

More than just me: Supporting fathers who are homeless

A report released yesterday by the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, has identified an urgent need to better support fathers who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

The 2011 joint research study by the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at Australian Catholic University (ACU) explored the experiences of homeless fathers, identifying the consequences of their homeless experience and their relationship with their children.

'For homeless fathers, the relationship they have with their children, and their role as a parent, is very important,' said Dr Justin Barker, Research Fellow at ICPS. 'Not being able to be with their children, or deliberately protecting them from their own circumstances of homelessness, can add to the anguish and difficulty of their lives. We found that homelessness affects the ability to be a father, and that fatherhood changed the experience of homelessness.'

'There are very few services in Australia that specifically support fathers who are homeless. The role and identity of homeless men as fathers has been a largely ignored aspect of homelessness. However those who do receive quality supports are more motivated to address issues and improve the conditions of their lives.'

Chief Executive of Hanover Welfare Services, Tony Keenan, said that changes are needed to ensure that fathers with children aren't disadvantaged.

'There is a real lack of housing for single dads with children,' he said. 'Many fathers interviewed in the research said they were not able to see their kids because they did not have suitable housing. The research shows a clear need for more responsive services for families with fathers as the primary caregiver.'

The report indicates that across the country, adequate data is not being collected on homeless men who are also fathers. It identifies that data collection must occur in order to develop a better idea of the scale of the problem.

The collaborative research project was implemented by ICPS, Hanover Welfare Services, and Melbourne City Mission. It was developed for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, under the National Homelessness Research Agenda 2009 – 2013.

The full report, *More than just me: Supporting fathers who are homeless*, is available at:
<http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/whats-new-3/supporting-fathers-who-are-homeless/>

Ends

For media comment: Contact Dr Justin Barker, Institute of Child Protection Studies, on 0407 395 070; or Mr Tony Keenan, Hanover Welfare Services, on 0413 526 910.

Notes to editors:

- Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded university, open to all. It has six campuses – in Brisbane, Melbourne, North Sydney, Strathfield, Canberra and Ballarat.
- Completing a degree at ACU involves learning to think critically and be guided by social justice principles. We give our students the skills to bring about change in their community, profession and industry.
- The University focuses on the delivery of quality programs in specialist areas including education, liberal arts, business, nursing and allied health, social sciences, theology and philosophy and visual and performing arts.
- For more information, visit www.acu.edu.au