program and Lotterywest, with in-kind support provided from the three partner agencies. From January 2019 SASH has been provided with bridge funding by the Attorney General's Office, through the Criminal Property Confiscation Grants program until September 2019. It is salient to note that this funding is insecure and that SASH is seeking ongoing funding to continue to deliver the program.

2 Evaluation Aims and Methodology

2.1 Purpose of this Evaluation

This evaluation had five broad aims:

1. Document the demographic profile, legal needs and housing issues of individuals who receive support from SASH;
2. Describe the SASH approach and operation of the service (including quantitative assessment of client numbers and characteristics, types of support and assistance provided to clients to date, key partners and organisations involved);
3. Analyse client-level data collected by SASH and partner agencies to identify the impact of SASH case management on client outcomes (resolution of legal issues, legal literacy, housing security, and social networks);
4. Examine how clients perceive SASH and their perspectives on the successes, barriers and potential for future service delivery to be strengthened, and;
5. Identify staff and stakeholder insights into the main barriers/gaps, successes, referral pathways, overall experience working within SASH and recommendations to strengthen future service delivery.

This evaluation utilised mixed methods and involved both quantitative and qualitative data (See Figure 3 for an overview of data sources). Ethics approval for this evaluation was obtained from the University of Western Australia HREC (RA/4/20/4574) and all clients consented to the use of their data for evaluation purposes when they commenced receiving support from SASH.



Figure 3: Data Sources across Client, Partner Agency and Stakeholder Domains

The data sources and methods of data collection are described below.

2.2 Administrative Data from SASH and Partner Organisations

Quantitative data sources included the Legal Health Check and extracts from the CLASS databases for each of the partner organisations. The Legal Health Check (see Appendix 1: Legal Health Check) is completed with clients at the commencement of support from SASH and identifies legal, financial and social issues that the client requires assistance to manage and resolve. Data relating to client needs and circumstances at first contact with SASH was provided via the Legal Health Check (administered to all potential SASH clients), as well as other data recorded by the SASH case manager and/or SASH partner agencies. Data from the CLASS database was extracted for the SASH clients supported by each partner organisation and included the number of clients seen and how legal advice was given to clients. Prior to being provided to the research team, data

was aggregated and identifying information was removed, partner agencies collated data for their clients and it was provided to the research team via SASH.

2.3 Client Interviews

Qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with a sub-sample of five SASH clients. The purpose of the interviews was to gauge clients experiences and insights into SASH and specifically to capture how clients first came into contact with SASH; their experience of the service (type of support received, staff responsiveness and understanding); how SASH made a difference (in terms of addressing/resolving issues and meeting their needs); any issues they may have experienced; and suggestions for strengthening future service delivery.

A purposive sampling method was used to guide recruitment of clients, reflective of the breadth of backgrounds of people supported by SASH from varied demographic backgrounds and with varying legal, financial and social needs. Staff from the SASH partner organisations played a key role in identifying and inviting clients to be interviewed as they had established relationships of trust with the clients. Staff were advised to stress that all participation was entirely voluntary and would in no way impact clients' relationship with SASH or the services they received. If clients expressed interest in participating their contact details were provided to the UWA research team who then organized a convenient time and location for the interview to occur.

Client interviews, on average, lasted for 46 minutes, with the interviews ranging between 35 and 60 minutes. All clients were provided with the participant information sheet and consent form prior to interview commencement, with the opportunity to ask the research team any questions they may have had. Permission to audio record interviews to allow for accurate transcription was requested prior to the start of the interview, with all interviewees providing their consent.

2.4 Partner Agency Group Interviews

Group interviews (n=3) were undertaken with key staff involved in SASH from each of the three SASH partner agencies. These interviews explored staff perspectives on the operation of the SASH service, the impact that SASH has had on mitigating/resolving clients' issues, their experiences working with SASH, any barriers they had experienced and suggestions for overcoming any barriers or gaps. All participants in the partner agency group interviews were provided with a participant information sheet and provided consent to audio recording. The average duration of the group interviews was 75 minutes, ranging between 65 minutes and 85 minutes.

2.5 Stakeholder Self-Complete Survey

The three SASH partner agencies were asked by the research team to identify organisations that they either receive SASH referrals from or organisations that they refer SASH clients to for support. A self-complete online survey was emailed to 34 key external stakeholders, there were 18 surveys completed, a response rate of 53%. The survey explored stakeholder perspectives on the SASH service, whether they refer clients to SASH or receive referrals from SASH, the impact of SASH for their clients, any barriers/gaps they have observed and suggestions for strengthening future service delivery.

2.6 Client Self-Complete Survey

An online survey was sent out, by SASH, to all SASH clients for whom SASH had email addresses and where it was assessed as safe to contact the client via email (n=47). There was a response rate of 47%. The survey responses were accessible to the research team, but did not contain any identifying information about the respondents. The short survey asked clients about their experiences with SASH, if these experiences differed from any previous services they had accessed, any barriers/gaps they had experienced and if they had any suggestions on improvements that could be made in the future.

2.7 Qualitative Data Analysis

Audio recordings of the qualitative semi-structured client interviews and group interviews with partner agencies were transcribed verbatim by Pacific Transcription and coded using NVivo (version 11, QSR International), a qualitative data analysis computer software package.³⁰ Thematic analysis using inductive category development and constant comparison coding,³¹ was undertaken, with cross checking between members of the research team. The coding schema was revised as data analysis progressed to include emergent codes.³² To ensure that conclusions are dependent upon the data and not on the individual interpretations of members of the research team, key findings were reviewed and verified against data by the research team.

2.8 Case Studies

Case studies triangulate quantitative and qualitative data from both the client and staff perspectives and can assist in capturing less tangible but vitally important insights around client needs and the way that a program such as SASH addresses these needs. Barriers and enablers to program engagement and impact can also be captured in case studies. Case studies provide deeper insights into the range of clients supported by SASH, and elicit the intangible aspects of service delivery that are critical to client engagement and improved outcomes yet difficult to capture through other measures.

2.9 Limitations

This evaluation did have a number of limitations relating to the availability of data. Due to the nature of data recorded in the CLASS database and the lack of data integration across partner agencies it was not possible to match clients across the three partner agencies and this prevented a more detailed examination of client referral and support pathways within SASH. Additionally, some of the data sought by the research team was not able to be exported from the SASH database due to export functionality limitations. A number of suggestions for strengthening the capacity to export data for future evaluations have been identified and discussed with the SASH team.

3 Safe as Houses Client Profile

This chapter describes the demographic and circumstances profile for the 133 clients supported by SASH between March 2017 and February 2019. The chapter draws on data from the Legal Health Check that is completed for all clients at commencement, along with case studies and client interviews to illustrate some of the humanity and complexity that lies behind the statistics presented. Clients supported by SASH are often highly vulnerable and experiencing multiple legal, financial, social and health challenges related to FDV. These multiple issues often intersect and can present substantial barriers to engaging and accessing services.

3.1 Demographics

All 133 clients supported by SASH over the first 23 months were female, and 61% had children under 18 years. The majority of SASH clients had children (60%), with the number of dependent children amongst these clients ranging from 1-7.

Overall, one in four (25%) of SASH clients identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a substantial overrepresentation compared to the 3.9% of people who similarly identify in the general WA population.³³ This is sadly congruent with other data depicting the disproportionate prevalence of FDV and homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in WA and nationally. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds were also common, accounting for one in five (22%) of the client group.

Table 1: Safe as Houses Client Demographics

SASH Client Demographics	N (%)
Age at Completion of Legal Health Check	
Mean Age of Clients	40 (range 15-67)
Clients aged Under 18	2 (1.5)
Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander	33 (24.8)
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)	29 (21.8)
Has children Under 18	81 (60.9)
Recently Evicted from a Tenancy	31 (23.3)

There is a substantial spread in the age range of clients supported by SASH, with an average age of 40, and the majority of clients are aged between 31 and 50 years (see Figure 4), and a small number of clients aged under 20 and over 60 years.

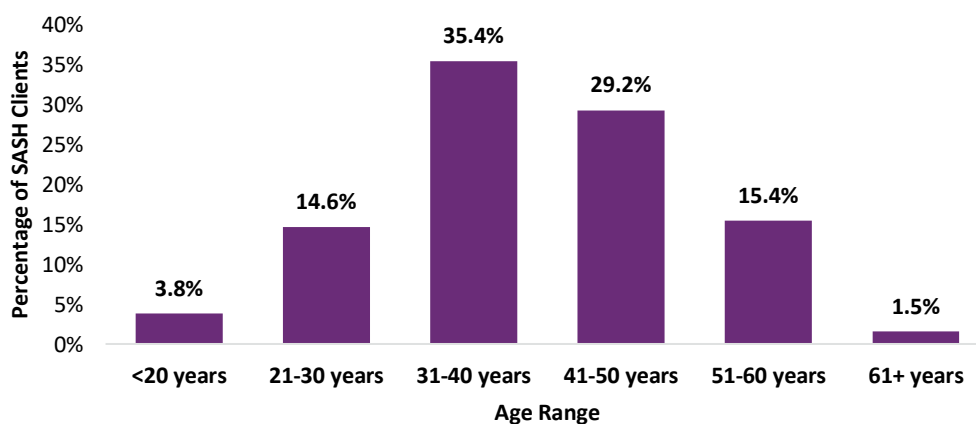


Figure 4: Age Range of SASH Clients

3.2 Experience of Family and Domestic Violence amongst SASH Clients

All SASH clients had experienced various forms of FDV either previously and/or at the time they began their period of support. This included physical, emotional and financial abuse, and often multiple types of abuse combined, and/or a long history of recurrent exposure to violence/abuse. It is important to note that although all SASH clients have experienced FDV, not all incidents have resulted in a criminal compensation claim, and not all incidents have resulted in a conviction and therefore not all clients are on the victim of crime notification register.

The high vulnerability of SASH clients is reflected in the substantial proportion (28%) who have been identified as victims of crime and have been placed on the victim of crime notification register and the 41% who report a serious ongoing health issue.

A substantial proportion (almost one third; 32%) of SASH clients had Family Violence Restraining Orders (FVRO) against the perpetrator of the FDV with a smaller proportion of clients identified as requiring an FVRO and not yet having one in place (Figure 5).

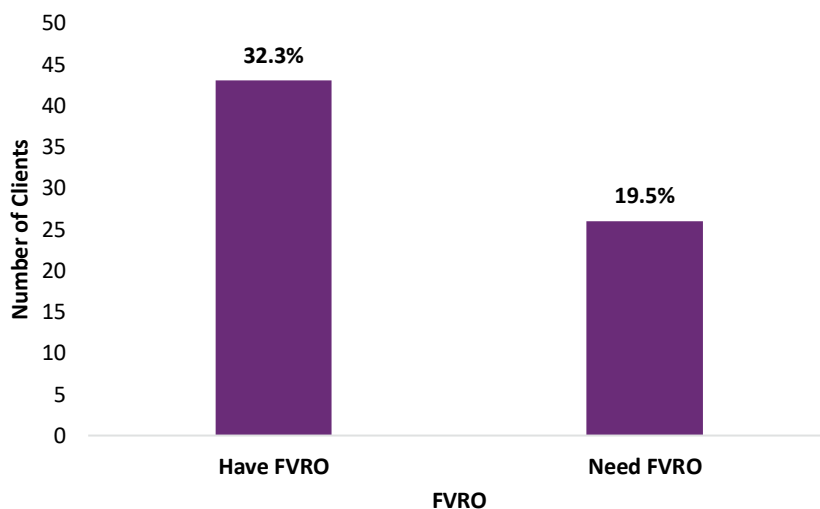


Figure 5: Proportion of SASH Clients That Have or Require a FVRO

In addition to the immediate physical harm associated with FDV that often culminates in an FVRO, the toll that FDV takes on emotional health and broader wellbeing emerged as a recurrent theme in client interviews. As reflected in the quotes below, the physical fear and consequences of violence further exacerbate vulnerability to homelessness:

*I don't know if it was a discrimination thing against me or what, but he never got hurt on the day and I was the one who had my ear ripped off, I was physically attacked in front of my children, I nearly died. He strangled me, threw me through a wall and I was the one who ended up with charges. It's the thing that still gets me today. – **SASH Client***

*Anyway, my husband came back for a few months and that - then he was physically violent and then that's when I put the FVRO and at the same time, he went back to Queensland because he'd met another lady. 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 Client***

The normalisation of emotional abuse experienced by women in FDV situations was also evident in some of the client interviews, with several clients underplaying what they had endured and diminishing the long-term effects it had on their overall wellbeing.

So I'm just waiting for the documents or records to come back from the police department for the criminal injuries compensation claim... But I wasn't originally going to go for criminal injury compensation, just because I haven't - apart from mental abuse, like I haven't really had any physical medical issues that have needed, well, like constant or ongoing treatment... I realise it now, but at the time, I probably didn't realise that it's just as important. – SASH Client

One of the critical considerations for SASH and its partner agencies is the fact that many women leaving or exited from a FDV situation can remain at risk, and it is vital that any efforts to support clients and their children does not place them at further risk. As part of the client intake process SASH assessed if it was safe to make phone contact with clients and completed a safety plan with clients where necessary (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).

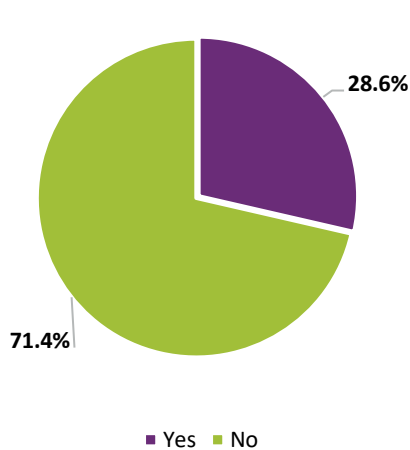


Figure 6: SASH Clients Safety Plan Developed

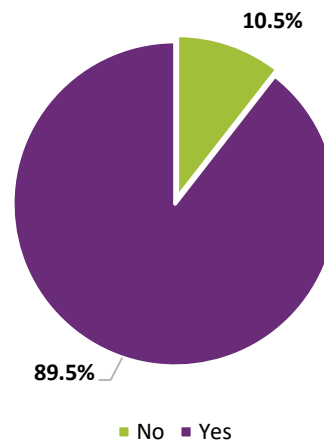


Figure 7: SASH Clients Safe to Call

3.3 Risk of Homelessness

A core aim of the SASH program is to prevent homelessness amongst women and children who have experienced FDV. Overall 83% of SASH clients were assessed as being at risk of homelessness at the time of first contact with the program, and a further 11% of clients were experiencing primary homelessness and rough sleeping when first supported by SASH.

Figure 8 shows the range of housing circumstances among clients when they first had contact with SASH. It is important to note that whilst around 19% indicate living in their own home, this is typically a precarious housing situation for SASH clients, whereby the relationship breakdown/FDV has led to issues such as mortgage default, property settlement disputes, or safety concerns.

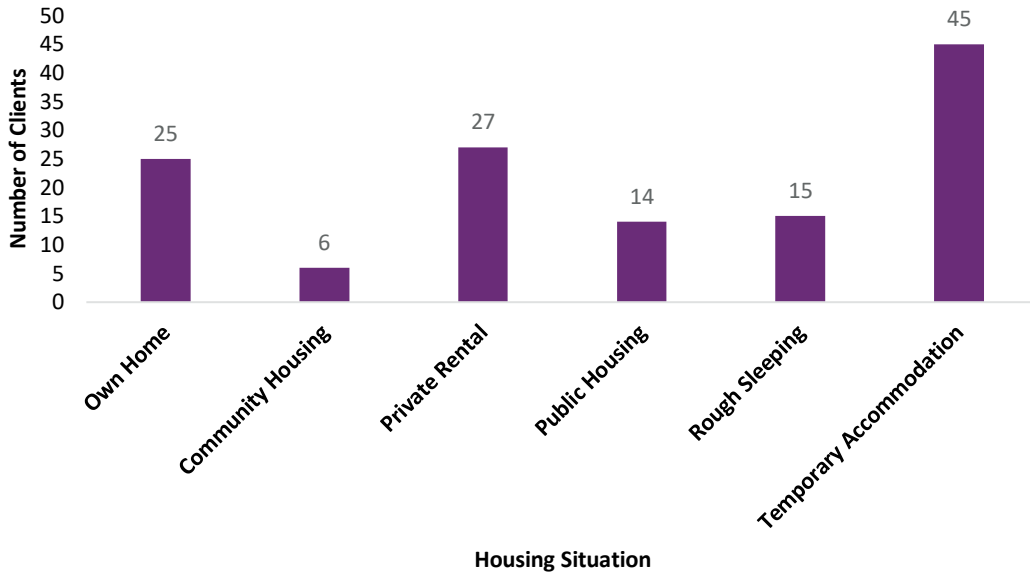


Figure 8: Clients' Housing Situation at First Contact with SASH

SASH clients experienced a range of complex issues contributing to housing precariousness and placing them at risk of homelessness. Most commonly a combination of legal issues and built up debt, often resulting from previous experiences of FDV lead to tenancy instability. Clients often felt overwhelmed and were in need of tenancy advice and advocacy, as reflected in the following quotes from client interviews.

I needed legal advice for the tenancy issues that were going on with my previous tenancy and just the real estate agent that is just a nightmare to deal with, specifically the property manager. – SASH Client

So, I kind of got to the stage where I had \$30,000 owing, and I was having difficulty repaying it. I got it down to \$20,000. Then on top of rent and everything like that, I was only able to pay off the interest. After a period of time my lawyers said that's not good enough, we're going to take you to court, da-da-da-da-da. I said well I've got nothing. I was paying every fortnight as much as I could off it, and I was kind of vulnerable because of that because I wasn't getting enough food and different things like that. – SASH Client (*note this is not a SASH lawyer)*

Ongoing legal issues and unpaid rent, as a result of financial hardship, were prohibiting some clients from accessing private tenancies. This placed them at extreme risk of homelessness.

Yeah, so just the two of us. So before we were staying between my friend and my mum, like just haven't been able to get into a property because the real estate agent black-listed me. – SASH Client

I was also having issues where I was in - what's that - not government housing, but social housing. I was having issues with them not kind of doing locks on my place and I was having constant break-ins because of my ex and everything like that... they were looking to evict me and sell my house after having lived there for 13 years. So I was kind of reaching the point where I was at risk of homelessness. Because of my ongoing payments to my lawyer, which I didn't want to stop repaying, they - I wasn't going to be able to rent through the private sector and one thing and another. – SASH Client (*note this is not a SASH lawyer)*

For SASH clients in rental situations, FDV had often meant that they were left with no, or significantly reduced, income whilst at the same time, forced to take responsibility for the tenancy.

*My husband was - he'd moved to Queensland and he stopped paying our rent. We had a rental property in Canning Vale and it was like \$500 a week. I had zero income, so he stopped paying the rent. I was in a position there where I was about to be evicted - four eviction notices and I was in real trouble because I had no way to pay. I was trying to sell a vehicle and crap like that. – **SASH Client***

The following case study demonstrates the complex issues facing SASH clients (Box 4)

Box 4: Complexity of SASH Clients

Background

Georgy is a female in her early forties who was rough sleeping at the time of first contact with SASH. Georgy has AOD issues that impact on her ability to maintain safe and secure accommodation. When she first came into contact with SASH, Georgy also had been unable to attain secure accommodation, had substantial accumulated debt and breaches of an FVRO that had been taken out against her by the perpetrator of the FDV. She had experienced physical and sexual assaults and was eligible for criminal injuries compensation. Georgy was facing imprisonment for further breaches of the FVRO, however the perpetrator of the FDV was subsequently charged and imprisoned for an assault against Georgy.

What was SASH able to do to resolve the issues?

SASH assisted Georgy with her legal matter firstly with an application for a FVRO against the perpetrator and an application for withdrawal of the FVRO against her. She was also provided advice on entering into time to pay arrangements for her outstanding debts and the Fines Enforcement Registry. SASH provided a submission to the parole board outlining the impact approving the perpetrators parole would have on Georgy. Georgy was provided with emergency relief and a new telephone to remove the potential of the perpetrator using her phone to locate her and was referred to the Sexual Assault Resource Centre. SASH supported Georgy to get on the public housing waitlist and to access interim emergency accommodation. She was supported into a specialist program where stakeholders work collaboratively to support clients holistically including health partnerships, accommodation support, referrals for appropriate residential rehabilitation and detoxification services.

Current Situation

SASH continues to provide advice and support to assist Georgy with her complex needs. However, a lack of stable accommodation continues to undermine efforts to resolve her ongoing issues. An increased provision of rehabilitation services and/or accommodation support for women who have experienced FDV while experiencing addiction, would greatly assist this client.

3.4 Legal Issues

Multiple, complex and intersecting legal issues are the norm for SASH clients. One of the partner agencies indicated for example that the average client last year had four or more legal issues that their agency was assisting with. When faced with multiple legal issues,

A SASH client commented that when faced with multiple complex legal issues they simply didn't have "the head space of time to be dealing with all of it and understanding it completely".

it was observed by partner agencies and clients themselves that prioritising and managing their legal issues was particularly challenging.

A key aim of SASH is to assist clients by identifying the legal issues they are experiencing, prioritising and planning how they can be addressed and referring to the partner organisations and external agencies where appropriate. Many of the legal issues faced by SASH clients had the potential to lead to homelessness, e.g. tenancy issues or eviction notices can lead immediately to homelessness or were substantial barriers to clients obtaining secure accommodation, and legal issues led to accumulated debts, unpaid fines and infringements and accumulated legal fees.

The legal health check ascertains the types of legal issues experienced by SASH clients. The most common legal issues were family law matters related to children, including custody proceedings, which applied to two in five clients (see Figure 9). Issues related to tenancies were also highly prevalent in the client group, affecting around two in five SASH clients at the time they entered the program. Tenancy issues included return of bonds and listing on the Residential Tenancies Blacklist, often due to damage caused by the perpetrator of the FDV. Family Law Property issues, particularly related to property settlement, were also common issues for SASH clients (36%), this is a key area of focus for the SASH program as few community legal centres (CLCs) provide assistance with these issues. Around one in five SASH clients required assistance with court representation, the majority of these clients were supported by SASH lawyers, for 2% of clients SASH arranged for assistance from a Duty Lawyer, a further 2% were assisted by a grant of aid and SASH facilitated pro bono assistance from external lawyers for a further 2% of clients.

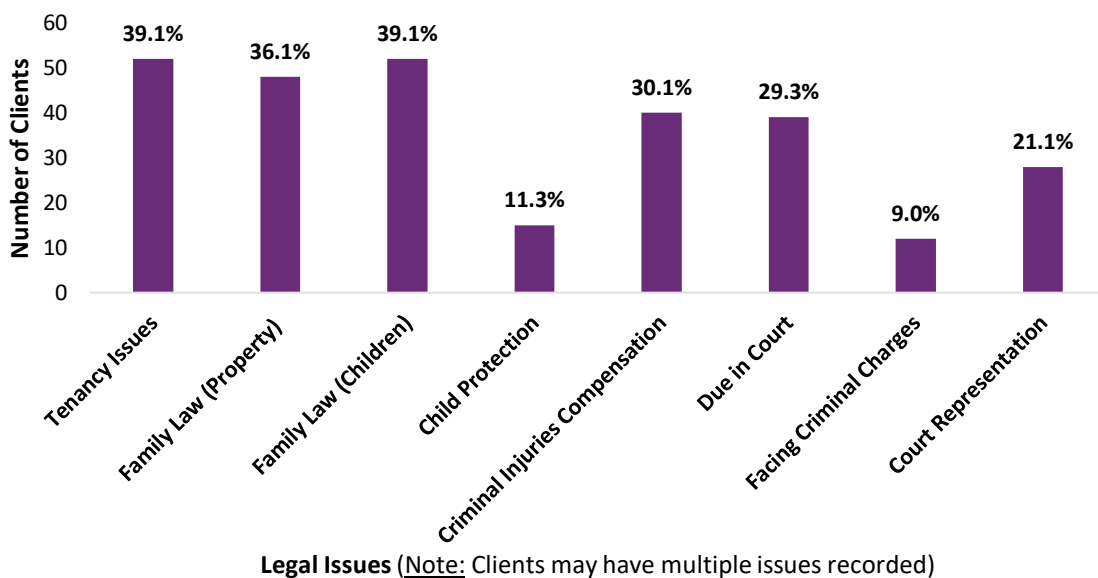


Figure 9: Legal Issues Experienced by SASH Clients

Beyond the actual legal assistance provided, the culture of client centred support and trust generated by SASH and the partner agencies is particularly critical for this vulnerable population group. Interviews with clients, SASH staff and stakeholders referring clients to SASH indicated that clients have often had previous negative experiences with other legal services and/or in the court system. This may in part reflect the fact that their complex legal needs have not been able to be met by a single service previously, as well as the fact that some of their legal issues are difficult to resolve without also addressing intertwined social, financial and housing issues.

3.5 Financial Issues

Financial issues are general and include the majority of clients. These include not having enough income, and having difficulty making ends meet. Debts are more specific and may require assistance with negotiation of payments usually involving one of the SASH lawyers. They relate to specific debts such as rent arrears, fines and infringements and may involve debt collectors. Overall, 83% of SASH clients reported that they were experiencing financial issues when they were first supported by SASH, with 57% also experiencing problems with debts. Unpaid fines and infringements were the most common financial issues affecting SASH clients (see Figure 10). Unpaid rent has substantial implications for maintaining housing security and was a major issue for over a quarter of SASH clients. Mortgage issues and credit card debt were also common challenges facing SASH clients.

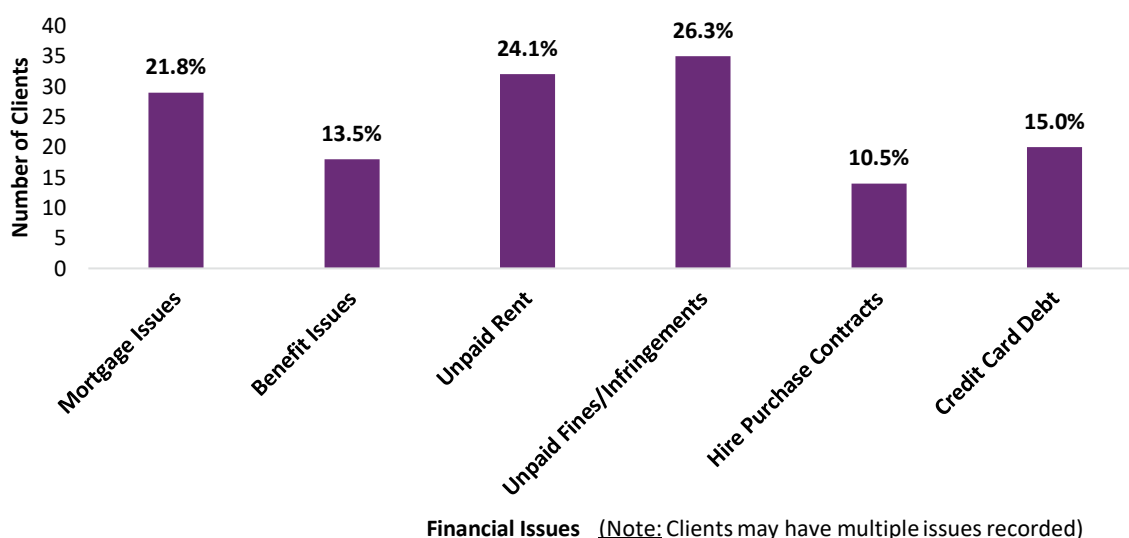


Figure 10: Financial Issues Experienced by SASH Clients

Ongoing financial abuse from a partner often resulted in clients lacking the skills and confidence to effectively manage their financial situation after experiencing a relationship breakdown.³⁴ These clients had been inhibited from having any control over their own finances, meaning that when they found themselves on their own, not only did they have to deal with a reduction in income they had to quickly adapt and learn how to manage and access finances. This often led to a build-up of debt resulting in housing precariousness.

Because financially, I was abused financially so I never got to deal with that side of things. I've learnt fast now, I certainly know what I'm doing with... He withheld everything, I had to let him know what I was doing, where I was going, what I was - yeah... I was never given money to spend on myself, it was always just enough to do this. That's where they helped me out getting onto the DSS and Centrelink and stuff like that. – SASH Client

All my married life, I've left all of these little - these sorts of things to my husband and he made all the decisions and then - but then, I was also very - a very submissive sort of wife and did what I was told. It was really hard when the separation came that he was firing things at me, saying, you need to do this and this and this and it's got me so confused. I'm still not - that takes a lot of time in counselling and building up my self-esteem again. I'm quite a different person from what I was when I was back in New Zealand. You've just got to stay positive and - I know I'll get there eventually but I've just got to shake off a few more things that are weighing me down. – SASH Client

3.6 Income

Overall, 75% of SASH clients reported that they had some source of income at the time they were first supported by the program, whilst for the other 25% of clients, there was no income source recorded. Figure 11 shows the income sources for the 75% of clients who indicated a source. The most common sources of income were Centrelink payments, with around four in five (83%) SASH clients receiving Centrelink benefits. In a 2017 study examining the adequacy of income support payments for unemployed and low income Australians, Centrelink payments were described as ‘woefully inadequate’.^{35(p103)} The study found that a single person on Newstart Allowance, one of the most common income support payments, would require an additional \$96 per week to account for the current cost of living, while a couple with two children would require an additional \$126 per week.³⁵

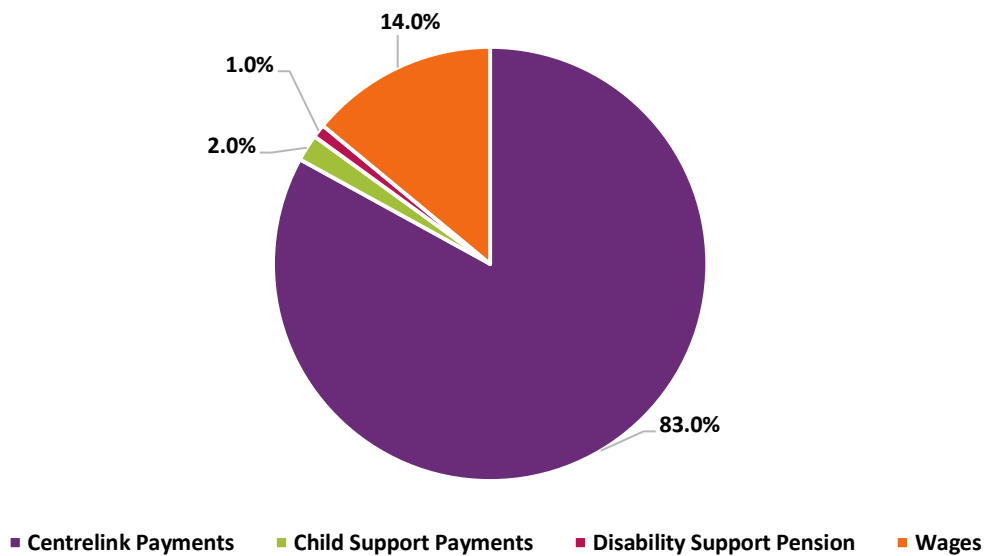


Figure 11: Income Sources for SASH Clients that Reported Income

As highlighted in this chapter, the consequences of FDV for SASH clients are complex, and multiple legal issues can cluster with financial and social issues. This supports the rationale for SASH seeking to transcend the traditional silos of support that women experiencing FDV can access. In effect SASH is able to triage the legal needs of clients and with three partner organisations with different areas or expertise, clients do not have to seek out each service separately. Additionally, SASH recognised from the outset that legal matters cannot be addressed in isolation of other pressing issues such as financial debt or no safe place to live.

4 Safe as Houses

4.1 How Clients Access SASH

Clients can be referred to SASH by any of the three partner agencies, or be referred by external organisations that come into contact with women impacted by FDV, or clients may self-refer. Referrals by external organisations and self-referrals require the referring centre or client to phone or email the program coordinator.

With the commencement of SASH, there is now a tailored program in WA that women with multiple legal needs coupled with homelessness or high risk of homelessness and experience of FDV can be referred into. From the data available, the majority of client referrals to SASH to date have been made by the SASH partner agencies, although it is possible that some of these originated externally (e.g. an external agency referring someone to one of the three partner agencies who then referred the client to SASH). All three partner agencies are well known and highly regarded for their community legal services and work with people with tenancy related issues, hence independent of SASH, they receive referrals and client requests for support.

External organisation referrals to SASH to date have primarily come from FDV services and/or refuges, health services (such as Women's Health and Family Services and King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) and not for profit community services such as UnitingCare West). Other less frequent referrals have come from WA Police (WAPOL) and of note and proactively, Westpac bank where there was a mortgage default situation associated with FDV.

At the inception of SASH, there was an attempt to establish an outreach service at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH), but at the time there were obstacles around the provision of non-health services in a public hospital. Instead, training was delivered by SASH staff to KEMH staff to facilitate referrals, and following this training a number of referrals were made by the KEMH social work department to SASH. However the original intention had been for an outreach element of SASH and this led to Women's Health and Family Services (WHFS) being identified as an alternative location for SASH outreach legal services. A fortnightly outreach clinic commenced at WHFS in April 2018. This outreach legal clinic enabled women and children who are victims of FDV and at risk of homelessness, greater access to the SASH Program and much needed legal and non-legal services. Due to funding constraints however, the clinic was paused in October 2018. Street Law aims to recommence discussions with KEMH and potentially obtain pro bono legal advice as to whether the barriers of providing non health services in a public hospital still remain.

The quotes from client interviews below highlight the variety of circumstances and referral pathways that have led to engagement with SASH.

*I got a phone call from Westpac Bank because I was - we have a - we had a mortgage on our home that was defaulting and I wasn't in a position to - yeah, anyway. The bank was going to foreclose on the house and I was in real, real trouble and it was actually the Westpac advisor that I was talking to, its specialist, who said, you need to make contact with these people. – **SASH Client***

*I ended up in a situation where I ended up being charged for something that I felt I shouldn't have been charged for. In doing so there was a lady at the Armadale police station who sensed something wasn't quite right and she was the one who put me on to Safe Houses. – **SASH Client***

*Yeah, so I went into East Perth Uniting Care and they put my name forward for SASH and then they contacted – [the SASH program coordinator] contacted me from that. – **SASH Client***

*Well, basically I went to get legal advice on an outstanding family law debt that I was having difficulty paying. I saw... Street Law Centre. She referred me to Safe as Houses. – **SASH Client***

It was evident from client and partner accounts that clients were often already at crisis point when they first entered the SASH program, many facing serious legal or financial issues placing them at high risk of homelessness.

The urgency of client situations when they first make contact with SASH was not only related to direness of circumstance, but for some clients, appeared to reflect escalation of issues arising from an initial reluctance to seek assistance. In some of the client interviews, clients stated that they did not seek assistance earlier because they had accepted abuse as normal behaviour and felt that they could not speak out.

*No and I think it's because you've accepted unacceptable behaviour already and let it get to that point, like it's just programmed or just instinct to keep accepting unacceptable behaviour. – **SASH Client***

*Well yeah, you don't really realise the damage that's been done or the actual - that there's a lot of other people in that same situation. I just don't even - I can't really explain why you don't - it's not necessarily a feeling of shame, you just don't feel like it's something to talk about, because you're already accepting things that are unacceptable, but you don't even realise that. So you kind of just think it's normal and so people don't really talk about normal things, if that makes sense, you know what I mean? – **SASH Client***

While others were embarrassed to reach out and ask for help as they felt they should be able to deal with it on their own and that this would take away from their independence. Some clients indicated that they initially didn't feel they needed help as much as others might.

*Well, I was also really embarrassed as well having to seek out that sort of help, do you understand where I'm coming from here?... I was very, very embarrassed and I've had my own life, independent with my kids, being able to work from home... Yeah, and you don't want to use and abuse those places like that, especially for me I didn't want to use and abuse them because I knew that I had that in me to get out the situation that I was in. – **SASH Client***

4.2 Client Eligibility for SASH

The process determining clients' eligibility for SASH has been refined during the course of the program operation. Eligible clients' are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, are experiencing or have experienced FDV and have legal needs that span two or more partner agencies areas of expertise. Figure 12 reflects the client pathway through the SASH program.

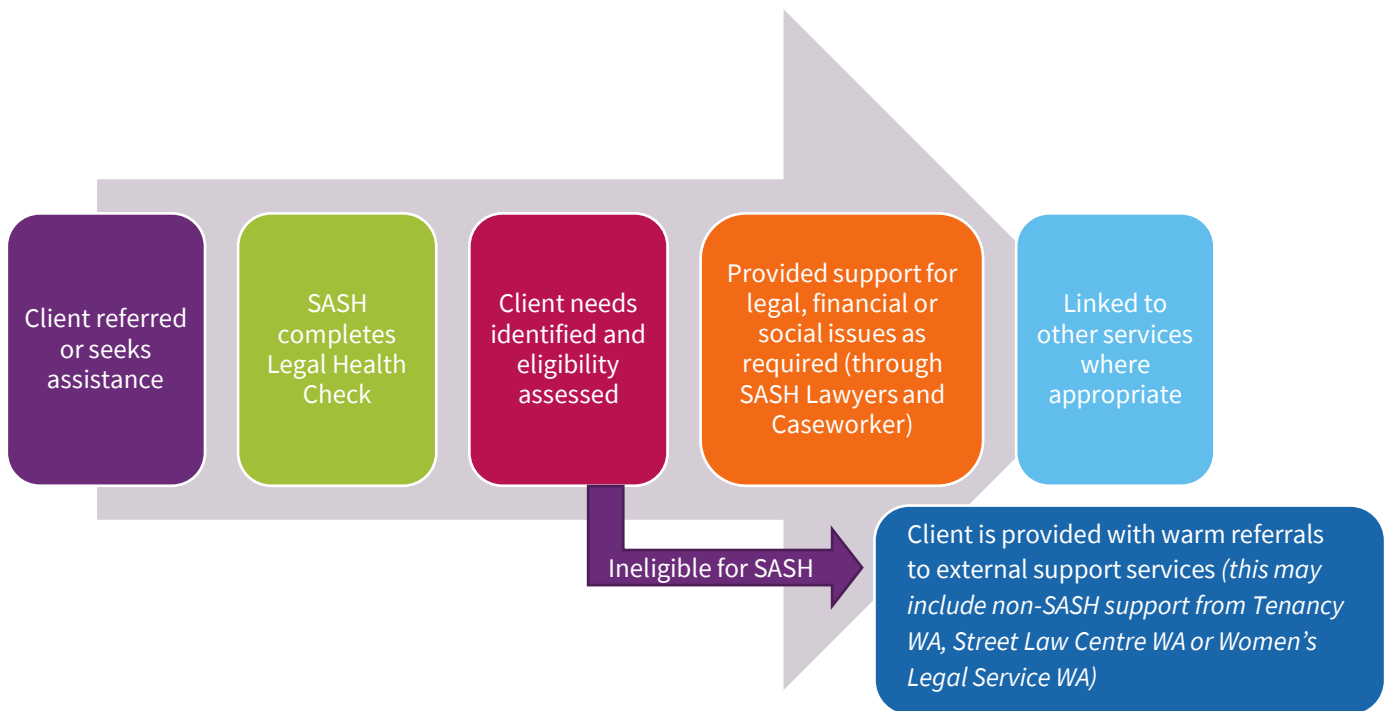


Figure 12: Client Pathway for SASH Support

4.3 Referral Pathways with Stakeholders

The majority of stakeholder respondents to the self-complete survey reported primarily referring to SASH, with 19% receiving referrals from SASH and 6% both receiving referrals and referring clients (Figure 13). The remaining stakeholders identified that their involvement mainly consisted of collaborating and coordination with other organisations to assist clients and that they did not receive referrals directly.

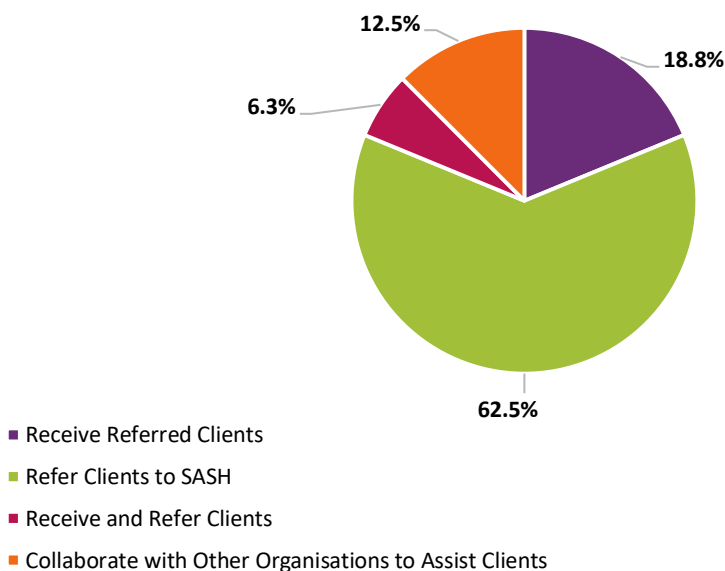


Figure 13: Nature of Relationship between SASH and Stakeholder Organisations

4.4 Types of Support Provided by SASH

4.4.1 Legal and Non-legal Support

The support provided by SASH has two integral components – legal and non-legal. If a potential client has only legal issues they would not normally be considered eligible as a SASH client, as the need for case management of other non-legal issues is one of the points of difference for SASH. Conversely, a potential client needs to have legal issues that require support from more than a single CLC in order to be referred into SASH. The three partner agencies work with clients to resolve the legal issues that fall within the scope of their expertise, whilst the SASH program coordinator provides clients with case management to address their non-legal issues. Sometimes there are issues that have both a legal and non-legal component, hence the merits of having a case manager embedded within the SASH program.

The types of legal and non-legal support provided by SASH is tailored to clients’ individual circumstances (see Table 2 for examples of the type of legal and non-legal issues SASH has assisted with).

Table 2: Types of Support Provided to SASH Clients

Legal Support	Non-Legal Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance with Family Court matters for custody/children’s issues • Obtaining/objecting to FVROs • Responding to criminal charges • Family law property settlement • Criminal Injuries Compensation Claim • Assistance with tenancy issues, eviction proceedings and rent arrears • Assistance with debts, unpaid fines and infringements • Criminal matters • Court representation • Accessing pro-bono legal services and counsel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case management • Case coordination across partnership • Referral to other services (e.g. financial counselling, mental health support) • Assistance to address non-legal needs (ranging from immediate material needs, food relief and crisis accommodation to support in obtaining transitional or permanent accommodation)

Clients remain supported by SASH while their legal and non-legal issues are being resolved. In some instances the case can be closed from a legal perspective, but still open with the program coordinator providing case management support to address other issues. Many clients have multiple issues, and the type and intensity of support required can vary over time. To illustrate, Figure 14 depicts the timeline of support provided to one SASH client over a 22 month period, and illustrates the different kinds of legal assistance required and how issues can often cluster together, requiring intermittent periods of intensive assistance.

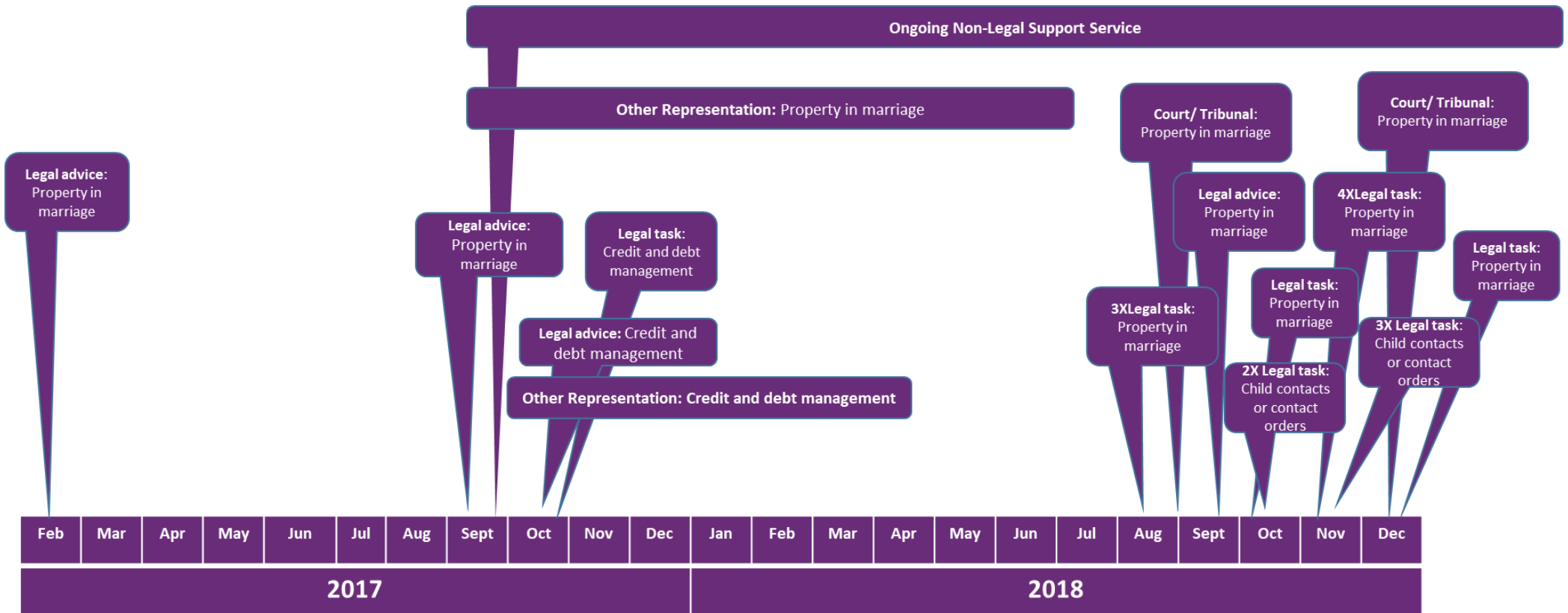


Figure 14: Timeline of Support Provided to a SASH Client

4.4.2 Referrals by the SASH Case Manager

Of the 133 clients supported by SASH, 119 had received one or more referrals to external organisations. The most common types of referrals are depicted in Figure 15 below.



Figure 15: Most Frequent Types of Referrals for SASH Clients

4.4.3 Legal Assistance Provided

In the first 23 months of the SASH program (March 2017 to February 2019), 201 instances of legal advice were provided to clients, with 119 legal tasks completed for clients across the three partner agencies. The types of support provided to clients are outlined in Figure 16.

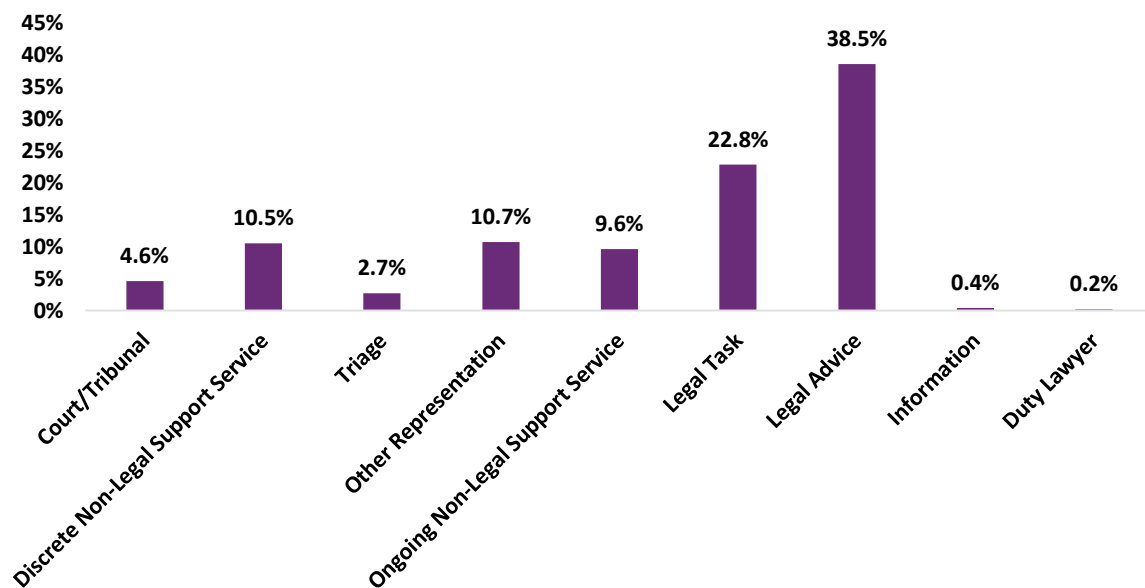


Figure 16: Types of Legal Support Provided to SASH Clients

As SASH clients typically present with multiple legal issues, that require involvement of more than one of the partner agencies, the legal health check serves as an initial tool for identifying what the main legal and non-legal issues are. Clients will then be referred to the relevant CLC (e.g. if it is family law matter, the client will be assisted by WLSWA, if the client is experiencing legal issues related to their tenancy they will be supported by Tenancy WA) once any likelihood of conflict of interest among the partners has been ruled out. The mechanism for providing legal assistance to clients can vary, depending on the clients' individual circumstances and requirements. Some SASH clients received discrete advice for individual legal issues they

were experiencing, however due to the complex nature of the legal, financial and social issues experienced by clients the majority received ongoing support from the SASH program coordinator and partner agencies.

The legal advice provided to clients across the three partner agencies, was to date most commonly provided in person (46%) (see Figure 17), but has also been provided via phone calls, letters, fax or email – this is determined by the individual client circumstances and the nature and complexity of the legal issues.

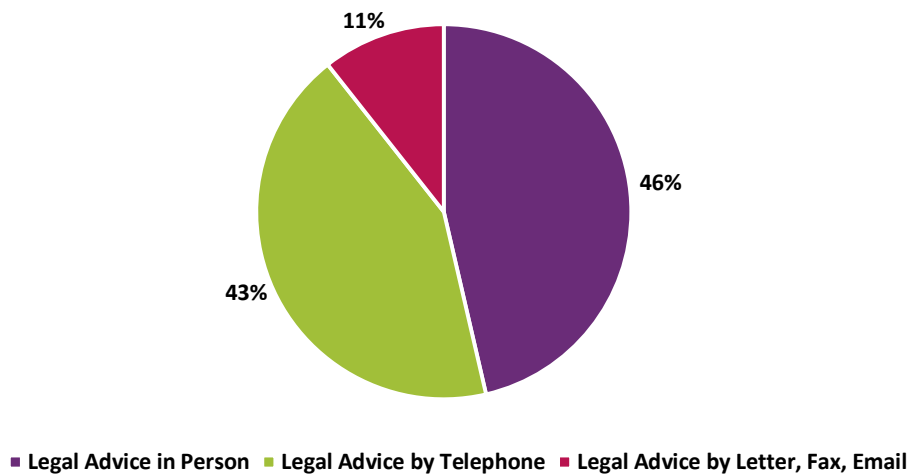


Figure 17: Method of Providing Legal Advice to Clients

Due to their exceptionally complex circumstances and the high prevalence of trauma within the client cohort, SASH clients require substantially more in-depth assistance and a greater time commitment than other partner agency clients. Whilst the precise staff hours to assist clients varied, the estimated hours spent on legal assistance preparing for court appearances for individual clients ranged from one to 100 hours, indicating the substantial diversity in the client group. One of the partner agencies commented on the additional time they had to allocate to SASH clients to ensure they could assist them appropriately.

*So, usually I can just do a consult for someone in an hour. If they're - if culturally diverse, it's more often than not, an hour and a half two hours and more so if they have trauma. Then getting - doing all the documents, it takes triple that time because they have to re-live that trauma, we have to get that instruction, it has to be translated. All this kind of stuff and it - and they have no access to computers so we have to go through a refuge worker. You know what I mean? It's all these other little extra things that are on top of what I normally could do – **Partner Agency***

4.4.4 Accessing Other Pro-bono Legal Support Where Needed

In some cases the nature and complexity of clients' legal issues may mean that their needs cannot be directly met by SASH or its partner agencies. One of the advantages of the program being embedded across three established CLC's is evident in a number of cases where SASH partner agencies have been able to leverage from their existing networks and relationships to obtain external pro bono legal assistance for these clients or ensure they are referred to the appropriate service.

*We've leveraged a lot of those pro bono relationships in some of the SASH files . . . About \$30,000 of time and this was a senior counsel assisting with this particular issue. It wasn't within their (Women's Legal Service WA) scope, not within Tenancy WA scope, so we pick up this legal issue and with the assistance of a senior counsel was able to secure her home. It was a great outcome. – **Partner Agency***

...there's another one just beginning a claim with an insurance company as well, another barrister in place assisting us through that process. So we have that support – **Partner Agency**

4.4.5 Client Perspectives on Support Received from SASH

SASH was able to provide legal assistance, individualised case management, and support in a variety of ways.

*[The perpetrator's lawyers] were just taking advantage of the fact that I didn't have any legal representation. So, [SASH lawyer] put me straight on some of my rights and then she helped me do up the responses and she sat with me through the - I had two hearings without legal representation and then I had one hearing with representation and then one more hearing with a registrar, who made a final ruling on our property settlement. Then [SASH lawyer] helped me with the divorce decree... So, it was a huge relief to get [SASH lawyer] on board and for her to tell me, this is not right, and this is not right. – **SASH Client***

*They covered every base with me, every single base was covered, right down to my wellbeing, down to legal aspects, down to me being safe, clothes and fed. All of that stuff was available, you can't really ask for much when you've been put in that decision. – **SASH Client***

*They've helped in terms of financial, so for my storage fees. They paid the last lot of my storage fees, because I was just paying the storage unit pretty much to put a padlock on, and I just couldn't get the amount of money to pay that extra few days for me to move all my stuff out and hire a trailer. So, they re-helped in that sense. In terms of - they paid for something else as well, like just phone access for when I just needed to have a phone, have phone credit pretty much. They've suggested for counselling for [daughter] and things as well and prompted me towards Pat Giles Centre. – **SASH Client***

*So it ended up - I was at risk of homelessness and (SASH lawyer) said this is more than just the debt, we need to look after the other things that are going on and have someone to advocate to your landlord. – **SASH Client***

4.4.6 Client Case Studies Demonstrating Impact of SASH Support

The following are two examples of client case studies demonstrating the impact of the SASH program in supporting clients to resolve the complex legal, financial and social sequelae of FDV. The first case study outlines how SASH has worked to engage and support a client with very complex legal and social circumstances to stabilise her situation and obtain suitable accommodation (The second case study outlines the complex financial issues experienced by a SASH client and describes the collaborative work of SASH partner agencies to assist and advocate for the client (Box 6).

Box 5).

The second case study outlines the complex financial issues experienced by a SASH client and describes the collaborative work of SASH partner agencies to assist and advocate for the client (Box 6).

Box 5: SASH Client with Complex Legal Issues

Background

Ines is a lady in her late thirties who experienced FDV over an extended period and has three children in the care of Department of Child Protection and Family Service (DCPFS). At the time of first contact with SASH Ines was living in public housing and was pregnant with her fourth child. The perpetrator of the FDV was imprisoned for offences against Ines and Ines began engaging with the DCPFS with the view to keep the baby in her care once born. Ines engaged with DCPFS and worked hard to provide a safe and secure home for the baby when he arrived, although there was significant damage to the public housing property as a result of the violent behaviour of the perpetrator.

What was SASH able to do to resolve the issues?

SASH supported Ines through her legal issues by assisting her to apply for and be granted a priority transfer to safe housing based on the safety risk and vulnerability of herself and her new baby. Ines was also assisted to apply for an FVRO against the perpetrator of the FDV. Through SASH, Ines was provided advice and support on the DCPFS process, family court applications, family court orders, and FOI applications for a criminal injuries compensation application due to FDV. Ines has been offered support to appeal an outgoing property condition report based on the condition of the house as the damage was a direct result of FDV. She was provided referrals to the Sexual Assault Resource Centre and was supported with emergency relief. SASH continues to support Ines when requested with a view to resolving her legal issues at a pace set by Ines. Due to the complexity of her needs, Ines still has unresolved issues after almost 12 months of SASH support.

Box 6: SASH Client with Complex Financial Issues

Background

Melanie, a single parent with one child, was living in a private rental at first contact with SASH. Melanie had experienced FDV from her ex-partner for which he was incarcerated and subsequently released on parole. Initially Melanie was referred into SASH from a financial counsellor as she was in a dispute with her co-tenant regarding damage done to the property, this then escalated to court proceedings between Melanie and the property manager as the lease was in her name. Melanie was also experiencing legal issues with debts, fines and infringements and had ongoing Family Court proceedings, a criminal injuries compensation claim and unpaid storage fees. Melanie required protection from her ex-partner on his

release from prison and was struggling with the complex issues she was facing and how to prioritise issues for resolution.

What was SASH able to do to resolve the issues?

SASH provided legal assistance with an application for a FVRO against Melanie’s ex-partner, as well as legal advice and assistance around the Family Court proceedings. SASH also assisted with legal advice and advocacy regarding the termination of the private tenancy, bond disposal and further debts arising from the property. The property manager was unwilling to cooperate in relation to outstanding debts at the property and made threats towards Melanie of placing her on negative tenancy database listings and placing her debts with a collections agency. SASH was able to advise Melanie of her rights and assist Melanie to avoid these threats being acted upon further.

SASH also provided information on options for housing, referrals for advice regarding her Centrelink debt, for counselling, to victim support services and the victim notification register. SASH negotiated support with associated costs of the storage facility and for Melanie to regain her possessions.

4.4.7 Staffing and Service Capacity

SASH staffing levels and consequently the capacity of the service, have varied across the course of the pilot program. Core SASH staff comprise the SASH program coordinator, who coordinates and assists clients with non-legal support needs, and SASH lawyers at each of the partner agencies who have particular expertise in legal issues related to tenancy, family law and criminal matters. It is pertinent to note that the insecurity of funding for the SASH program has led to challenges in staff retention.

Perceptions of SASH Program Capacity

The stakeholder survey asked, “*In your view is Safe as Houses able to meet client demand for their service?*” With response options ranging from capacity exceeds demand, capacity meets demand or demand exceeds capacity. Overall, 75% of stakeholders perceived that the capacity of the SASH program was adequate to meet the needs of their clients (see Figure 18). Where stakeholders had a different perception to this, it potentially reflects variability in client numbers and needs amongst stakeholder organisations.

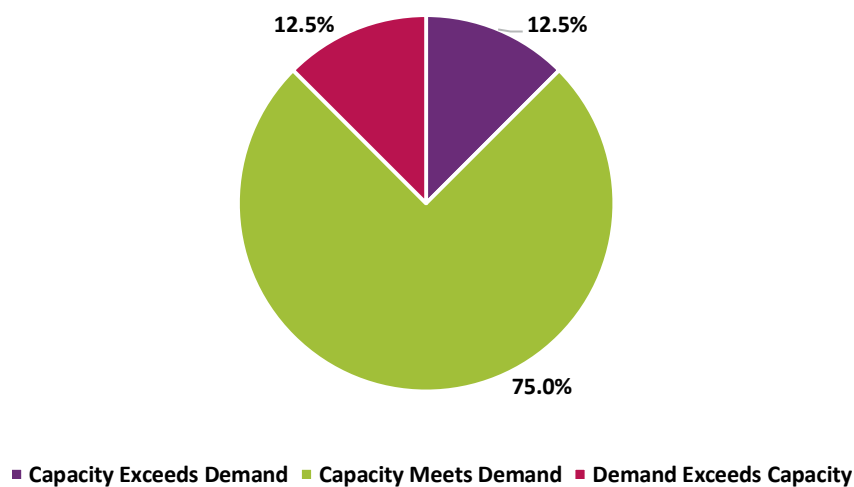


Figure 18: Stakeholder Perceptions of SASH Capacity to Meet Client Needs

5 Client, Partner Agency and Stakeholder Perspectives

As a pilot project, a key focus of the evaluation was to investigate client, partner agency and stakeholder experiences of SASH, and to elicit any feedback and suggestions for SASH moving forward. The data sources drawn from for the client, partner agency and stakeholder perspectives are summarised in Figure 19.

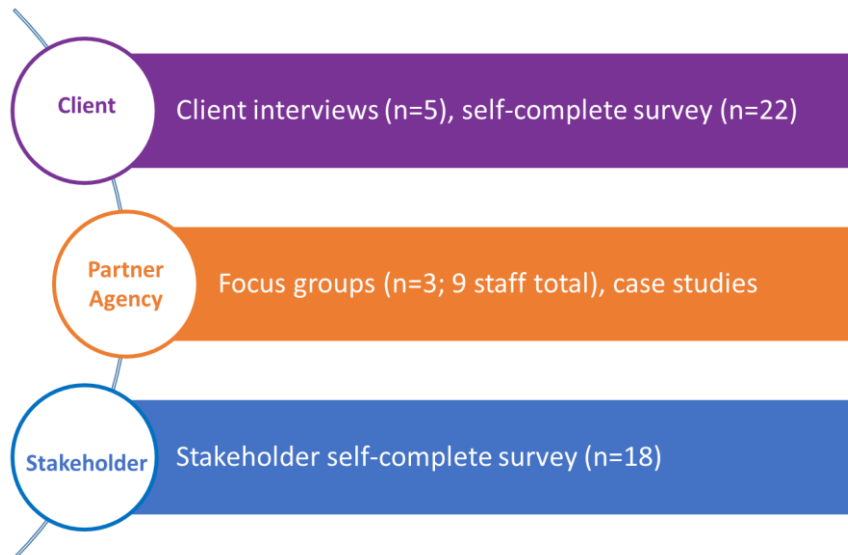


Figure 19: Data Sources Analysed to Present Client, Partner Agency and Stakeholder Perspectives

It is important to note that in the evaluation of any pilot program, there are typically insights in hindsight and areas for improvement identified, and some of the findings and observations should be read in this light.

From the interview and survey data a number of key themes emerged in the data analysis:

- benefits of the SASH model and services provided (**Section 5.1**)
- key impacts of SASH to date in preventing homelessness, promoting mental health and wellbeing and building capacity and legal literacy (**Section 5.2**), and
- strategies for strengthening the SASH program (**Section 5.3**).

These themes are discussed throughout the chapter, illustrated with quotes and examples provided by SASH clients, partner agencies and stakeholders: The main sub-themes that emerged within each of these are shown in Table 3.

When services are working with vulnerable population groups and addressing complex client needs, statistics on service provision only tells part of the impact story. The voice of clients themselves is critical in evaluating social sector programs, as these tell the stories of the people behind the statistics. Service providers also have valuable insights to share that are not captured by numbers on a page.

- Dr Karen Martin, Vulnerable Populations Research Group, UWA

Table 3: Key Themes across Client, Partner Agency and Stakeholder Domains

Theme and subthemes	Perspective		
	Client	Partners	Stakeholder
Benefits of SASH model and services			
SASH support compared to other programs and services	✓		
Advocacy on behalf of clients	✓		
Wraparound approach	✓		
Communication between clients and SASH	✓		
Impact of support on clients' issues	✓		
Role of SASH in addressing an important service gap		✓	
Benefits of SASH model for organisations and clients			✓
Impacts of the SASH Program			
Preventing homelessness	✓	✓	✓
Improving mental health and wellbeing	✓	✓	✓
Capacity building and increasing knowledge, skills and legal literacy	✓	✓	✓
Reduced resource demand on other sectors and agencies	✓	✓	✓
Feedback and suggestions for strengthening SASH			
Increased communication	✓		
Increased service capacity	✓	✓	✓
Greater awareness of SASH amongst other organisations	✓		
Improved clarity for eligibility		✓	
Need for consistent approach to prioritising clients		✓	
Streamlining referral processes and pathways			✓
Increased focus on in-depth case management		✓	

5.1 Benefits of SASH

5.1.1 Client Perspectives

SASH Support Compared to Other Programs and Services

Of SASH clients who completed the client survey, 44% had previously received support from other services for the issues that SASH had assisted with (see Figure 20).

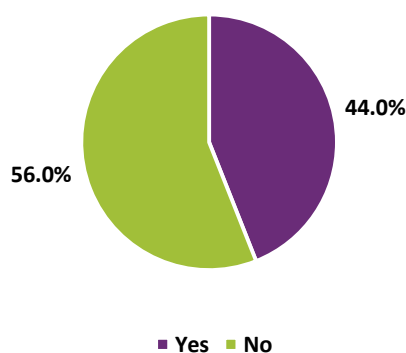


Figure 20: SASH Clients Who Received Support from Other Services

In the survey, clients who indicated having received support from other services were asked about whether/how their experiences with SASH were different from these other services. The majority of clients recounted that their experiences with SASH had been positive and that they had received greater advocacy and more in-depth support than with other services they had received.

. . . it's been personally tailored [to me] like a support network giving reassurance and confidence –
SASH Client

Yes. Continuous contact and support – **SASH Client**

Some clients had previous negative experiences with other legal and FDV support services and this created a wariness about seeking assistance from SASH. One client expressed her initial cynicism towards these types of services in general, based on a lack of support and services being unable to meet her needs in the past.

I was fairly disillusioned by the sector in general because I found that there's not a lot of long-term support for people and there's not a lot of wrap-around services. So basically you're left in a position where they give you a bit of information and a bit of help and then it's like okay, well we've given you three months, now you've got to go and do it yourself or find somewhere else. – **SASH Client**

This client proceeded to engage however with SASH, and she and a number of other clients commented that the program had been able to address needs that were previously left unmet by other services they had accessed, this is illustrated in the vignette below.

Vignette on Addressing Previously Unmet Needs

SASH advocated for me with my lawyer rather than just telling me to write to them myself. I had written and explained my situation multiple times to my lawyer etc myself, but what people don't seem to realise is that when you're powerless, no one listens to you regardless of how often you explain your situation. Having someone else advocate, suddenly, I got a completely different response (compassionate & understanding). There is a lot of emphasis on how people experiencing domestic violence need to speak up about their experience. However, I have spoken up so many times to people with the authority & power to help but they don't listen or do anything (e.g. police). SASH provides a wraparound service where each aspect of my situation was managed centrally but helped by Street Law or Tenancy WA. Therefore, it was more effective & coordinated management rather than just being limited to one aspect of your situation. Also saves having to explain your situation multiple times to multiple different agencies- which is exhausting, disheartening & traumatic- especially if no one does anything to help.

Advocacy on Behalf of Clients

The advocacy SASH was able to provide on a client's behalf was regarded as an invaluable aspect of the service by many clients, particularly in relation to more complex situations and on legal matters. Clients perceived this aspect of support as something that was lacking from other services they had been involved with previously.

... private rental. Yeah, so from then, they've been giving me advocacy for that, as well as putting me forward towards Family Court advocacy in the Women's [Legal Service WA]. – **SASH Client**

Having a single service that can advocate for clients across both legal and housing or other matters was also valued by clients.

Wraparound Approach

The wraparound, holistic approach to the multiplicity of issues faced by many clients was perceived to be both unique to SASH and critical to its success. SASH clients are often facing extremely complex circumstances, and in some instances, issues that have been ongoing for years and years, and some felt that other mainstream services had not been effective in resolving this.

...our domestic violence situation's been ongoing for 14 years. It's something that I've left years and years ago, but it's still ongoing. So it's not something that is addressed by the mainstream services. So when I actually came to Safe as Houses, I was fairly cynical about the level of help that I'd receive. – SASH Client

Clients also expressed past difficulties in having to access multiple services to meet their needs, and each time having to share their story from the beginning.

It's also re-traumatising when you have to go through it again and again, when you're in the midst of trying to do it. – SASH Client

In the client interviews, clients were surprised to find a service such as SASH that could address various issues they were facing and offer ongoing support to meet their needs. This was something they had not experienced elsewhere but had resulted in significant positive changes.

...it's like I said, I was amazed to find there was even something out there like that where they deal with you emotionally and they deal with you legally on legal matters, just everything. – SASH Client

One of the things that I think really is beneficial about the Safe as Houses is the fact that because it is the wraparound service and it does have the communication between different things. I think that you actually use fewer services than you otherwise would. I actually think it would save money in the long term because people are speaking to one another so you're not having to take what this person said, then go and phone up this other person, explain everything that's gone on there. Then they will work for you for three months, then you'll have to go and start again with a new agency and stuff like that. I think in terms of cost effectiveness, it really delivers in terms of saving money from other programs that you would otherwise be accessing and wouldn't really be meeting those needs. They actually got things resolved rather than just saying that's awful that that's happening and unfortunately we can't do anything. – SASH Client

One client poignantly described the load that had been taken off her shoulders as a result of support provided by SASH.

Because honestly, I would not have known what to do with my legal side of things. Really, I would not have known, I probably would have been like a newborn baby I'd say... I was amazed to find out that they handle the whole - and that took a weight off my shoulder, it really did. It took a load off my shoulders. – SASH Client

Communication between Clients and SASH

Given the vulnerability of women who have been through FDV and the raft of other issues faced by most SASH clients, trust and sensitivity in communications are critical. As illustrated in the client quote that follows, most clients were very appreciative when SASH staff were mindful of this.

*I lack a lot of self-esteem. I spent 12 years with a guy that told me that I was too old, too fat, too ugly and not good enough, and I just feel like I'm - I had a sense a lot of the time that I wasn't worth helping. A sense of worthlessness but she just persevered and she said, I'll call you back later or something like that or I'll call you when you're feeling better... - **SASH Client***

Two other clients noted that SASH was able to provide a nurturing and persistent approach to communication which enabled them to overcome some of those barriers to engaging with SASH.

*But they're busy professionals as well. For them that's a big thing in terms of retention and stuff is that they're able to do that. But at the same time, I do realise the impact that not answering calls and everything like that does have on the actual system. - **SASH Client***

*So yeah, but unfortunately, it's not a situation that you really expect to be in, but it's been valuable, like I can't express how helpful everyone has been and they've contacted me after I've been initially introduced to the services, they've contacted me and just kept following on. [The program coordinator] especially contacted to follow up and make sure that I'm on track with advice that I need or things that I need financing for, so they've helped me... - **SASH Client***

Funding and staffing constraints within the SASH program has however influenced the nature of communication between clients and some of the SASH staff, with the majority of communication between clients and the SASH program coordinator for instance, occurring only by phone.

*I've never met [program coordinator]...No. She would just call me regularly. - **SASH Client***

Another client stated that she only met the program coordinator incidentally when she went into the service to collect something.

*It was mostly phone, but I have met with her probably about four months ago when I had to go into the Tenancy WA office to get a voucher. - **SASH Client***

This differs from case management models in quite a number of other programs in WA where this is also the opportunity for clients to meet with case management staff face to face, particularly early in the period of service engagement. Reliance on phone communications does limit potential to observe and respond to non-verbal communications and being able to meet at least once face to face can enhance rapport building, but clients appeared to accept that the busyness of staff precludes this in most instances. As reflected in the following quote, the client was pleased with the level and consistency of contact.

*No, phoning was fine. I was fine with that. The thing is that, it's an agency. She would just make the phone calls and she would follow up if she couldn't reach me and...Yeah, she'd leave a message and say, I'll call again in a few days or something. So, she was consistent and reliable. - **SASH Client***

There have been some exceptions depending on individual circumstances. One of the clients interviewed reported meeting with the SASH program coordinator face-to-face and felt that this was beneficial as the client was in an extremely vulnerable position and the visit enabled her to access vital assistance.

*Yeah, she came out to see me... I was put in the situation where I was literally kicked out of my home, had no contact with my kids and just ordered off my property. - **SASH Client***

Two of the clients interviewed discussed how the SASH program coordinator had persevered with communication, despite their reluctance to seek assistance.

...I wasn't the easiest person to talk to. I'm loads more confident now than I was back then. I was just putting a lot of walls up. It's just like that person that comes to your door and you can say, yes, I'm fine and shut the door but it's the person that jams their foot in the door and shoves the door open and says, I'm coming in whether you like it or not. That's kind of what it was like. – SASH Client

They were actually really good. I was less good at that because I was so distressed at the time that I would avoid phone calls and everything like that. Yet, they were really good at that side of things. I realise I was a less than ideal client in that respect. – SASH Client

Impact of Support on Clients' Issues

The client survey asked, *What impact (if any) has support from Safe as Houses had on the issues you were referred for?* Of the clients who completed the survey, the majority felt that the issues for which they initially sought assistance from SASH had either been resolved (44%) or as ongoing but improved and with plans in place to address these (28%) (Figure 21). For some clients with multiple complex issues, they indicated that SASH had assisted in resolving some issues, but others remained ongoing. Around one fifth of clients however reported that their issues were ongoing and had not yet improved. This may reflect complex legal and financial issues that generally will take considerable time to resolve. The staffing and budget constraints on the SASH program and the number of clients needing intensive case management support may also mean that not all of client expectations are able to be met. No clients selected the response option 'issues ongoing and escalating'.

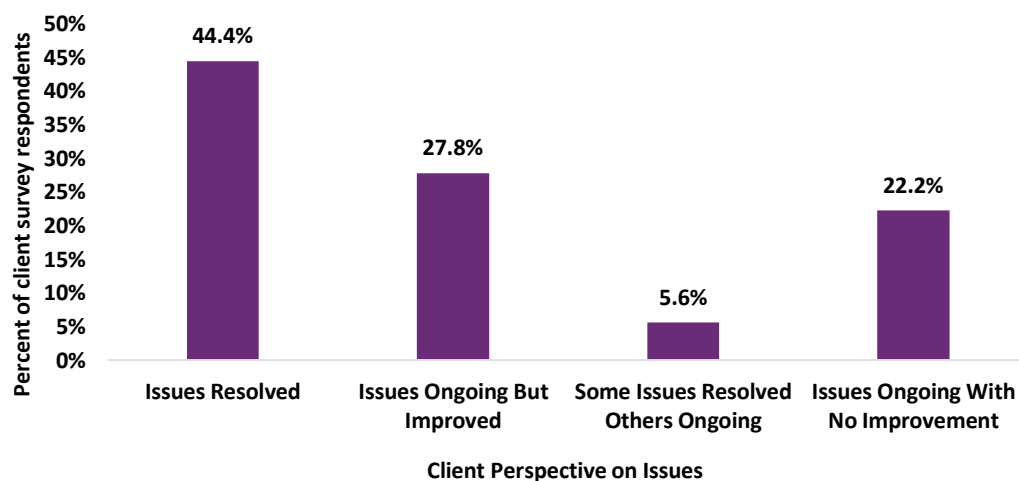


Figure 21: Clients Perspectives on resolution of issues that led to referral to SASH

5.1.2 Partner Agency Perspectives

The SASH pilot program, represents a new type of collaboration between three CLC's and feedback was sought from partner agency key staff about perceptions of SASH from a client perspective, and from the viewpoint of their own agency as part of the collaboration.

Role of SASH in Addressing an Important Service Gap

All of the partner agencies reiterated that from the outset, the SASH program was established to address previously unmet needs amongst women at risk of homelessness and who experience a coalescence of legal, financial, housing and social issues associated with FDV.

Let's actually make a significant impact for the women who are most vulnerable and who would not be able to get services anywhere else. – Partner Agency

It was noted that both clients and CLCs stand to benefit from a more coordinated response for women with multiple legal issues that extend beyond the remit of a single legal service. Moreover, as reflected throughout this evaluation report, whilst clients may present with prima facie legal issues, these are invariably intertwined with a myriad of other housing, social, financial and health issues that fall outside the CLCs remit, resources and areas of direct expertise. Hence the pivotal coupling of legal assistance with case management in the original SASH model.

A key point of difference for SASH is that it can identify and coordinate a response to multiple legal needs of clients that go beyond the role of a single CLC, and eligibility for SASH is in part based on this. Often clients have legal issues that require the involvement of two of the CLC partner agencies. There have also been some situations where all three CLCs have been involved in resolving legal and tenancy matters, as reflected in the following vignette.

A client had a shared equity loan with Keystart. Street Law picked up the issue early on, then referred it to Women's Legal Services WA to negotiate with Keystart. The other party involved said he would get an early release of his superannuation to pay out the mortgage debt but then didn't follow through. The client then decided to give up the home to Keystart. After she gave up the home, she was assisted by Tenancy WA who ensured she was on the priority housing list.

The collaboration between the three CLCs via SASH has reduced the need for women in a FDV situation to have to seek out each legal service separately. As reflected in the adjacent vignette, the SASH program enables partner agencies to provide support for a client with multiple intersecting legal and non-legal needs, whereas prior to SASH, the client would have had to access the partner agencies separately, and seek separate support for non-legal issues.

The client presented to SASH with multiple legal and non-legal issues, and was at serious risk of homelessness due to mortgage default, as the perpetrator of the FDV had failed to meet mortgage repayments, and the house was about to be repossessed. She was assisted with family property law advice by one of the partner agencies, whilst another assisted with negotiations with the mortgagor. During this process the client was supported by the SASH program coordinator and when it became clear that she would have to surrender the property the program coordinator provided assistance with relocating to stable accommodation.

The imperative for SASH to continue to have a sharp focus on its point of difference (i.e. what it provides that is different to other services available to women who have experienced FDV) was emphasised in interviews with the partner agencies.

Why we started the service or the program nearly two years ago now is exactly why we're doing it and we know that there's a need out there. That's very strong and that sense of commitment and value of the program and the belief in the potential of the program, I think that's reverberated across all staff that are involved in it. – Partner Agency

5.1.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

Benefits of the SASH Model for their Clients and Organisation

The breadth of organisations referring clients to SASH reflects the gap that this program is addressing in WA. Just as the legal services involved in SASH are acutely aware of the non-legal issues impacting on their client's circumstances, the same is true for homelessness and health services, who see clients with legal and other needs that extend beyond their own area of expertise or role. Being able to refer clients to a program such as SASH is highly valued and exemplified by the following stakeholder comments;

Our service has been able to access Safe as Houses for support mainly with legal enquiries, this allowed us to be able to provide immediate support to our clients. – External Stakeholder

SASH offers a real benefit to our organisation, as we are able to refer clients at risk of eviction and facing a particular risk of domestic or other violence to them, where we know they will receive support with issues we do not have capacity to address (eg domestic violence). – External Stakeholder

Multiple stakeholders commented that there were substantial strengths in the SASH model and the potential for wraparound support to be of significant benefit for their clients.

In the stakeholder survey, the benefits of SASH for individual clients centered primarily on addressing clients' legal issues, including providing family law property advice, negotiating to delay and prevent eviction, supporting clients to find suitable accommodation and advocating for clients.

Stakeholder Example of SASH Assistance

A community-based outreach centre discussed how SASH assisted with one of their clients and provided legal advice to manage outstanding fines and issues related to driving offences committed by the perpetrator in a vehicle registered in the clients' name. The centre also discussed how SASH had kept their outreach worker up to date on the legal situation and advised them on how they could assist the client.

5.2 Impacts of the SASH Program

As reflected in the previous subsection, the value of the SASH program in addressing a key gap in services available to women who have experienced FDV was recognised across client, partner agency and stakeholder domains. This subsection collates client, partner agency and stakeholder perspectives on some of the key intended impacts that were articulated when SASH was established – these relate to preventing homelessness, improving clients' mental health and wellbeing and building capacity and legal literacy. These are clearly ambitious outcomes for any single program but were importantly visionary in guiding a more holistic community legal sector response to preventing and reducing homelessness among women who have experienced FDV. Attaining these outcomes is influenced by many wider systems-level challenges that are outside the direct scope of SASH to address, but as reflected in this section of the evaluation report, there has been positive progress in these areas.

5.2.1 Preventing Homelessness

Client Perspectives

By addressing some of the complex social, financial and legal issues SASH was able to assist some clients to access stable and secure housing, and avoid homelessness. As outlined in Figure 22, there were fewer clients in temporary accommodation upon exit/the end of the evaluation period. The number of clients who were housed in private rental accommodation increased after receiving SASH support.

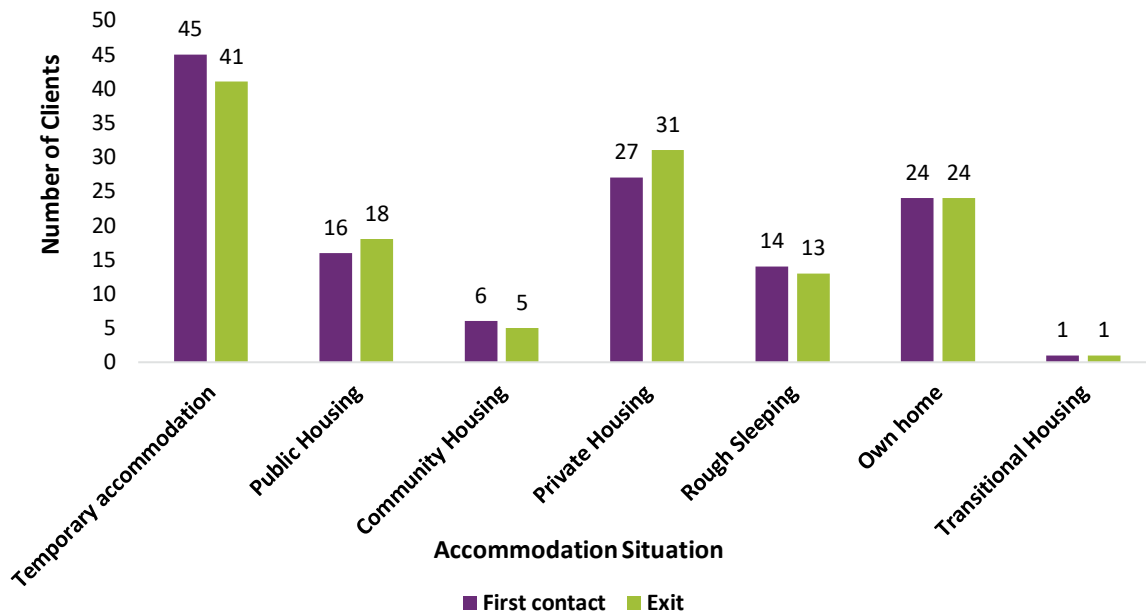


Figure 22: Clients' Accommodation Situation at First Contact with SASH and on Exit/End of Evaluation Period

By successfully alleviating debt and resolving legal issues, one client described how SASH directly prevented homelessness for her and her child, and enabled her to move into a private tenancy.

*There are aspects of it that are ongoing in terms of the ongoing situation with my ex. However, what has happened, because they've enabled me to get the debt forgiven so I'm no longer paying \$100 a fortnight to my lawyers. I eventually had to leave my social housing so they could sell the house. I'm in private rental now, which I would not have been able to afford. I can't really afford it at the moment, but it's still - I would have been out on the streets probably, had they not got that debt forgiven and I was trying to repay that at the same time - **SASH Client***

Risk of homelessness or return to homelessness can however be a more ongoing issue for some SASH Clients, and there are cases where it will take months if not years to resolve all of the legal and property issues.

*Yeah, well with the whole tenancy thing, definitely. I know the Family Court process is going to carry on for about a year - **SASH Client***

Where there is little income or lack of employment, financial circumstances can also render women vulnerable to homelessness beyond the period of SASH support. This is unfortunately beyond SASH control, but where possible clients are connected or signposted to other programs and supports.

In working towards connecting clients with stable and secure accommodation, SASH aims to empower clients to move forward, and take greater control of the next steps in their lives. Evidence of this was seen across many client case studies and reflected in some of the client interview comments. Being able to manage finances, sustain tenancy or think about returning to work are all positive markers of this.

*I've got my first house inspection today, actually [in my] private tenancy. I didn't want to go through Homes West or Community Housing, because I plan on going back to work next year, so yeah, I wouldn't have been eligible to continue... - **SASH Client***

*So now I'm in the position where I'm in private rental, I'm managing financially. I've always been really good at budgeting, which a lot of people don't expect if you've been on the verge of homelessness... I'm working... so it's contract to contract and you kind of - but it's beautiful work and it's really - I feel socially valuable – **SASH Client***

Despite the presence of some ongoing FDV issues in some client's lives, a number commented that the housing and financial stability had enabled them to distance themselves from these issues and begin to make positive changes.

*It does give me the feeling of being a little bit on the outside of it even though the harassment is still going on. – **SASH Client***

*I count myself (one of) the lucky ones. I mean, I went from one place to a really nice place.... So just things worked out for me, like I said, I'm one of the lucky ones, and I would have never done it without these ladies. – **SASH Client***

Partner Agency Perspectives

Partner agencies provided multiple examples where they had assisted SASH clients to resolve complex legal and financial issues that were threatening their ability to obtain and maintain secure accommodation. In conjunction with non-legal support provided by the SASH program coordinator, partner agencies were also active in tackling barriers clients faced in accessing stable accommodation. The case study below (Box 7) outlines how SASH partner agencies were able to address a clients' legal and financial issues and assist them to avoid homelessness.

Box 7: SASH Assistance to Prevent Homelessness

Background

Transitional housing tenant Claire, a single mother with three dependent children was living in public housing when the Department of Child Protection and Family Services (DCPFS) removed the children from her care due to FDV and other issues. Whilst Claire was temporarily not residing in the house, the public housing authority reported the house was being damaged. They suggested she surrender the property to avoid any further damage, then invoiced Claire \$10,000 for the extensive property damage. This has resulted in a debt and an inability to be housed within the public housing system. Claire relies on Centrelink benefits to care for herself and her children. DCPFS returned the children to Claire but the case remained open due to outstanding criminal matters and housing concerns. Anglicare has provided temporary transitional accommodation. DCPFS have since closed the case. Claire also has outstanding ambulance debt, a criminal injuries compensation claim, license suspension and her vehicle was impounded.

What was SASH able to do to resolve the issues?

SASH has assisted Claire to move from transitional housing into a long-term tenancy with the Housing Authority, this involved lengthy negotiation with both Housing and Anglicare to assist Claire in a smooth transition. SASH gave legal advice and assistance with regard to the criminal matters; stealing and traffic charges, extraordinary drivers license, resolving fines and infringements and impounding of vehicle as well as referrals for family support programs and school based assistance, victim notification registration and victim support service assistance. Emergency relief provided school supplies, paid school fees, food vouchers, uniforms, transport cards, phone credit and car seats. SASH referred Claire to Safe at Home for assistance in improving the security at the property.

The case study in Box 8 also illustrates how, in tandem with addressing legal issues, SASH works with clients to address other matters that are of high priority to client, such as working towards reunification with children in this circumstance.

Box 8: SASH Assistance to Resolve Legal and Financial Issues and Obtain Housing

Background

Ashley, a single mother in her mid-thirties, was experiencing multiple legal and financial issues at the time of her first contact with SASH. Her living situation was unstable, she was residing at a property without a formal tenancy agreement and the house was in poor repair. Ashley also had a child in the care of the DCPFS and was experiencing mental health issues that resulted in a hospital admission. The FDV Ashley had experienced over an extended period of time had left her with limited support networks and her situation was further complicated by financial abuse resulting in her holding significant debt. With limited income and outstanding fines and infringements Ashley was unable to afford a private rental and when she first presented to SASH was exhausted, anxious and concerned for herself and her child's future and safety.

What was SASH able to do to resolve the issues?

SASH provided a referral for financial counselling and assisted with a collation of debt history, as well as legal advice and support to apply for the fines to be converted to community work. SASH provided assistance with more appropriate rental accommodation and submitting correct information to claim the correct rate of rent assistance. Sash also provided assistance with Ashley's application for public housing and priority housing waitlists, and negotiated a rental agreement at a reduced affordable rate. Sash has provided support for Ashley to seek appropriate counselling, support to understand legal terminology and advice to assist in the complexity of her circumstances with all parties. SASH liaised with the FinWA (Family Inclusion Network of Western Australia Inc.) advocacy worker and Legal Aid WA lawyer on Ashley's behalf. SASH also provided assistance with emergency relief of food and personal items, a SmartRider, support at DCPFS safety planning meetings and support letters to agencies. DCPFS are now considering reunification of Ashley with her child.

Stakeholder Perspectives

The majority of stakeholders who responded to the evaluation survey identified assistance with tenancy/housing concerns and the prevention of homelessness as the key benefit of SASH for clients. Of note, stakeholders reported multiple instances where they felt that their clients would have been homeless without intervention by SASH.

Too often in FDV situations, women and children are forced to leave their family home for either safety or financial reasons, and one of the unique aspects of SASH is that it is supporting women across the spectrum of public housing, private rental accommodation and home ownership. There are tenancy support services for people in public housing in WA, and for people in private rentals (e.g. the Red Cross Private Tenancy Support Service), but people who 'on paper' have their own home, are particularly vulnerable to not being able to access support, and this is why the capacity of SASH to take on property law issues is particularly unique. Illustratively, one stakeholder noted that the property legal advice SASH provided had enabled one of their clients to remain in her own home.

Several stakeholders mentioned that SASH had negotiated with real estate agents to address rent arrears and increase the security of their clients' housing. Another stakeholder commented that SASH was instrumental

in negotiating and supporting one of their clients facing eviction and that this enabled the client to obtain suitable accommodation.

Safe as Houses has helped a client to extend an eviction notice and negotiate dates, so they had sufficient time to find alternative accommodation. – External Stakeholder

5.2.2 Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health conditions have been reported to be the largest contributor to the Australian health system burden due to physical/sexual intimate partner violence, with a 2016 study indicating that anxiety and depressive disorders account for a substantial proportion of this.³⁶ One of the outcomes aspired to by SASH is to improve health and wellbeing, reflecting the SASH program's recognition of the strong association between FDV and mental wellbeing, and additionally, that safe and secure housing as a critical social determinant of mental health and health more broadly.³⁷ If homeless or facing the risk of homelessness, a person's focus is on day to day survival, and health is not a pressing priority.³⁸ When risk of homelessness is coupled with complex legal and financial issues, these in and of themselves are a source of anxiety and stress.

The evaluation team identified three main pathways through which SASH can assist to improve mental health and wellbeing (i) through reducing client stress and anxiety associated with issues they are facing, (ii) connecting clients to supportive services relating to mental health and wellbeing, and (iii) assisting clients to secure and be able to maintain a safe place to live. The adjacent comment from Dr Amanda Stafford from the Royal Perth Hospital Homeless Team is particularly pertinent to this third pathway.

Domestic violence is the most common reason behind homelessness in women in Australia. Many of the women seen by the Homeless Team at RPH have been victims of violence, and the reality is that once on the streets, a woman's risk of physical and sexual assault increases, not only from intimate partners, but also from the men who prey on vulnerable homeless women. The levels of violence experienced by homeless women are extraordinary and the best protection on the streets is usually a violent partner, thus taking the woman back to the situation which made her homeless in the first place. The physical and psychological damage done can take a lifetime to undo and won't start until she's off the streets and safe.

Dr Amanda Stafford, Consultant Emergency Department and Clinical Lead Homeless Team, RPH. April 2019

Client Perspectives

To date improvements in self-reported client wellbeing appear to have mostly related to stress, social isolation and mental wellbeing; all of which are areas of high vulnerability for women experiencing FDV and its aftermath. FDV wreaks havoc in many areas of one's life, including the severing or disruption of some family ties and friendships, and as evident in the experiences of SASH clients, it can be extremely lonely and isolating. Having to relocate to a different area, diminished finances and the emotional legacy of FDV also contribute to this. In some of the client interviews, it was conveyed that SASH staff were able to help alleviate some of this loneliness and improve social support.

Well, I felt I was in a much worse - and out of my - not comfort zone but being here with no family and stuff was... and I felt very much alone. It was like - [SASH Lawyer] was like my sister in a way, thank you so much and she just put a big smile on my face and it lifted a lot of weight off my shoulders. I was really drowning before that happened for me. I don't know where I would have ended up... – SASH Client

... you feel like you're not having to do it on your own, so even just them saying, look we're not sure of the answers right now, but let me look into it and I'll get back to you with the next part of the process, just having them do that makes such a difference ... – SASH Client

Some clients indicated that having someone who would regularly check up on them when they were struggling or experiencing poor mental health was central to the success they experienced with the program.

Yeah because you don't get too overwhelmed with everything and go, oh this is just too hard, I'm just going to give up, which is - I think that's probably been one of the most motivating and important things of it. Then you get a random phone call from [program coordinator] going, just following up, just to check on how you're going and it's just like, oh thanks. – SASH Client

Many SASH clients have suffered deeply, not only from the violence and relationship breakdown itself, but also from the stresses of subsequent legal and financial challenges. As noted by one client, the assistance of SASH and an increase in housing stability enabled them to better manage issues with their mental health.

... I think that going through something like this does take a toll on you. I suffered with really bad panic attacks around the time that I was involved with Safe as Houses and stuff like that. I manage it a bit better now. But it's still - it's less than ideal. – SASH Client

Congruent with its rationale, SASH has sought to provide clients with support across a number of domains. That clients can get support from the same program for multiple issues was reported by clients to have a profound impact in alleviating much of the stress resulting from cumulative financial and legal issues.

... I had so many factors that - like being a New Zealander and not having the Centrelink support and those other things that were happening to my children. I had other extenuating factors that have just - I don't know where I would have ended up... – SASH Client

Yeah, like very reassuring and just relieving, like unbelievably relieving. I almost cried when they paid my storage fees. I'd been in the house for three months already and I still didn't have my lounge in there. I mean I had my bed, but not my lounge, dining table, outdoor furniture...to finally get it in there, I was just like, oh my god, it's a place where you can live now, instead of feeling like you're a squatter, you know what I mean? But [daughter] having her own room, she was just elated, like it was just really - I didn't expect it. – SASH Client

Partner Agency Perspectives

All of the partner agencies noted the importance of the wraparound support aspect of the SASH model as a conduit for supporting vulnerable clients to improve their mental health and wellbeing. In addition to the distress and mental health impacts of FDV in and of itself, as reflected in the case studies and examples provided by partner agencies, many of the clients are dealing with a cluster of distressing circumstances. Thus supporting clients to reduce the number of stresses and problems they are dealing with is a recurrent theme in the work that the SASH lawyers and the program coordinator do.

The links between stable housing and mental health were also stressed.

... with the focus on addressing legal and financial issues that would lead to secure accommodation and improved wellbeing. – Partner Agency

*[SASH] should be doing that and actually facilitating that in a much stronger way, because we know if we can get people housed, all the research says, even if it's into transitional we know then it's a longer term journey, but they can settle, they can access health, they can access counselling or mental health, whatever it is they need and then the other things will flow. – **Partner Agency***

One of the partner agencies emphasised the link between mental health and alcohol/addiction issues for some SASH clients, but the scarcity of appropriate rehabilitation options in WA was noted to pose a barrier to client's accessing this type of support.

*Generally it can be drugs, it can be mental health, those sort of things, so it's getting the supports around that. If it's residential rehab that they want to do, then it's getting on the lists for them to get onto that. Long wait times for that, and supporting them in the meantime. Then we bubble along with the legal issues. – **Partner Agency***

As several of the organisations referring clients to SASH are from the health sector (such as King Edward Memorial Hospital and Women's Health and Family Services) partner agencies are aware that some clients will potentially have a range of health issues they are dealing with. The example was given of a client who has been in and out of hospital frequently, and hence, struggling to deal with their multiple legal and social issues and have missed a number of court appearances.

Stakeholder Perspectives

While stakeholders did not necessarily refer to mental health and wellbeing benefits of SASH overtly in their open ended survey responses, the vulnerability of clients and the value of SASH support at a critical time in their client's lives was acknowledged. One stakeholder commented that one of the main benefits of SASH they had observed was around case management:

*Case management to offer support for clients with tenancy issues or vulnerable women experiencing high risk in the community. – **External Stakeholder***

Another stakeholder identified that SASH provides referrals to mental health support and counselling when required by their clients:

*Safe as Houses provides support at a critical time of need for families as well as coordinated support and referral. – **External Stakeholder***

5.2.3 Capacity Building and Increasing Knowledge, Skills and Legal Literacy

Building clients' legal literacy and increasing their capacity and skills to manage their situation and deal effectively with future legal and financial challenges were identified as desired outcomes in the original program logic for the SASH program. Across client, partner agency and stakeholder feedback there were positive examples of this, particularly for clients who initially felt totally overwhelmed and admitted they had no idea how to go about resolving their financial, tenancy and legal issues. This building of longer term capacity and legal/financial literacy is vital scaffolding to support clients in their journey to stable housing and greater financial surety. It is also empowering for those women who previously had little or no control over such matters in their prior violent relationships.

Client Perspectives

Whilst, due to the short-term nature of the evaluation and limitations in available data, it was not possible to measure the impact of SASH on clients' ability to deal with future legal issues, many clients identified increased understanding and confidence. Clients often found it overwhelming and confusing when initially seeking out support and assistance. This was particularly evident among clients who talked about how they had previously left all financial and property decision matters to their ex-partner.

Many clients were facing complex legal, financial and tenancy issues and indicated that prior to support from SASH, were unaware of their options or the steps they should be taking.

Yeah, it was mind blowing, so they've been really invaluable, can't thank them or put it into words enough. Because I mean I'm not uneducated or anything like that, but just the resources, you just don't realise what's out there and what's specified for your situation. – SASH Client

...the avenues they give you, I just wouldn't have been aware, it would have taken me a lot longer and I would have probably been a lot more stressed, just to have the resources and information accessible and just the quick response, even if there's no result, they still will let you know, this is what we've got to do, we've got to look into it further, bear with us, we'll get back to you as soon as we have more information, do you know what I mean? – SASH Client

By equipping clients with knowledge, skills, and resources SASH empowered clients to be able to make informed decisions and encouraged independence. As a result some clients felt more confident they would be able to maintain their tenancies in the future.

Yeah, I am. Does it sound stupid that that just propelled me, that one incident there just sort of turned my life around? I don't think I would be in that position if that didn't happen, would probably still be sitting there unhappy. Financially - yeah. There's nothing better than a woman with a bit of independence. That's what I say to my daughter, an educated woman is an independent woman, don't forget it. – SASH Client

Partner Agency Perspectives

Clients are often referred to SASH when their legal and/or financial issues have already reached a crisis point, and 'not knowing what to do' emerged as a recurring theme. While assisting with immediate legal needs is a key role for SASH, congruent with the original SASH aims, partner agencies also stressed the importance of building clients' legal literacy and knowledge of their rights and options. As illustrated by one partner agency, providing information and advice to clients had increased capacity and confidence to engage and follow up with required actions:

More often than not, they have no idea of what they're - what they should do or what they're entitled to. Just by giving them that information and that advice, they then have the confidence to go forward - do it to what you've suggested, you know what I mean? Then get the outcome so they don't have to worry about it anymore. – Partner Agency

All three CLCs partnering in SASH have extensive experience working with clients in vulnerable circumstances, and it was evident from both client and partner agency recounts that SASH lawyers spend considerable time assisting clients to understand their legal situation and options, and are very skilled at breaking the issues down into less overwhelming steps for clients. This was evident in a case example provided where the client

was being contacted by the ex-partner who had been released from prison, alongside a raft of other issues she was facing. The SASH lawyer in conjunction with the SASH Program Coordinator were able to ‘chip away’ at things that needed to be done, as well as clarifying what was happening, with the client along the way.

Stakeholder Perspectives

Most Stakeholders who responded to the self-complete survey, when responding to the open ended question on the benefits of SASH, identified legal advice and capacity building on legal matters as one of the most valuable aspects of SASH for their clients.

Beyond the benefits to clients directly, it also appears that SASH has also had some capacity building impact on other organisations that are working with women in these situations. Illustratively, one stakeholder commented that SASH had provided feedback on how the stakeholder organisation and staff could continue to assist the client as they gathered necessary documents to resolve issues regarding accumulated fines and infringements. Another stakeholder noted that the case management through SASH had increased their organisations capacity in terms of understanding shared clients’ challenges with legal and financial issues and that the management plan provided a framework to work with clients’ vulnerabilities to help them achieve goals and positive outcomes.

They provided legal advice and assistance to a client to do with Fines and Vehicle registration issues where a vehicle had been registered in a client's names but never driven by her. The perpetrator was fined for various driving offences which were in her name. The Outreach Worker was given advice on how to assist her. – External Stakeholder

5.2.4 Reduced Resource Demand on Other Sectors and Agencies

It is well recognised in the literature and in economic impact reports on FDV commissioned by government,^{2,39} that FDV has a significant flow on effect to an array of other sectors and services, including health, justice, education, social welfare. The potential for SASH to have a positive ripple effect on client interactions with other sectors was mentioned unprompted by a couple of the partner agencies, and is also reflected in the support for SASH and referrals to it from health and homelessness services (and the client suggestions around police referrals to SASH in future).

For the CLC partners, the benefits for the justice system were particularly evident:

If someone is on the streets, automatically there's going to be interaction with the justice system, whether as a victim or a perpetrator of assaults or whatever. So that's a definite cost [to society], so if you can eliminate all of that. If someone is in safe accommodation, it's still possible but less likely (for them) to be a victim of crime as well – Partner Agency

The legal and financial burden associated with the accumulation of fines, and the burden this places not only on individuals in disadvantaged circumstances, but also on the justice system has been a topical issue in social media and policy discourse over the last few years in WA. As illustrated in the following vignette from a SASH partner agency, this is a scenario often faced by clients.

The Attorney General keeps talking about the fines issues; that is a huge issue. We've got clients with up to \$50,000 worth of fines because they don't have the wherewithal or the capacity to buy a [transport] ticket every day, or they don't have the ID to even go and get a SmartRider or a concession SmartRider. Living hand-to-mouth costs more than living in accommodation, and Newstart is not enough regardless, but they don't have the - they can't afford the \$0.60 or \$0.70 a day to actually do that. But then they end up with these huge amount of fines because they haven't bought a ticket. They keep accumulating, and then they don't pay it or make an arrangement within 28 days, so then it's doubled. It just goes on and on and on. So I think there is that cost. The cost of the PTA issuing those fines, the cost of enforcing those fines. The cost of the Fines Enforcement Registry putting out warrants, et cetera, et cetera. Then the cost of them going to prison if they are picked up on a warrant of commitment. We've had a client [in this situation] who was picked up and put in prison for five days... – **Partner Agency**

As the example of fines shows, the potential economic benefits of the SASH program for other sectors could accrue from a number of areas, including reducing burden on debt collection services (contracted by government agencies), law enforcement, courts, and costly short-term prison sentences.

5.3 Feedback and Suggestions for Strengthening SASH

As a pilot program, feedback on strengthening SASH going forward was sought from clients, partner agencies and stakeholders during the course of the evaluation. Overall clients perceived clear benefits from their involvement with SASH but also provided a number of suggestions for strengthening future service delivery. Stakeholders similarly identified benefits and impacts of the SASH program, but also gave feedback on potential areas of improvement. Partner agencies discussed the benefits of the SASH model and the potential to provide unique wraparound support to their extremely vulnerable client group, they also highlighted a number of challenges that had emerged during the course of the pilot program and the potential opportunities to strengthen the program.

5.3.1 Client Perspective

During the interviews, clients were asked if they had experienced any barriers to accessing or gaps in the SASH program. The survey asked about clients' experiences with SASH and any suggestions they had for strengthening the program.

Client Interview Feedback

Overall, the clients participating in interviews gave extremely positive feedback about their experiences with SASH and the impact the service had on their lives. There was however, some constructive feedback in regards to staff resources, communication and service accessibility.

Clients did report at times some frustration at waiting times and difficulties in getting in contact with SASH due to the high demand on the service.

*She was very good at pulling stuff out that... I was almost embarrassed that I was getting so much help. The only thing that was difficult was that [SASH lawyer] was so busy. Apparently, she's the only lawyer that deals with cases like mine... – **SASH Client***

*Yeah, I would go to the city and every time I saw them - but like I said, she was so busy that the appointments were often weeks apart. – **SASH Client***

However, clients felt that this was a result of insufficient resources, rather than the fault of the SASH workers.

Yeah, give them more funding... I owe them a lot, you know? I'm indebted to them and they're just everything, [the program coordinator, SASH Lawyer], what can you say? They should be honoured really. – SASH Client

As noted in an earlier section of this report, the SASH budget constraints and workload has meant that most of the case management contact with clients is over the phone, and there were clients who indicated that they would have liked to have been able to complement this with some face to face contact.

Whilst overall clients were very positive about the sensitivity shown by SASH staff to their circumstances, one client did note that because women are often at such a low point when come to SASH, preparing clients for the 'worst-case scenario' needs to be coupled with a lot of compassion and support.

Because they make you aware, I guess, from their perspective of the worst-case scenario. But maybe while telling you those things, they could have provided some extra support or done it in a slightly different manner or something. – SASH Client

Another suggestion for strengthening SASH arising from clients was that more could be done to promote the fact that services like SASH are available to help people who need it. Importantly, one client even described that someone in an abusive relationship may have more confidence to leave knowing that there is this kind of support available.

I think a lot more women would know, would feel a lot safer leaving a domestic relationship, if they knew that help was available... Because a lot of women don't know that it's there, a lot. Like the two women I've got with me now, they have no idea that this sort of help even exists. – SASH Client

Client Survey Feedback

Client survey respondents primarily described their own experience in largely positive terms, but also proffered ways in which they felt the SASH program could be improved. In particular, clients reported that the required tasks after a meeting with the SASH lawyers could feel overwhelming and, at that time, they lacked the capacity to manage and understand what was required. One client suggested that a timeline or record of help that had been provided and tasks they were required to action could be helpful.

Possibly be more involved and not let the client do most of the work as I found this was the hardest for me as I didn't have the head space or time to be dealing with all of it and understanding it completely – SASH Client

Providing a spreadsheet timeline just as a reference for client to keep up to date with appointments & record of help provided as well as copy of links or places for service that allow client to access procedures involved for services provided. – SASH Client

More practical and emotional support around reporting FDV to police was a suggestion made by a number of clients.

Another client identified that support from the SASH program coordinator would have been useful when they were reported incidents of FDV to the police as this was an experience they found particularly difficult and traumatic. – SASH Client

Help with reporting incidents to the police as this is extremely traumatic compounded by the fact that police don't respond well to stalking/harassment cases. It would have been really useful to have a central contact in the police to report to rather than just going through the general call centre. I no longer report anything to the police because they don't deal with it well, don't help & they just make everything worse. So it would have been useful to have support and advocacy to make reporting easier.
– **SASH Client**

5.3.2 Partner Agency Perspectives

The partner agencies were very open about some of the challenges and learnings that had arisen along the course of the SASH program commencement and implementation to date, and identified a number of opportunities to strengthen the SASH program in the future that we have grouped into five themes; i) improved clarity for eligibility, ii) consistent approach to prioritising clients, iii) challenges with service capacity, iv) clearer definition of roles and v) increased focus on in-depth case management.

i) Improved Clarity for Eligibility

Throughout the pilot project, regular efforts to review and refine the process of eligibility have been undertaken by the partner agencies, and this should continue as the project evolves further. Partner agencies noted that particularly in the earlier stage of the project, they were often overwhelmed with referrals and that the SASH program overall did not have a clear protocol, strategy or mechanism for prioritising referrals nor clear eligibility criteria for clients. As clients present with acute needs, partner agencies have typically sought to assist as many clients as possible, but dealing with a larger volume of clients comes at a price, as it has meant that SASH is often not providing the kind of intensive case management and support across multiple legal and other issues that the program was designed to provide.

A bit grey, yep. I think, from my point of view, it was really unclear what the criteria was for who would be the SASH clients. It just seemed that we were drowning in referrals and I felt that this created an expectation that we would try and help as many women as we could. – **Partner Agency**

We don't have capacity to provide that intensive level of support that we were wanting so I think over time, it became more of [SASH lawyer] assessing how she could use the limited time she had to help the client. Sometimes that was in discrete advices. – **Partner Agency**

Given that case management support is one of the intended core features of SASH, taking on too many clients at any one time, or not having a mechanism for prioritising the multiplicity of issues facing clients, runs the risk of the case management support aspect of the program not fully realising its aims. As noted earlier in this report, the client case load (average 25 at any one time) for the Program Coordinator is high comparative to other services with intensive case management support from a case worker or social worker. Hence a couple of partner agencies felt that in-depth case management is not currently able to be provided for all clients.

The fact is that [the program coordinator] in her role needs to be a part of all of these women's lives in terms of the service. We have to be more diligent about our selection of these clients. We can't just accept all of them. – **Partner Agency**

It's clear, the service can't cater for everybody, nor should we. That's one of the most difficult things with services is that they think they can cater for all but we can't. The funding is limited, [the program coordinator's] time is limited, she's only one human being, – **Partner Agency**

The need for SASH to retain a sharp focus on ‘who most needs this service’ was a recurring theme in the partner agency interviews. There is no shortage of referrals to SASH, nor women who would benefit from its service in some way, but partner agencies felt there was a critical need to better prioritise which clients the SASH program will have the greatest impact on, and identify those that can be assisted elsewhere.^a

Surely, the benefit of having SASH is because you can have an opportunity for two or three lawyers across different practice areas providing that more complex assistance, but you need the right client to benefit from that. What’s the difference between just referring between CLCs and the SASH referrals? –

Partner Agency

We now need to prioritise those that are going to benefit from...that wraparound. No, they may not need three legal lawyers but definitely, they do need to have some sort of support from the [program coordinator]. Because otherwise, it's advice only and you can get that from Women's [Legal Service WA] or you can get that from Street Law. It doesn't actually prioritise you for Safe as Houses –

Partner Agency

As SASH has evolved, there have been attempts by the program and its partner agencies to clarify the eligibility criteria, and the evaluation team’s understanding is that more recently the criteria has been refined so that clients need to have legal issues that span two or more of the partner agency areas of expertise, as well as non-legal case management issues.

I don't know the numbers exactly, but it's a small percentage [of clients] that are all three [need all three CLCs]. But most of them are two, and then there's a whole bunch that are just one, and they're the ones that probably shouldn't be in the program. –

Partner Agency

All of the partner agencies agreed that it is critical that they all be involved in the decision making concerning eligibility and prioritisation of clients.

Decisions about who enters SASH- needs to be a joint decision between the partner agencies and that we should be focusing on clients who have those legal needs spanning our three centres. –

Partner Agency

It's a little bit like going back to, what is the criteria? Then the conversation now is coming to the case management meeting which is held fortnightly...or every three weeks. Then looking at the referrals that have been made in that period of time and saying, which are the ones that we're going to take on? –

Partner Agency

ii) *Need for Consistent Approach to Prioritising Client needs*

In addition to prioritising clients for entry into SASH, there was a shared view across partner agencies about the imperative for a more collaborative and consistent method of ranking client needs once clients have been accepted into the program. Given nearly all clients have multiple and competing needs, it was generally felt that there needs to be more communication between partner agencies around prioritising which needs get addressed first. In effect, an agreed triage model for prioritisation of needs has merit for SASH moving forward. A sharper model for the prioritisation of multiple client needs was particularly voiced in relation to the non-

^a The Women’s Legal Service in Victoria has developed a referral and priority matrix for this purpose (see Appendix 2)

legal needs of clients, ideally in consultation with each client around their own goals and priorities. The predominant view was that preventing homelessness is one of the key aims of SASH, hence housing and accommodation needs should take precedence over other material needs such as food relief, transport assistance or furnishings, particularly as there are often other existing services that can address the latter, but very few services that can simultaneously address women's concurrent legal and housing/homelessness priorities.

There would never seem to be this actual assessment holistically of everyone about priority. – Partner Agency

From the evaluation team's perspective, clarifying the criteria and processes for prioritising and addressing client needs (which would take into account where needs can be referred to other services) would reduce some of the current demand on SASH to be 'many things to many people', and would also strengthen the unity of the collaborative approach that underpins SASH.

iii) Challenges with Service Capacity

Although the SASH program is in its relative infancy, the number of clients seen and the breadth of referring organisations testifies to the service void it is filling. However as noted above, one of the aims of SASH is to provide more intensive support to clients with multiple complex needs, and across the legal and case management components of SASH, it was observed that staff do not have the capacity to provide the level of support clients were looking for and that current caseloads hindered their ability to provide additional support or case plan for the future.

The demand for SASH is far greater than the current resources will allow which causes its own complexities, -Partner Agency

We don't have the capacity to be that person who they can pick up the phone to call any time they need, talk - go with them to collect documents, make copies of things, that sort of thing. – Partner Agency

It makes it hard, though because we've got - I think we've got - I've got 30 current cases open. When you've got lawyers who are really strapped for time, it's really hard to case plan with the lawyers for two hours – Partner Agency

That doesn't mean either that if something else - if a client's file gets closed and something else pops up that's relevant, they can come back and say, hey, can you help me, I've still got my SASH file open – Partner Agency

It was the perception of some partner agencies that the legal team were spending a significant amount of time providing case management for clients, perhaps due to the high demand on the program coordinator.

Where things are pushed back to us and they're really non-legal issues, that's a bit frustrating as well. – Partner Agency

These challenges go beyond just that of prioritising which clients to take on, as it speaks to the heart of the complex needs of clients, and that a service such as SASH, to be optimally effective, needs to have additional capacity to respond to multiple concurrent legal needs; averting risk of homelessness; and higher intensity triaged case management for clients, all of which may need support for an ongoing period.

iv) *Clearer Definition of Roles*

The advantage of SASH is that each partner agency is able to bring its own expertise, as well as resources and network contacts in order to maximise the outcome for clients. However, the partner agencies felt that there have been some issues surrounding role clarity, collaboration and fulfillment of the SASH objectives. Some of this is par for the course in a pilot project, but given SASH has been underway for more than a year, it appears that there is still a need for greater shared understanding of respective roles and some of the processes and mechanisms for prioritising.

*I think because no one really knew what they were doing, we just pretty much did whatever we could do and assist with however we could. Structure wise it was a bit all over the place and we kind of just had to fumble our way through it. – **Partner Agency***

*I think having a clear identification as to the roles and the expectations and procedures, I think that was missing quite a bit. Everyone, I think, had mixed interpretation as to what they were expected to do. – **Partner Agency***

*A lot of the ideas that they had at the beginning about what the program would be like, never really made it through to those of us who were running the program. – **Partner Agency***

An additional issue that impacted on the lines of communication was that two of the partner organisations split the Management and Principal Solicitor roles during the pilot adding another degree of complexity between the partnership, the teams were brought together on numerous occasions to assist in clarifying the issues around roles and expectations.

A key suggestion across two of the partner agencies was that SASH would benefit from a clearer overarching strategy with a more refined definition of the roles and responsibilities of SASH staff. Partner agencies felt that increased clarity in definition of roles and better communication between all three services would not only be beneficial within the SASH collaboration, but would also result in more positive outcomes for clients.

The original intention when SASH was first launched was to have a social worker, similar to the role of the social worker in the Victorian Justice Connect program for women.⁴⁰ However, during recruitment which was done in consultation with the Head of the Social Work Department at King Edward Hospital for Women it was decided that the program did not require a social worker but rather a case manager with a list of relevant skills and experiences. Several staff from partner agencies expressed that re-instating a social worker role within SASH would have many benefits including around role delineation.

*A social worker would be able to do that really effectively . . . understanding the delineation between what a case manager should do and what a practitioner should - you know, it doesn't have to be a legal practitioner, but understanding the delineation of the roles. In my experience, I think that would have had a significant impact and we may have had better outcomes for some of our clients than what we've achieved. – **Partner Agency***

*If it was a social worker, the social worker would be very clear about what's legal and what's not legal. – **Partner Agency***

Currently the SASH case manager has a case plan document for each client, but greater shared use of the case plan between all partner agencies would be beneficial. This could reduce confusion surrounding areas of

responsibility, sharpen the focus on client outcomes, and help map out the support to be provided by different partners within SASH, as well as the role of external services that clients are being referred to. Currently, in the absence of a shared case management plan, there is no consistent mechanism for prioritizing needs, tracking client progress and assessing whether or not clients goals are being achieved.

...the database as a case plan... it's a repository for basic information. It doesn't set priorities, it doesn't set goals, and it doesn't record or review how we're doing things. – Partner Agency

Partner agencies also felt there needed to be better communication to keep everyone involved informed on what is being done for a client.

Having clear communication to update each other... well, this is because the level of involvement that we have as lawyers is different to the social work...and that needs to be transferred back to the lawyers as to any updates that we need to be aware of... Yeah and it was unclear, as well, exactly what [other partner agency] was doing. – Partner Agency

v) *Increased Focus on In-Depth Case Management*

Many SASH clients are extremely vulnerable and first enter the service with a variety of complex issues, thus require more intensive support. Due to the complexity of some client situations, partner agencies feel that more individualised, in-depth case management, and hands on support would be beneficial, but the large case load for the program coordinator limits the extent to which this can occur for all clients.

Well, I know we do ID docs, but certainly [a case manager] could assist and physically take that person around and do that kind of stuff...or physically help them go and make an application to go to the Department of Transport to get their photo card; that doesn't happen. So the client has to go off and do that themselves, but if they're very vulnerable, isn't that what SASH is here to do? Because if we get ID, they can actually make applications for accommodation. – Partner Agency

While the original intention of SASH was to provide that holistic and intensive style of case management, in reality, due to the high demand on the service and limited resources, achieving this across a caseload of 25 clients with complex needs is challenging.

It seems like just from the clients we've spoken to and other services and broader work we've done in this kind of space, that - it can be a bottomless pit, that case management...because there's so many issues and obviously you've got more demand than capacity. Then, how do you - how are the decisions made around which clients get case management and how much - how is that - work, in practice? – Partner Agency

Several partner agencies felt that because the service had reached capacity they were unable to provide the level of assistance required to address some of the more underlying crucial issues clients were facing. If funding was to be available, it was suggested that the addition of an experienced social worker to the SASH team would expand capacity in this regard.

In the Women's Homelessness Prevention Project (WHPP) run by the Justice Connect Homeless Law service in Victoria, the social worker attends initial client sessions with the lawyer and follows up with them afterwards, but this is not possible within the current caseload of the Program Coordinator. For clients with

complex social needs and high vulnerability, the availability of this type of support can potentially reduce anxiety where the legal issues are complicated or distressing.

*Part of that safety plan is, from our point of view, meant to be that they can then have non-legal - they can have support to cope with that after the appointment so they don't leave and then go [harm themselves] basically. – **Partner Agency***

*So I suppose it's the assessment of the priorities, and as predominantly . . . lawyers, we're always going to focus-in on the legal priorities, that's what we're trained to do. But that's why having a case manager with a social worker background, they can assess those other priorities. Because we both should be working together in order to get rid of the stressors that the individual is experiencing. – **Partner Agency***

Expanding case management capacity within the SASH program would further strengthen the SASH point of difference of coupling wrap-around support with the addressing of multiple legal and/or tenancy issues.

*That's the integral part of the program. That's what it all falls around. Anyone can go see a different lawyer . . . But if you don't have that connection and the holistic kind of service, then it kind of falls to the wayside. – **Partner Agency***

*We've really worked long and hard to try and get this common view of what case management and the importance of that to this program, because without that, the program is not enough. – **Partner Agency***

*It requires that wraparound, one individual knowing everything that's occurring in order to facilitate all the best practice, all the best that this program has been. – **Partner Agency***

5.3.3 Stakeholder Perspectives

Whilst reporting that their clients had benefited from the SASH program, there are always learnings with a pilot, and stakeholder organisations identified a number of gaps that could be addressed to strengthen future service delivery to clients. Overall, the main strategies identified by stakeholders to strengthen the program included streamlining referral processes and pathways and increasing capacity to assist clients.

Streamlining Referral Processes and Pathways

Several stakeholders identified streamlined referral processes and the 'one door' pathway into SASH as areas that could be improved.

*The model was really promising in terms of providing access to housing and legal support through one point of contact. However, in practice, the services did not seem joined up and we found that referring to the individual services was more efficient and provided better outcomes for clients. Streamlining referral processes and pathways could make a difference. – **External Stakeholder***

*Safe as Houses could be of great benefit to our FDV clients however, we have found that in practice the clients we have referred have been referred on and been unable to access the benefits of Safe as Houses. Our experience has been that there is no one door to access the Services provided under Safe as Houses, instead we have to contact each directly to make a referral. – **External Stakeholder***

One stakeholder commented that support provided and referral options for SASH clients could be strengthened by greater involvement of existing homelessness services in clients' management plans.

Increased Capacity to Assist Clients

A need for increased SASH capacity so as to be able to assist clients in a timely manner was a recurring theme in comments provided by stakeholder organisations. Several stakeholders perceived that current limits on capacity have led to clients being referred on to other services, which could have happened in the first instance if it was clear SASH did not have capacity.

Issues with continued support by [partner agency] as often clients were seen and then referred to other legal services, which often could have been done from the start, to avoid getting so many parties involved. – External Stakeholder

Accessing [partner agency] has been challenging due to capacity, as an Advocate being able to provide clients with the opportunity to discuss Family Law matters is very important. – External Stakeholder

Very dependent on single worker, who can be overwhelmed with workload or on leave – External Stakeholder

It is pertinent to note however that other stakeholders commented that they felt the lack of capacity to meet client demand was common across the sector and noted the positive impact that SASH had on clients who were supported.

Tenancy terminations and domestic violence is, in my view, an area in which supply of services will always struggle to meet demand. In my opinion, services like SASH are incredibly important and life changing programs for those who access them. I hope SASH will continue into the future, to add another building block to the bridge between services and those who need them. – External Stakeholder

Another stakeholder noted that SASH staff followed up with their referrals and provided referrals to other services when clients required assistance outside of the SASH remit.

Staff are always helpful and professional. They follow up with referrals in a timely manner. They also are good at suggesting other support services that would assist the client and family with particular needs. – External Stakeholder

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

It was apparent throughout the evaluation that, prior to the commencement of the SASH program, there was a lack of integrated services in WA for women whose experiences of FDV have resulted in homelessness or high risk of homelessness in conjunction with legal issues, often compounded by financial issues and complex support needs. SASH has thus sought to address a critical service void, and this was echoed in feedback gathered from clients, partner agencies and stakeholders.

SASH is a pilot program that has been working with a highly vulnerable client cohort, all of whom have substantial complexities influenced by external factors outside of the control of the SASH program. The lack of appropriate and affordable housing, previous debt, isolation from friends and family, and disjointed hard-to-navigate services all contribute to the complex issues experienced by SASH clients. These are among key factors that place women at heightened risk of homelessness in the aftermath of FDV experiences, as summarised in Figure 23.

Many long-term impacts of FDV that often persist after the relationship has ended. These issues include financial hardship, isolation from friends and family and mental illness.

Concurrent and complex needs that span legal, financial, social and health issues cannot be addressed by any single service – integrated responses and multidisciplinary teams required.

Shortage of affordable housing and long public housing waiting lists.

Private rental properties are difficult to obtain and sustain - especially if reliant on Centrelink or experiencing financial hardship.

Rent arrears and/or property damage repair debts resulting in eviction are a legacy of FDV for many women and can result in eviction and impede both ability to terminate current tenancy agreements and access to new tenancies.

Women left with property law issues often have very little access to no or low fee legal support.

Tenancy related legislation and rental agreement practices are typically oriented towards landlord perspective, and this can impede safety considerations and increase eviction risk.

Figure 23: Factors Contributing to Homelessness and Precarious Housing among SASH Clients

Many of these systemic challenges lie outside of the direct remit of the SASH program, but SASH clients benefit indirectly from the wider advocacy and work of its partnering agencies, Tenancy WA, Street Law WA and Women's Legal Service WA and others in the community legal, FDV, homelessness and affordable housing sectors to tackle the issues identified in Figure 23. The recent changes to the WA Residential Tenancies Act (1987) to remove barriers for women who are experiencing FDV is a recent example of this that is of benefit to SASH current and future clients.

Whilst community legal services, homelessness services and other social sector services in WA have all been providing vital services, at the time of SASH inception, no single portal was available for accessing support across the diversity of issues many SASH clients face. Women (those with and without children) who are in the midst of or recently have experienced FDV are highly vulnerable and having to retell one’s story over and over to different services who can only deal with ‘one part of the problem’ can be re-traumatising and overwhelming for clients. When SASH began, there was also no single service that could triage multiple legal needs that cannot be met by a single community legal centre. Reducing the risk of homelessness and/or supporting those who have become homeless to secure stable and appropriate accommodation is also a core tenet of SASH – housing is a fundamental human right that is precarious for many SASH clients, and many of the legal and financial issues related to housing circumstances.

Reducing barriers to accessing assistance and providing a more coordinated response to complex legal and other needs lay at the heart of the rationale for the establishment of SASH, and it was evident from the evaluation that this is valuable not only for clients directly, but also for services in health, homelessness and other sectors that have clients with complex needs beyond what their own service can address.

The need for a service such as SASH to address this gap in current service provision was evident across all domains. For the clients who were interviewed, the impact of SASH was profound and the enormous potential of the SASH model was emphasised by partner agencies and stakeholders. However as a pilot program, and with limited funding and staff capacity, there have inevitably been some challenges and learnings for improvement in the service delivery. Some of these pertain to internal aspects of the program (such as coordination, communication and prioritisation), whilst others relate to outward facing aspects of the program (such as awareness, referral pathways and breadth of collaborators), and finally there have been challenges relating to funding that impact on service continuity and sustainability.

In the remainder of this chapter, we present some key recommendation themes that have emerged from evaluation findings. Each recommendation has been informed by data available to the evaluation team, including feedback and suggestions provided by clients, partner agencies and external stakeholders. Where applicable, we have also drawn on relevant learnings from other program evaluations, such as those of the Justice Connect, Women’s Homelessness Prevention Program (WHPP) and the Women’s Legal Service Victoria (WLSV), Stepping Stones Program, two established programs in Victoria that also couple legal and other supports for women impacted by FDV with dual legal and homelessness priorities. The recommendations outlined below (see Figure 24) present opportunities for SASH to build upon the pilot program and strengthen future service delivery and program outcomes.



Figure 24: Overview of Recommendations

6.1 Clarity of Client Eligibility Criteria

In order to provide the maximum possible benefit to clients most in need of SASH support, it is recommended that SASH clarify and refine current eligibility criteria for clients. The consensus view among partner agencies appears to be that SASH focuses on clients who have legal needs that span more than one partner agency, and multiple non-legal needs that are not being met by other services that would benefit from case management. Formalising agreed eligibility criteria will increase clarity for partner agencies and referring stakeholders. It will also potentially allow for more manageable caseloads for the SASH lawyers and the Program Coordinator, ensuring that agency resources are dedicated to those clients with greatest unmet need. In the past there have been instances when clients have been accepted into the SASH program but due to caseloads across staff, could not receive case management and legal assistance as quickly as they needed, and whilst this can't always be avoided, the vulnerability of clients, particularly if homeless, makes it preferable that once accepted into SASH, assistance can commence immediately.

The Stepping Stones program provided by Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) is an example of a similar holistic service which includes legal assistance and advice, financial services and counselling and a social worker to ensure clients have access to appropriate services (including housing) and feel supported and safe through the legal process.⁴¹ SASH drew upon the experiences of WLSV in establishing SASH, and there is merit in looking at the qualifying matrix developed for Stepping Stones to assist in consistent assessment of client needs and eligibility to gain assistance for the program.⁴¹ The policy and guidelines that WLSV use to assess client eligibility are outlined in Appendix 2.

While SASH currently uses the legal health check to identify the range of client needs, this is a descriptive qualitative process and doesn't actually facilitate identification of clients who are most vulnerable and most in need of SASH support. To ensure that the assessment of client needs and subsequent prioritisation is consistent across the SASH program, we recommend that SASH considers the use of a standardised screening tool. Whilst a number of such service prioritisation tools exist, for example the Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) used by 50 Lives 50 Homes to prioritise clients for rapid housing,⁴² SASH could also adapt the current legal health check to quantify the number of needs and level of urgency and vulnerability. This does not take away from the fact that regardless of the specific process used for assessing eligibility and prioritising client selection, SASH staff also have extensive experience and judgement that contributes to informing decisions about clients' vulnerability and the urgency with which they require assistance.

6.2 Clarity on Process of Prioritising Needs

In addition to the need for greater clarity around eligibility criteria to accept client entry into SASH, once clients are accepted, the SASH program needs a clear and agreed process for prioritising clients based on their needs. SASH clients typically have multiple and competing non-legal needs, and with limited case management capacity in the current SASH staffing model, some of these need to take precedence. Alongside legal needs, homelessness or risk of homelessness should rank as the highest priority in light of the SASH program goals. It was perceived that additional time should be allocated to averting homelessness in comparison to the amount of time spent on some other material needs that could be met by other services in WA. Given the number of needs clients present with, SASH could benefit from a more systematic approach (agreed to across partner agencies) to prioritising which non-legal needs should be tackled first and which needs warrant the most staff time. Moreover, SASH could be more judicious in assessing which needs could be met by existing external agencies, focusing its limited staffing capacity on needs that align with the SASH purpose and remit, and triaging referral for needs that can be met elsewhere (such as food relief). In

particular, assisting clients to access safe stable accommodation for clients should be the primary consideration and priority for SASH into the future. Non-legal needs that are particularly interwoven with legal matters (e.g. connecting clients (and children) to FDV counselling or child reunification where the client currently has a child in care) also fit well with SASH remit.

6.3 Increased Service Capacity

A number of themes relating to SASH service capacity emerged during the evaluation and we draw attention to several of these under the umbrella of this recommendation.

6.3.1 Clarification of Roles of Partner Agencies and of Legal and Non-Legal SASH Staff

Our evaluation identified a need for greater clarity of roles across partner agencies, in particular the distinction between legal support and non-legal support and the SASH staff responsible for providing this support. It is important to note that challenges in distinguishing roles is not unique to SASH and as noted in a US paper for the Legal Aid Association of California, lack of clarity in staff roles is a substantial challenge reported by CLC's when integrating legal with non-legal social work type services.⁴³ Increased clarity of the different partner agency responsibilities and roles and honing these to respective areas of expertise will allow for more efficient use of limited resources. This needs to be accompanied by more shared understanding of the complementary role of case management for clients. One suggestion to facilitate this was the use of formal case plans which would clearly identify which agencies were supporting clients and the scope of their support and keep all relevant agencies up to date on clients' circumstances.

6.3.2 Strengthening Case Management Capacity

Currently there is only one SASH program coordinator who has the remit of providing case management support to all SASH clients. There is an active caseload of around 25 clients at any one time, but support to prior active clients can also be provided whenever clients seek it. Whilst this ongoing support is positive for clients, realistically with such stretched resources, this means that the program coordinator is often responding to the most immediate or crisis-based needs. Across all partner agency interviews, it was evident that greater case management capacity is needed if SASH it to achieve its intended outcomes with clients presenting with so many complex needs. This sense of being stretched was also raised by the program coordinator, commenting that clients had been referred to other services or some left without in-depth case management when SASH capacity was strained. With more substantial resourcing (and more streamlined prioritising of client needs), SASH would be able to provide more comprehensive case management, and work longer term with those women who do not have any other case management options to assist them with securing safe affordable housing. Ideally, increased resourcing is needed for the case management component of SASH, as a case load of 25 is high compared to many other programs working with clients with similarly complex needs.

It is pertinent to note that the SASH program was initially planned to include a social worker and this merits revisiting as a way to expand case management capacity for SASH. As noted in a discussion paper from the Legal Aid Association of California:⁴³

The collaboration between social workers and legal services has become increasingly important as both legal and social services are challenged by increasing client needs and decreasing resources. This collaboration allows for more efficient and holistic services for the neediest clients and ensures that the root causes of legal issues are resolved to prevent further need for legal action.^{43(p 8)}

The WHPP, one of the programs SASH was based on, is an initiative of the Justice Connect Homeless Law Service in Victoria and another example of a program that integrates a social worker with legal services to support clients.⁴⁰ The role of the social worker in this program is outlined below (further information in Appendix 3).

The Women's Homelessness Prevention Project (WHPP)³⁸ has a dedicated social worker who is a key aspect of the WHPP holistic model along with legal advisors. The WHPP social worker's assistance begins at the initial client interview to provide clients with emotional support to tell their stories to the pro bono lawyers. The lawyers assist with the relevant legal issues and the social worker then provides a period (up to 3 months) of intensive support with a focus on transitioning clients to long-term support services (i.e. financial counselling, FDV counselling, housing and family support, education and employment). The WHPP social worker also refers women to a range of services, including housing access points, mental health professionals, financial counsellors, drug and alcohol counsellors, doctors, material aid providers, family violence counsellors, Centrelink and others.

The WHPP regards the social worker as crucial to building the capacity and understanding of pro bono lawyers in relation to clients in crisis who have experienced trauma and the complex housing, homelessness and services sector. Importantly, women do not have to re-tell distressing details of their story to a range of new services and workers.

*summarised from Justice Connect, WHPP – keeping women and children housed Report September 2015

A SASH social worker could for example spend time with clients to assist them in identifying their priorities and client determined goals, and complement the work of the program coordinator in connecting clients to longer term supports in the community. Currently supervision and support for the program coordinator falls to senior staff at Tenancy WA who have considerable experience in this regard, but their time could be freed up by the addition of a social worker to the SASH team.

6.3.3 Additional (and Sustainable Funding for Legal Support)

SASH is a vital service filling a significant gap in unmet legal, financial and social assistance for women who have experienced FDV, but has had a limited budget from the outset, and some of the partner agencies have had to reduce client intake (or not take on new clients) in the latter months of the pilot as a result of this. Job security could not be offered in one instance to the SASH lawyer in a partner agency due to funding uncertainty, and this also has an impact on clients, as continuity of staffing is important particularly with this vulnerable population group.

Greater legal capacity would also be beneficial, with SASH lawyers from partner agencies commenting that their client load had in some cases limited the depth of support they could provide to clients or the number of issues they could address. Family law matters for example often require intense legal support, and there is not really the capacity to do more of this at present. All SASH lawyers are currently part-time due to funding limitations, but if the funding for legal support could be increased, SASH lawyers would feel less stretched across multiple legal issues, and the complex nature of clients' legal needs could be more fully addressed.

6.4 Improved Data Management Systems and Ongoing Evaluation

All partner agencies raised frustrations around the challenges of sharing client data in a seamless and integrated manner between the services. Partner agencies perceived that this posed barriers collectively

addressing clients' legal and non-legal needs. Some of these barriers related to the requirement for all CLC's to use the Community Legal Assistance Services System (CLASS), which has a number of acknowledged gaps.⁴⁴ Key features of an improved data management system should include the capacity to capture more detailed information on clients' circumstances and progress, in particular evictions averted, tenancies sustained as a result of SASH intervention and clients supported to access housing and importantly also have an export functionality. An improved data management system would address the gap in data sharing and would additionally provide opportunities for future evaluations to explore the ongoing impact of SASH on client outcomes.

Whilst it was beyond the scope and budget of the current evaluation of the SASH pilot, future analysis of the economic impact of SASH would be valuable. The outcomes that SASH seeks to achieve for clients in terms of resolving legal, financial and social issues and securing stable accommodation have the potential to result in reduced resource demand on a number of other sectors that are funded by government (Federal and State), some of which were identified in a 2016 Commonwealth Government report on the economic costs of violence against women and their children (see Box 9).³⁹ Another critical cost to both the government and non-government sector, not explicitly identified in this Commonwealth report but that has substantial relevance to SASH is the demand on homelessness services as a result of FDV.² In WA, FDV is the major cause of homelessness among women and accounts for 43% of requests for support from specialist homelessness services.¹² Preventing homelessness and/or reducing the period of time women and their children spend homeless in the wake of FDV experiences therefore has potential to reduce demand on strained homelessness services.

Box 9: Cost of Violence Against Women and Their Children

The 2016 Report on the Cost of Violence Against Women and Their Children, commissioned by the Department of Social Services, states that "Violence against women and their children is a crime and a fundamental breach of human rights. Experiencing violence has significant implications for victims, their children, families, friends, employers and co-workers. The implications of violence can include long term social, health, psychological, financial and economic damage. Based on the 2012 Personal Safety Survey (PSS), KPMG estimates that the total cost of violence against women and their children is \$22 billion in 2015-16. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, pregnant women, women with disability, and women experiencing homelessness are underrepresented in the PSS. Taking these groups fully into account may add \$4billion to these costs in 2015-16."³⁹

The health and justice systems are two of the biggest and most escalating costs to government, accounting together for 39% of the WA state budget in 2017/18.⁴⁵ Both FDV and homelessness contribute to preventable cost burdens on health and justice systems. A future economic component to SASH evaluation could therefore examine some of the potential cost savings to these sectors as a starting point. Recent UWA evaluations of the 50 Lives 50 Homes project^{42,46} and the RPH Homeless Team^{47,48} have included a number of case studies illustrating the way in which experiences of FDV preceded homelessness which in turn was associated with costs borne by the health system. These included

Intimate partner violence causes more illness, disability and deaths than any other risk factor for women aged 25-44. AIHW, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018.²

ED presentations, unplanned hospital admissions,^b and delayed help seeking for health conditions that were amenable to prevention or earlier intervention.

Being able to demonstrate the potential cost savings to legal, justice, homelessness, health and justice sectors of SASH may also strengthen its case for greater and more sustainable funding, with many not for profit services increasingly incorporating economic impact into their evaluations for this reason. Government funders are increasingly looking for services to be either cost-saving or cost neutral, and whilst there is a compelling humanitarian argument that the value of programs such as SASH should not have to be substantiated on economic grounds, in an era of strained government budgets, this is a pragmatic reality hard to avoid.

The other advantage of incorporating economic impact assessment into future SASH evaluation lies in capturing the enormous value of the pro-bono hours of legal assistance it has been able to obtain for clients. A valuable strength of SASH is that it brings together three well established CLC's, all with strong networks through which pro-bono specialist legal service (including barrister court representation) can be sourced. Whilst data on total pro-bono hours and associated costs is not routinely captured by SASH, it is estimated to be substantial, for one client exceeding \$30,000, and this not only has the effect of reducing demand on government funded legal services (such as Legal Aid), but in a number of SASH client scenarios, the type of legal support and outcomes would not have been possible without the pro-bono assistance provided.

6.5 Increased Awareness of SASH and its Role

As with any new program, and particularly programs where most of the limited funding is for direct service delivery, it can take time to build awareness of service existence and understanding of its intended target group and the scope of what it can and cannot assist with. Whilst a recurring theme arising in interviews with partner agencies and clients was the need to increase the awareness of SASH, an important caveat is that this is predicated on SASH securing ongoing funding and expanding its current capacity to enable it to manage and meet the expectations of referring organisations and of clients. An increased awareness of SASH amongst external organisations could lead to potential joint collaboration between other vital services that SASH clients may require. This includes:

(i) *Awareness by other external agencies working at the coalface with women impacted by FDV to facilitate referrals to SASH for future clients it would benefit (for example WAPOL, tenancy support services in metropolitan and regional areas such as the Red Cross Tenancy Support Service, area-based Centrelink offices). The SASH program was originally intended to do outreach into hospitals however some logistical challenges mean this has not been possible to date, but this remains a valuable avenue for reaching those women most vulnerable and most eligible for SASH, for example, if WAPOL had a greater awareness of SASH as a service that they can directly refer women to, both following FDV incident reporting, or for women who may need support while navigating the process of FDV reporting, there may be a more efficient take up of assistance. While this can be particularly challenging with such a large, multi-site organisation with high turnover and rolling staff assignments, the potential benefits to both SASH clients and WAPOL could be significant. With FDV accounting for a substantial proportion of policing resources in WA, SASH could provide an earlier intervention pathway that could reduce repeated episodes of FDV and/or reduce risk of homelessness for women who currently need to exit the family home to feel safe. One of the partner agencies suggested that it would be possible to utilise the existing networks of the partner agencies to raise awareness*

b 49. Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. National Hospital Cost Data Collection Cost Report: Round 20 Financial Year 2015-16. 2018. Average cost of an emergency department presentation was \$765, and average cost inpatient admission/day was \$2718

of SASH but also cautioned that, with current funding arrangements, SASH would be unable to take on an increased client load. Increased promotion of the SASH program to external services would need to be accompanied by increased funding and expanded staff capacity.

(ii) *Awareness and collaboration with other agencies and services who can provide essential support needed by SASH clients.* Given the limited capacity of a single SASH program coordinator to provide direct support for the number of SASH clients, triaging referrals and support from other services for the non-legal needs of SASH clients is critical. This appears to happen to some extent at present, but often the examples provided related to immediate material needs (such as food relief, furniture, and transport vouchers), and substantial housing outcomes or connection of clients to ongoing counselling or mental health services were less mentioned, compared with for example, evaluation findings from the WHPP in Victoria^{40,41} upon which SASH was in part based. In the available SASH data, it was not possible to ascertain the number or breadth of non-legal support services that SASH clients have been connected to.

(iii) *Greater awareness and clarity around how clients can be referred to SASH* was raised with the evaluation team. Among the 22 responses to the external stakeholder survey, 13 indicated that they had directly referred clients to SASH, and half of these stakeholders expressed uncertainty regarding the referral pathways and eligibility criteria for the SASH program. This was mirrored in some of the observations of partner agencies, who were of the view that SASH would benefit from greater clarity around referral pathways and processes.

Increasing awareness and clarity of referral pathways with external services would allow SASH to assist a wider range of clients and could lead to synergies for organisations with shared clients, enhancing information sharing and continuity of client care. Raising awareness and building new collaborations and referral pathways however requires staff time and resourcing, as does meeting any additional demand for SASH services.

6.6 Sustainable Funding

A lack of adequate and sustainable funding is a challenge common to community legal and FDV support services and is by no means unique to SASH. Nevertheless, the lack of sustainable funding has been a substantial challenge for SASH in terms of staff retention, new client intake, and ability to meet the intensity of clients' support needs. A number of the following specific recommendations are contingent upon access to increased and ongoing funding.

While it is recognised that all social and community services in WA are currently operating in a very resource-strapped environment, increased service funding, and funding that has a longer term commitment would greatly improve the capacity and effectiveness of SASH. For example, an increase in funding/resources would enable the employment of additional staff, allowing for more in-depth case management with smaller caseloads of clients.

In addition to the increased staff capacity outlined in Section 6.3, greater resourcing would allow staff to access additional training, particularly in the area of trauma informed practice, as all partner agencies stressed the vulnerability of SASH clients, and the need to account for their experiences of trauma when working with clients to resolve their legal and financial issues. This would also allow staff to upskill in the area of reflective practice, an emerging area that has benefits for both service providers and clients and involves providers considering issues within their practice, exploring potential emotional, psychological or behavioural responses to these issues and incorporating the increased awareness into future practice.⁵⁰

6.7 Conclusion

Leaving a violent relationship is a significant turning point for women who have experienced family and domestic violence, as it is for their children. However this is often followed by a litany of other stresses and challenges, often relating to homelessness (or risk of), legal matters, debts, financial insecurity, and loss of prior social support networks. Conventional legal and homelessness services are often only able to address part of the intertwined issues that follow in the wake of FDV. As evident in the journeys of SASH clients, seeking help from multiple agencies can be overwhelming and confusing at a time of immense vulnerability, and can be re-traumatising to have to tell one's story over and over again.

This was the impetus for the inception of the SASH program, bringing together three community legal services (Tenancy WA, Street Law Centre WA, and Women's Legal Service of WA) to offer statewide wrap-around legal and other support to prevent homelessness among women and children who have experienced family and domestic violence. Since SASH began, it has supported 133 women, many of whom have dependent children. These clients have presented with multiple and complicated issues, often at crisis point.

SASH has highly commendable but nonetheless ambitious outcomes, as it has been challenging to fully address the intertwined legal, homelessness, financial and health issues that accompany FDV with limited resources. Moreover, many of the challenges experienced by SASH clients require wide-ranging societal and legal reforms at a broader level. The findings from this evaluation can help to further strengthen the SASH program, enabling it to continue to provide assistance to women who have experienced FDV resolve legal financial and social challenges and secure stable accommodation.

Amidst all of the data and feedback presented in this evaluation report, most powerful of all, is the immense gratitude to SASH expressed by many of these women. The integrated service model of SASH has filled a critical void that existed for women who needed both legal and other support to bridge the gap between leaving a violent relationship and forging a new life with secure stable housing.

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Appendix 1: Legal Health Check

Legal Health Check

INTAKE ASSESSMENT TO BE COMPLETED BY AGENCY.



SAFE as **HOUSES**

Client name Date

Phone Safe to call Y N

Completed by:

Name Agency

Telephone Email

Conflict check Y N

Safety plan completed Y N

Woman or Child (<18) Y N

At risk of or are homeless Y N

At risk of or are experiencing family and domestic violence (including historic) Y N

1. Money Trouble

Y N

Examples include: anyone chasing you for money, unpaid bills, unpaid fines, infringements, Centrelink problems, hire purchase contracts

2. Housing Concerns

Y N

Examples include: recent evictions, bond or tenancy issues, belongings left behind, unpaid rent, apply for government housing, blacklisting from previous tenancy, Housing Authority debt

3. Criminal Issues

Y N

Examples include: pending charges, outstanding warrants, criminal injuries compensation claim, bail, parole, community orders

4. Income

Examples include: centrelink, royalties, family tax benefit, child support

Y N

5. Health

Examples include: involuntary treatment order, guardianship order, ongoing health issues, involvement of the public trustee

Y N

6. Relationships and Family

Examples include: existence of family violence orders, family court for children, child protection issues, property settlement issues, foster or institutional concerns

Y N

7. Upcoming court dates

Examples include: Family, Children's, Start, Drug, tenancy, Magistrates, traffic, domestic violence unit

Y N

8. Engagement with other services

Examples include: Daydawn, Ruah, Uniting Care West, STEP program, community legal centres, and private lawyers

Y N

9. Is there anything else?

10. Action taken

11. Class Data

Appendix 2: Women’s Legal Service Victoria Client Eligibility Guidelines

Women’s Legal Service Victoria (WLSV) commenced operation in 1982, as a phone advice and referral service provided by a small group of volunteer lawyers. It has since grown to a major social change organisation with nearly 40 staff, 60 volunteers and a wide range of programs and services, including;

- Representing disadvantaged women across Victoria – providing legal advice, representation in court and running complex cases from start to finish
- Supporting women with related issues through an in-house financial counsellor and social worker
- Advocates for law and policy that respects and promotes the rights of women
- Provides training and professional development so that women’s legal issues are identified early and responded to appropriately

There work is directed towards challenging the legal, social and economic structures that disadvantage women, with a focus on preventing and responding to legal issues arising from relationship breakdown or violence.

GUIDELINES FOR TAKING ON A CASE – WOMENS LEGAL SERVICE VICTORIA⁵¹

Policy

WLSV provides ongoing legal representation in cases in the areas of relationship breakdown and violence against women and their children, where:

- Cases have systemic impact,
- Highly disadvantaged clients would otherwise be excluded from accessing the justice system.

Procedure

An assessment is made using the matrix below.

IMPACT	3	HIGH	VERY HIGH	VERY HIGH
	2	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
	1	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM
		1	2	3
BARRIERS				

Cases taken on by WLSV should be within the very high or high categories. When assessing what barriers a client faces, WLSV will consider the following (non- exhaustive) list:

Barriers

The entrenched nature of the disadvantage experienced by the women

- Disability or health issues experienced by a women or dependent child/ren
- Racial or cultural background resulting in disadvantage
- Personal background and capacity impacting on women's ability to engage with the legal system
- Social exclusion; women who are marginalised or lack social support
- Geographic disadvantage

Women receiving low or no income, who are entitled to department of housing accommodation, and Centrelink benefit as their sole source of income

No access to legal assistance such as Victoria Legal Aid

Impact

Any matter that is determined to have potential systemic impact is a '3' on the impact axis of the matrix. This will mean the case will receive a 'high' or 'very high' priority category.

When assessing impact, WLSV will consider the following (non-exhaustive) list:

Systemic impact

- The case has potential to have broader impact for Victorian women who suffer a similar injustice
- The case has potential to change law, policy or practice or community attitude
- The case highlights an omission in the current law, a pattern of adverse outcomes for women or a legal process that disadvantages women

Individual impact

- WLSV's involvement in the matter will make a significant difference to the outcome or impact for the women and her child/ren
- WLSV's involvement will give the women confidence to break the cycle of violence
- There is injustice, unfairness or discrimination experienced by the women

Appendix 3: Women's Homelessness Prevention Project Role of the Social Worker

Justice Connect Homeless Law's, Women's Homelessness Prevention Project (WHPP) is a holistic, integrated model of legal services, focusing on preventing homelessness to women experiencing FDV. It keeps women and children in housing through a combination of legal representation and social work support.

WHPP's commenced co-ordination and development work in September 2013, with weekly clinics in the Melbourne CBD commencing in April 2014. Women facing homelessness receive legal advice and representation from pro bono lawyers, as well as intensive social work support for up to three months from a dedicated social worker employed by Justice Connect Homeless Law.

In addition to preventing homelessness for this cohort, the WHPP gathers data and insights about the influences pushing women into homelessness, and presents recommendations for systemic change informed by direct casework and the experiences of clients.

Homeless Law has made a submission based on these insights, to the Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV), as well as coordinating a joint submission on family violence, housing and homelessness that was endorsed by 129 organisations from the housing, homelessness, family violence, health, local government and legal sectors (Joint Submission).

The WHPP's results, evidenced through independent evaluation reports, show that integrated models which target both legal and non-legal needs play a crucial role in preventing evictions and must be contemplated as part of strategies focused on early intervention and homelessness prevention.

Significant direct assistance is provided to clients by the social worker including:

- explaining housing options and eligibility for social housing, skill building on how to find more affordable private rental, how to use internet filters searching for rental properties, tips on maximising private rental opportunities, and searching for properties online with clients. Skill building in managing budgets and spending is also provided.
- grants of brokerage through the WHPP to assist clients with other costs, including taxis to attend court, household supplies, food vouchers, public transport credit, and a diary to manage multiple appointments with support workers, to pay rent arrears or start-up costs in new tenancies, support letters for women with VCAT hearings and attendances at VCAT to support women through the process and provide evidence about involvement with the client. (VCAT is a tribunal that hears and decides civil and administrative legal cases in Victoria, including tenancy disputes).
- attendances at Magistrates' Court venues to support clients.

