

Keeping Families Together

2023 Study Summary

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What is Keeping Families Together?

Having a secure and affordable place to live is a critical factor influencing the wellbeing of families and enabling their full participation in society. As well as negatively impacting on families' social and wellbeing outcomes, being unable to access secure and affordable housing increases the risk of statutory child safety intervention due to its significant impact on parents' ability to care for and protect their children. Statutory child safety intervention can result in children being removed from their families and placed into the care of the state; a practice which itself has been problematised for its negative long-term impacts on children's and families' outcomes.

Recognising these issues, the Keeping Families Together (KFT) program is a model of support that enables families to access and sustain secure and affordable housing, and to divert 'at risk' families from involvement with the child safety system. Funded by the Queensland Government and delivered by Micah Projects (service provider) and Common Ground Queensland (housing provider), KFT was established in July 2020 as a form of supportive housing. The program is funded to provide subsidised housing (head-leased through the private rental market) along with multidisciplinary support to 20 families in the Brisbane region.

KFT's housing and family support was designed and delivered based on the core tenets of permanent supportive housing for families (SHF). SHF is a broad term for housing programs that provide low-income families with affordable and secure housing, along with intensive family supports. KFT upholds the core overarching aim of SHF, which is to support families in maintaining safe, secure, and affordable housing for the long-term benefit of children and families. To this end, KFT supports participating families across the following three key domains.

HOUSING ACCESS

Improve housing access
and reduce future
homelessness



CHILD WELFARE

Improve child outcomes and
reduce child safety
involvement



FAMILY WELLBEING

Improve family wellbeing
and build parents'
self-efficacy



What did the study examine?

Using a mixed method approach, we conducted an empirical study of the KFT model and its delivery, as well as the experiences and outcomes of participating families in each of the three domains.

Qualitative data

We conducted in-depth interviews with current KFT family members (n=19), service practitioners from Micah Projects and Common Ground Queensland (n=8), and real estate agents involved in providing housing to the program (n=2). These interviews aimed to gain insight into how KFT was delivered and experienced. We also undertook ethnographic observations, involving a researcher accompanying practitioners on their support visits with the families. Approximately 5 hours of observations were conducted over 6 sessions.

Quantitative data

We also drew on quantitative data from 7 assessments conducted by Micah Projects with families at regular timepoints, as well as administrative brokerage and tenancy records. This data included assessments and records from all families who had ever participated in KFT (n=33), regardless of whether they were currently in the program.

HOUSING ACCESS

What were the housing outcomes?

- 44% of families had been experiencing homelessness for more than 1 year prior to entering KFT
- 94% of families felt safe/stable or somewhat safe/stable once housed in KFT
- A majority of families remained housed through KFT for more than 36 months

What factors enabled success?

- KFT's ability to flexibly meet families' housing needs
- Provision of ongoing tenancy support
- Engaging real estate agents to facilitate access to affordable housing

What were the challenges?

- Ongoing housing instability due to multiple property moves
- Families' accumulation of housing-related debt
- Significant limitations of the private rental market

CHILD WELFARE

What were the child welfare outcomes?

- Participation in early education increased from 39% to 88%
- Involvement with child safety reduced from 48% to 25%
- 12 children were reunified, and 42 remained in their families' care

What factors enabled success?

- Supporting children's enrolment in early education
- Linking families to external support, including the NDIS
- Developing strong relationships with child safety

What were the challenges?

- Delivering parenting support in complex family contexts
- Supporting families through child removals

FAMILY WELLBEING

What were the family wellbeing outcomes?

- Women feeling unsafe in their relationships decreased from 63% at baseline to 18% at the second follow up; this increased again to 50% at the third follow-up
- Feeling unsafe was often linked to ex-partners coming back into women's lives, including finding out where they lived or being released from prison
- Families seeking employment doubled from 36% at baseline to 73% at follow-up

What factors enabled success?

- Delivering flexible, tailored, and parent-led support
- Supporting families to build their capabilities
- Building strong relationships between practitioners and families

What were the challenges?

- Disrupting families through high staff turnover
- Difficulty meeting families' high service needs
- Practitioners wanting additional cultural support

What
did the
study
find?

