

RESEARCH BRIEF



LINDSEY FIDLER
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and housing barriers for
reunifying Tasmanian families

IN LIMBO



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Why this research?

In the course of SARC's consultations on housing issues for vulnerable Tasmanians, Anglicare Tasmania community support workers highlighted regularly seeing parents who have had their children removed by Child Safety Services (CSS) and are working towards family reunification. These parents had very few satisfactory housing options available to them. For many, their housing challenges were triggered by losing eligibility for parenting-related payments when their children had been removed. Anglicare workers reported that this often left such families vulnerable to precarious housing arrangements that did not meet the stable housing requirements necessary for family reunification to occur.

They reported seeing families trapped by the constraints of the systems and scrutinised. The parents could address all of Child Safety Services' concerns about their parenting skills, their mental health, their addictions – the safety concerns about *their deficits*. But with their limited income and in a competitive Tasmanian housing market, parents were unable to provide the material basics required to reunify with their children: stable housing that could accommodate their children and adequate food, clothing, furniture, toys and learning materials. For many, this meant that family reunification was held in limbo.

These stories echo international research that has begun to define the "collateral consequences" of child removal (Broadhurst & Mason 2017). Among these consequences are significant ongoing psychological and social challenges, such as coping with the trauma and grief of children being removed and the social and legal stigma. These consequences can spiral into worsening mental health and substance use and impact on parents' ability to effectively engage with practical parenting or therapeutic support.

International research also identifies the removal of their eligibility for parenting-related payments by welfare agencies as an additional material "sanction" that compounds the significant emotional challenges that parents face (Broadhurst & Mason 2017; Fernandez et al. 2017).

The income and housing challenges faced by Tasmanian parents engaged in family reunification have been acknowledged a number of times in recent years, without resolution. This includes Hinton's (2013) work and, notably, a forum held by the Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee as part of a 2012 Tasmanian symposium that brought together the community sector with Child Safety Services and Centrelink to consider possible outcomes. *In Limbo* continues that conversation by further

[Child Safety Services] know Tasmania's the most expensive state to live in at the moment. The housing's just shocking. They've watched my struggle with housing, like I've always worked closely with them. They've watched me move into a house, get kicked out of a house, they've watched me go up and down, up and down. So for me to finally get stable accommodation and them question me, 'Oh is that where you're always going to stay with the kids?' ...I can't look that far ahead into the future cos I don't know where I sit with them with the kids coming home.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

investigating the nature and extent of the income and housing challenges faced by Tasmanian families who have had children removed by Child Safety Services and the impacts those challenges may have on positive family reunification outcomes.

This project also explores what elements an effective model to address these challenges might contain. It aims to contribute to the Tasmanian Government's evolving redesign of Child Safety Services, *Strong Families - Safe Kids*, and its renewed focus on keeping families together, or expediting family reunifications where possible, to minimise the traumatic impacts on children of removal from their birth families.

Research approach

In Limbo aims to:

- Highlight the income and housing challenges during family reunification for Tasmanian parents whose children are on Short Term Care and Protection Orders, and the impacts those material challenges have on families and on successful family reunification processes.
- Review Tasmania's ability to quantify these issues and estimate the scale and nature of the problems.
- Explore Tasmanian, Australian and international policy, program and practice responses to these issues that are having positive impacts on family outcomes.
- Offer recommendations that could address the income and housing needs of Tasmanian parents who are engaged in the process of family reunification and enable appropriate family environments for during reunification and beyond.

This investigation was conducted through a review of national and international literature; and face-to-face/phone/Skype interviews with 15 academic experts, leading family support practitioners and public servants within policy and practice management roles across Housing Tasmania, social housing providers and Child

Safety Services; an interrogation of quantitative data from the Tasmanian government's Child Safety and Specialist Homelessness Services information systems; face-to-face group and individual interviews with 43 front line professionals in government agencies and the community sector with considerable experience of working with parents engaged in the reunification system; and face-to-face interviews with five parents and one grandparent who were or had been actively involved in the family reunification process over the last three years.

The policy landscape: the need to recognise families' requirements for material basics

The Tasmanian Government's *Strong Families - Safe Kids* strategy (DHHS 2016) renews Child Safety Services' focus on the *best interests of the child*. It focuses on strategies that prevent children being removed from their birth families and, if they are removed, a recognition that the goal, where possible, should be to return children to their families (DHHS 2016). It states that *the first day of child removal is the first day of reunification*.

Child Safety Services assess risk to a child using the Tasmanian Risk Framework (DHHS 2009). Using the safety planning tool Signs of Safety, CSS will assess parents' capacity to address safety concerns, their level of understanding and engagement in addressing CSS' concerns, their strengths, and their support network that they might draw on to address concerns. Material basics, such as stable housing, adequate food and clothing, and education and training materials, will form part of a wider assessment along with support for their physical, mental and emotional health and connections to culture and a positive identity, drawing on the Tasmanian Government's Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework domains (DoC 2018; DHHS 2017).

CSS, family support and housing support workers interviewed for *In Limbo* highlighted that there are no set "thresholds" for families to meet in terms of material basics in order for children to be removed, or for family reunification to occur; as one family support manager described, 'It's the individual [CSS] worker's interpretation of what's "okay enough"'.

Recognition and provision of parents' ongoing parenting costs when children are removed by Child Safety Services is absent from current federal and state policy. Parents reunifying with their children are pulled between two policy objectives: Child Safety Services requirements for family reunification to occur in an environment appropriate for children - a stable home, connected to their familiar community, with material basics which enable children to thrive; and the federal Welfare to Work objectives to provide a minimum employment-focused income for individuals based on their current, rather than their potential, circumstances. This means that the costs of parenting children in out-of-home care for birth parents are not recognised by either system.

Responses to poverty and homelessness in Tasmanian professional practice

Australia does not have data that allows us to understand the nature of the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect. But from international research we do understand that there is a link. Poverty can have both a direct effect on child maltreatment through material deprivation, meaning parents face challenges buying support and development opportunities for themselves and their children, and indirect effects through parental stress (Bywaters et al. 2016). Poverty-related stress is well understood and is likely to be exacerbated by parents' ineligibility for parenting-related payments once children are removed from their care.

Poverty is absent from Tasmania's current legislation on what constitutes child maltreatment. However we need to understand this relationship in order to guide professional practice and design effective interventions that address poverty and homelessness in the context of child maltreatment.

FIGURE 1: How poverty is reported to be handled within practice for Tasmanian CSS, Family Support and Housing Workers and its impacts on the reunification process



This research revealed a range of professional responses to poverty for families reunifying, similar to those identified in Morris et al.'s (2018) study of UK social workers, which found poverty had become the normalised backdrop of practice.

Reported practice responses amongst Tasmanian family support, housing support and CSS workers included a detachment from poverty – “not my business to solve”; a disconnect between their understanding of poverty and their practice in addressing it, which led to a deficit-focused approach to addressing parenting capacity – “let’s focus on what’s wrong with *you*”; or poverty becoming the wallpaper of practice, too big to tackle – “we feel unable to solve parents’ challenges” (see Fig.1).

Support workers and families reported that these practice responses led to a lack of clarity, inconsistency and a perceived lack of realism around the goals relating to stable housing and adequate provision for their children. These goals might shift with different CSS workers and as the reunification process developed. Additionally, there was little clarity on how families were to achieve these goals within current policy and program settings.

Parents experiencing trauma and heightened poverty due to their children being removed are likely to be so consumed by their own material and emotional stability and safety they cannot immediately address any wider safety concerns Child Safety may have (Maslow 1943, 1954; Bromfield et al. 2010). To tackle the direct and indirect impacts of poverty on parenting, we need to shift, or at least broaden, the focus of government agency and NGO practice culture from being mainly about “what’s wrong with you?” (i.e. how we can address individual deficits), to “what’s inhibiting you from achieving your goals?” (i.e. directly address the structural and material barriers to reunification). We need a legislative or policy framework and a poverty-informed practice culture that acknowledges that parents need a stable home and resources. We need to shift poverty and homelessness from being the wallpaper of practice and culture to being the forefront of it.

It’s a really tricky one, because the [CSS] Department, they obviously have the children’s best interests at heart, but what we’re finding is that the requirements on families, what needs to be in place before A, B, C and D can happen, are often outside of [parents’] ability. For example, a mother might want the child back, and yes they can, but they have to have a two-bedroom unit. And living circumstances, as in finances, a whole bunch of things, make that really tricky to do... So it does go on and well, if you lose your house, you won’t be able to have your children back, because there’s nowhere for you to have them. And it actually happens more frequently that we might understand it to.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM MANAGER

See, I sort of got two different [CSS] Workers. This is only a two-bedroom unit and the kids do come to stay overnight here...One worker has said that’s fine as long as they’ve all got a bed...and the other one said what’s going to happen when you get reunified - are you going to get a bigger house or whatnot? And I said, well I don’t get paid for the kids currently and it’s a bit hard. And they’ve all got their own bed. So they sort of contradict themselves and it makes it difficult.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Understanding the extent of income and housing challenges: how Tasmania could lead the national conversation

In their current forms, the two Tasmanian government information systems that relate to child safety (the Child Protection Information System – CPIS) and homelessness services (the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform – SHIP) were unable to quantify the extent of income and housing challenges for Tasmanian families who are reunifying with their children, nor the nature of these challenges for this specific cohort. However, between the two information systems, they have relevant data categories that can provide much of the information we need. CPIS can tell us the proportion of children with a Reunification Case and Care Plan (around a quarter, or 367 to 412 per year between 2015 and 2017). It can also tell us some basic information about their parents at the time that children were removed from their care as well as their age at childbirth. But it can not systematically tell us the proportion of families for whom income or housing challenges were part of the safety concerns that led to the removal of a child, or the proportion of those for whom income and housing have become a concern since removal. SHIP can tell us about clients of homelessness services and the nature of their income and housing needs, what services are provided to assist them and their housing and homelessness outcomes. But it does not record whether those clients are families who are involved with Child Safety Services or who have an active Reunification Case and Care Plan.

Sharing relevant data available within CPIS and SHIP, along with adding some key additional parental data fields, such as socio-economic disadvantage and the distance between where the birth family live and the children's OOHC placement, could provide us with data we need to understand more about the risks, extent and nature of income and housing challenges, services accessed and outcomes for Tasmanian families reunifying with their children. It would also provide a basis for understanding the types of income and housing challenges that co-occur with other risk factors such as family violence, mental health issues and substance use (Bywaters et al. 2016; Font & Warren 2013). This would be insightful on both a systemic level and a case-by-case basis and enable Tasmania to inform and lead a national conversation and response around these issues.

Research findings on families' experiences and their impacts

For many Tasmanian parents, given the existing framework of policies, programs and services, there is an inevitable trajectory when their children are removed from their care by Child Safety Services (see Fig. 2). We can more or less predict the challenges they will face after they become ineligible for parenting income, particularly those who are in private rental accommodation and/or are fleeing domestic violence. Common experiences reported by both families and service providers include increased parental stress due to the need to juggle unaffordable living and parenting reunification costs (see Fig. 3), accumulating debt and homelessness. Only families who were able to retain or obtain housing that offered income-related rent (either public or social housing, or through living with relatives) were able to maintain a stable base for family reunification to occur.

You try finding private accommodation on Newstart. You can't. I looked around...Couldn't even rent a caravan out...So I was thinking to myself, how can anyone survive, or get accommodation to support your child on this? You can't. I couldn't do it. On Parenting Payment I could barely do it, but when I went to the Newstart, I couldn't do it. I didn't know what to do.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

These challenges have direct impacts on reunification prospects for the family, including negatively affecting parenting confidence and mental health, prolonging children's disruption and trauma, heightened tensions and frustrations between parents, carers and CSS over who is responsible for providing for children's material needs, and a stalling or halting of the reunification process, particularly in the absence of stable housing.

FIGURE 2: The common trajectory for the income and housing challenges amongst parents who have children removed by CSS



I don't really think [CSS] understand the struggle that parents have. Like if my kids wanted to go somewhere or do something, I wouldn't be able to because I don't have money to... So, I get them [3 children] on Mondays for three nights and I got paid last Wednesday. I've got \$4 to my name.

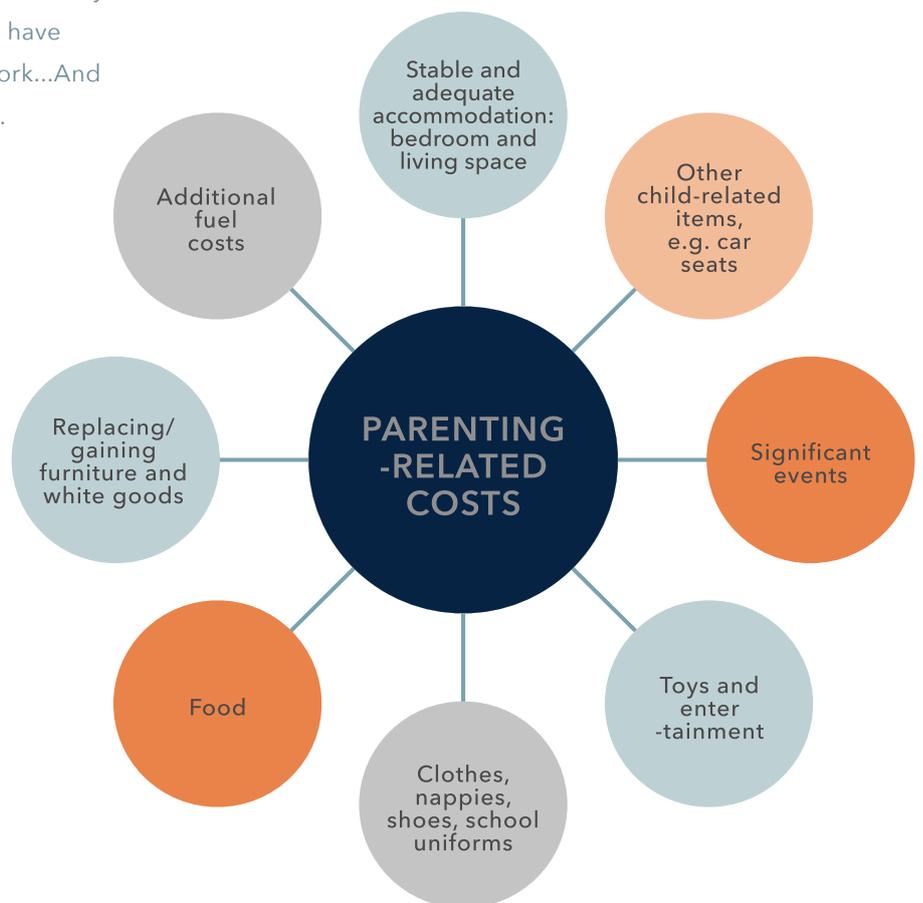
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

[CSS] told me to go get a job...I have handed out resumes. But...it's easier said than done. Especially when workplaces like you to work their time, not work around when I can work...I have the kids on Monday and Tuesday afternoons, so I can only work a certain time on Monday and Tuesdays and then, when I have them for three nights, I can't work...And prioritising my kids comes first.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

This trajectory inhibits parents' capacities and resources to achieve the goals both Centrelink and CSS desire. Unless they are in accommodation that sets rent relative to their income, they do not have the resources to provide the stable base and material needs for reunification to occur. Due to the many and changing activities required by the reunification process, they are unable to maintain the availability necessary to actively seek and maintain employment, as required by Centrelink, and are thus unable to supplement their income or break dependency on income support. They are held in limbo.

FIGURE 3: Summary of parenting-related costs parents struggle to meet



The service landscape: the case for a suite of material responses to expedite family reunification

A common observation amongst families and service providers interviewed for *In Limbo* was the lack of service options in Tasmania to address shortfalls in income and housing, leading to family reunification processes taking longer than they need to be. We have a policy framework that currently withdraws parenting income from parents at the point that CSS removes their child(ren), triggering an almost inevitable trajectory into poverty and homelessness. These risks and vulnerabilities are well-recognised, but the current Tasmanian service landscape does not offer sufficient options to help parents address these material and structural challenges (Figure 4).

At the point at which parents are at their most vulnerable and experiencing heightened trauma and poverty from the removal of their child(ren), there are very limited case management and parent support programs they can access. The maze of discretionary emergency relief and NGO brokerage funds cannot meet parenting and reunification costs and are time-consuming for parents to access, and the current suite of transitional and longer term housing options are at capacity, leaving few options available for reunifying families to access affordable and suitable accommodation that will expedite family reunification.

You can't be reunified with your kid if you're homeless...It's a downward spiral post-removal for parents, and one thing we've noted is no supports are put in place for the parent post-removal. So while the focus of CSS is on the child, there is no one to go 'but hang on, who's supporting the parent'? So there is a very big service gap that exists...I don't think it's CSS's role to support the parent, but there needs to be something that runs alongside it. If a child is removed then a service needs to go in to support that parent, one, to maintain stability, and two, to work on whatever the reasons were that the child was removed.

FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER FOCUS GROUP

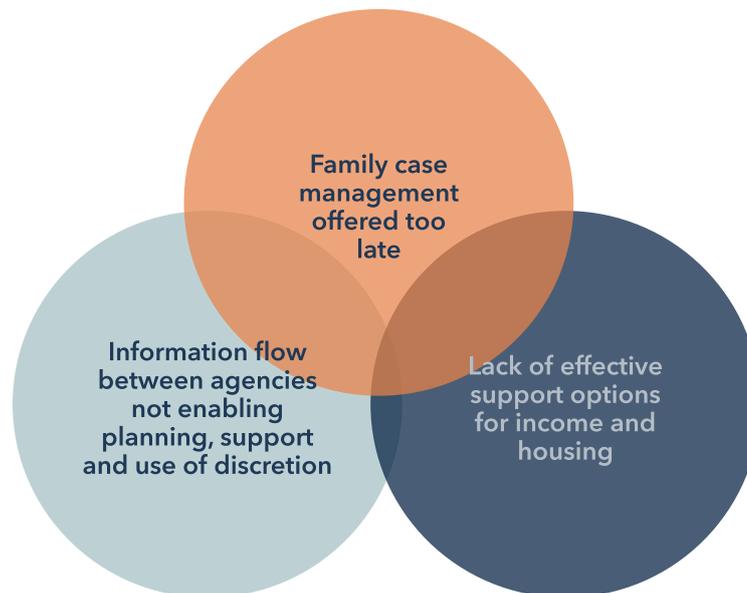
At the moment, we're really log jammed, because there's not really a lot of exit points for the client.

HOUSING SUPPORT WORKER

Stability and structure - that's what I needed...I just needed someone to take me under their wing and head me in the right direction.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

FIGURE 4: Service provision responses to families' income and housing challenges



Service providers in government agencies and in the community sector reported that when information was shared between CSS, Housing Tasmania and Centrelink, it often led to positive outcomes for clients, whether it be allocating public housing with sufficient space for reunification due to Case and Care Plans being shared between CSS and Housing Tasmania; or Centrelink clients successfully obtaining a job search exemption from Centrelink while they focused on reunifying with their child, due to CSS providing evidence of actions parents were required to undertake. But although these processes worked, they were not routinely undertaken. Lack of communication between agencies often had catastrophic impacts for parents and family reunification: delays to parenting income being removed or returned leading to an intensity of poverty-induced stress, or parents languishing on the Social and Affordable Housing Register with no hope of an affordable housing solution to support their family to reunify.

This trajectory is avoidable, but it requires a will to recognise both the emotional and material vulnerability of parents whose children are removed and the ongoing parenting costs they have to meet, so that the first day of removal really can be the first day of reunification.

It requires the availability of consistent case management support for parents to navigate their journey with Child Safety Services – from notification through to post-reunification – at a level of intensity that is appropriate for that family. It requires a reliable source of parenting income to keep households on track. And it requires housing policies that prioritise families from child removal through to family reunification, together with a suite of supported accommodation responses that can create a pathway for stability to be re-established and maintained.

As with practice culture, we need to move poverty and homelessness from being the wallpaper of service delivery to being at the forefront of program planning, design and delivery.

It woulda been nice to have, when Eve came home, to have her own room and her own yard and stuff...And I think they should get [parenting] payments organised before they pass children back, cos that's been a big thing. My heart goes out there to the families, cos I know what I've been going through with these payments and stuff and it's not easy. ..This housing thing, I don't want Eve to go to school...here. I want to put her in pre-kindy in January. I think they need to look at the age of the children and what their requirements are before they reunite them.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

They need a reunification income...They need some acknowledgement from the government departments that yes they are going through this process and their income needs to be increased in order for them to be able to support their children.

FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER FOCUS GROUP

What's happening elsewhere?

LEGISLATIVE RESPONSES

International legislation around child maltreatment varies in how poverty is addressed. Poverty or material deprivation can be explicitly ruled in or out as being assessed as neglect, or, in many cases, not mentioned at all.

About half of US states have acknowledged that raising a child in poverty does not equate to child maltreatment by including a poverty exemption in their statutory definition of neglect (Dale 2014; Fernandez et al. 2017). These exemptions are on a spectrum, from complete exemption for substantiating neglect if poverty is a factor, to exemptions of neglect on the basis of environmental factors that are outside parents' control. Other states have legislation that prohibits the termination of parental rights based on poverty alone (Dale 2014).

This has assisted these states in distinguishing between poverty and neglect. It has encouraged authorities to ensure there are responses that assist families in addressing materials basics where there is a risk of terminating parental rights on the basis of poverty, or where reunification requirements are seen as discriminating against parents in poverty "in the best interests of the child." See Dale 2014 for a detailed commentary on these cases.

POVERTY-INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORKS

Family-inclusive practice frameworks promote understanding and addressing the social causes of harm to children, including disadvantage, poverty and racism. Jessica Cocks is advocating for such an approach to drive child safety and family support work here in Australia (Cocks 2018).

Krumer-Nevo 2015 offers a practice framework that positions consideration of poverty and material challenges at the centre of assessments and interventions. This “poverty-aware” paradigm updates connections between social work and the developing body of knowledge around the impacts of poverty. It also includes consideration of the role indebtedness plays in family lives (Krumer-Nevo et al. 2016, cited in Morris et al. 2018) and the role that stigmatising and “othering” by social work professionals can play when families’ experiences of poverty are not fully considered (Morris et al. 2018).

Northern Ireland’s government has recently put into operation a poverty-informed approach to practice by publishing an Anti-Poverty Practice Framework for Social Work in Northern Ireland (Morrison et al. 2018). This framework guides professionals working with children and families to keep poverty at the forefront of their practice at every stage of their work – from assessments of challenges facing clients to appropriate referrals and interventions. It is aimed at ensuring professionals understand they have a duty of care to remain informed about the role of poverty in their clients’ lives and experiences.

SUPPORTED HOUSING MODELS

Healey et al. (2016) offer a detailed exploration of international approaches to and benefits of supported housing models for homeless families involved with Child Safety Services. They particularly explore the US Family Unification Program, offering vouchers to reunifying families to subsidise housing costs in the private and social housing sectors; New York’s Housing First, which marries affordable housing with intensive and integrated support (which has spawned Australia’s Common Ground model); and the US’ Keeping Families Together pilot project, which addressed affordable housing and coordinated service support for welfare-involved families.

Healey et al. also note:

- The US National Centre for Housing and Child Welfare has demonstrated that the cost of supportive housing is approximately 70% less than the cost of maintaining children in foster care (NCHCW 2015, cited in Healey et al. 2016).
- Affordable, secure housing linked with appropriate services is showing positive outcomes across programs in the US, Europe and England. Again, US research has established that it is the *combination* of focused case management, support services and a housing subsidy that supports housing stability and family wellbeing outcomes (White 2016, cited in Healey et al. 2016).

Recommendations: reimagining the provision of material basics within Tasmania's policy, culture and programs to expedite family reunification

We need to reimagine the policy and practice frameworks relevant to Child Safety, family support, income support and housing within an ecological approach that supports, rather than problematises, families to address the best interests of their children. As Bowlby reminds us, working for the best interests of the child includes ensuring their parents are supported to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which they can develop (Bowlby 1951, cited in Cocks 2018).

These recommendations are designed to inform a suite of integrated responses from legislation and policy, culture and practice, programs and services, and planning and data. They are not designed to attribute responsibility for funding or delivering initiatives, but do allocate a lead government agency to explore how these elements could be developed. They are starting points for a conversation about how we can expedite family reunification by focusing on the structural, as well as the personal, challenges that have led to parenting capacity being assessed as unsafe.

LEGISLATIVE/POLICY FRAMEWORKS

RECOMMENDATION 1: Duty of care to families. The Department of Communities Tasmania should review Tasmania's legislative and/or policy framework around children and families so that it stresses a duty of care for families, in a similar way that there is a duty of care towards the child.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Clarity around how child safety practice should treat the relationship between poverty and child maltreatment. The Department of Communities Tasmania should review Tasmanian child safety legislation, policy and guidance to ensure it prevents authorities from assessing poverty as child maltreatment, outlines the need for structural, as well as personal, responses to poverty and compels a support response when income or housing is identified as a barrier to family reunification.

PRACTICE CULTURE

RECOMMENDATION 3: Bringing poverty and homelessness to the forefront of practice and child safety planning. Children and Youth Services should explore opportunities for Child Safety Services' practice framework, safety assessment and planning framework Signs of Safety, and family support interventions to draw on poverty-informed frameworks that acknowledge and address families' structural challenges. This would assist in routinely acknowledging the material challenges families are facing in securing stable accommodation and meeting the costs of parenting and reunification requirements, and clearly stating standards and goals for material basics and the interventions needed to address these.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

RECOMMENDATION 4: Offering parents continuous case management to achieve safety goals. The Department of Communities Tasmania needs to provide parents involved with Child Safety Services access to a continuous working relationship with a case manager who can support families from notifications and assessments, through to child removal, and to family reunification. This case management should include supporting parents to interact in an informed and constructive way with Child Safety Services and to address the practical and emotional consequences of Child Safety's processes and safety concerns. Post child removal, this case management service should work with parents, Child Safety Services and other relevant agencies and support services to develop a post-removal plan covering what needs to happen for the family to become reunification ready.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Recognising and providing parenting and reunification income. The Department of Communities Tasmania, along with other relevant federal and state government departments, should explore a suite of programs and services that recognise and address continued parenting costs post child removal and the significant costs involved in preparing for and undertaking family reunification. These should include the following elements:

- automatic access to financial counselling pre- and post child removal to prepare parents for any change in income and explore ways to address it;
- a form of transitional parenting-related income for the first six months while an active case plan is being developed to either get children home, or get parents reunification ready;
- providing parenting-related income once family reunification begins in a way that appropriately responds to day and overnight visits;
- expanding access to finance for significant one-off costs for parents that enable family reunification, such as children's car seats, car registration, maintenance and repair, white goods and furniture;
- routinely reimbursing any expenses parents incur in arranging access visits and meeting reunification requirements, such as travel and medical fees; and
- reviewing guidelines and mechanisms that direct carers to materially support reunification activities when the carer is still in receipt of parenting payments for the child.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Providing a suite of stable accommodation options for family reunification. Housing Tasmania and Child and Youth Services should ensure that, in order to expedite family reunification, families whose children are removed by Child Safety Services have a suite of options to support them to maintain stable accommodation. These may be tailored to where parents are in the reunification journey and their level of support needs, but should include elements such as:

- Parents who have had their children removed and are either at the pre-reunification stage, reunification ready or actively reunifying with their children to be a priority cohort for crisis, transitional and longer-term housing and tenancy support, in a similar way to families experiencing domestic violence. Any tenancy support should routinely be part of the family's case co-ordination team, linked to the parent's NGO case manager, Child Safety case worker and the Reunification Case and Care Plan requirements.
- Developing a suite of housing options for parents who have had their children removed and are either at the pre-reunification stage, reunification ready or actively reunifying with their children. These might include:
 - providing specific guidance and mechanisms for Housing Tasmania and social housing Managers to allocate adequate bedrooms for family reunification in available public and social housing;
 - exploring ways to subsidise access to private rental accommodation, as well as access to the community and social housing sector, for parents post child removal, in order to ensure that families have the option to find stable accommodation where they need it; and
 - explore possible supported accommodation options for families. These could include both supported clustered tenancies in the community and residential support models that can work intensively with families.

PLANNING AND DATA

RECOMMENDATION 7: Sharing government agency case data to plan for housing allocations that enable family reunification. Children and Youth Services and Housing Tas to explore necessary amendments to policies, processes and documents needed to ensure that active forecasting and planning of public and social housing stock for reunifying families can occur between Children and Youth Services, Housing Tasmania and social housing providers.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Sharing government agency case data to enable smooth transitions out of and into parenting-related payments. Explore necessary amendments to policies, processes, data sharing and documents between Centrelink and Children and Youth Services, to support Centrelink in responding to changes in care arrangements. This should include timely adjustments to parenting-related income and potential use of discretion in suspending Newstart Job Search requirements during family reunification, if mutual obligations are inhibiting reunification commitments. An additional consideration would be having reunification activities treated as eligible activity for Newstart requirements.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Sharing case data to understand parents' income and housing needs for reunification on a case and systemic level. Children and Youth Services and Housing Tas to explore opportunities to share case data across the CPIS and SHIP government information systems, subject to privacy regulations. This would help government agencies and service providers to understand more about families' income and housing needs on a case level and systemic level, and to plan resources that effectively support successful family reunifications.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Collecting additional data to enable Tasmania to become a leader in understanding the role of income and housing in child safety concerns, interventions and service responses. Children and Youth Services and Housing Tas to collect additional data within CPIS on the socio-economic circumstances and disadvantage of families involved with Child Safety Services, whether income and housing challenges are part of safety concerns in initial substantiations and as cases progress, and the distance between birth parents' and carers' households. This would enable a clearer understanding of vulnerability, risks and support needs in a family's reunification process and help us to understand trends in the role material basics have in child safety concerns and family reunifications at a systemic level.

FURTHER RESEARCH

RECOMMENDATION 11: Areas for further investigation. There are further areas to explore to comprehensively inform the development of policy and practice in this area. These include specific responses to families experiencing domestic violence and exploring differences in experiences for Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse families and families with disabilities. There is also a need to examine residential AOD support options for parents who have had their children removed and pathways into stable accommodation for this cohort.

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For more information

The full report, *In Limbo: Exploring income and housing barriers for reunifying Tasmanian families*, by Lindsey Fidler, is published by the Social Action and Research Centre at Anglicare Tasmania, September 2018.

It can be downloaded at www.socialactionresearchcentre.org.au/research-library



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