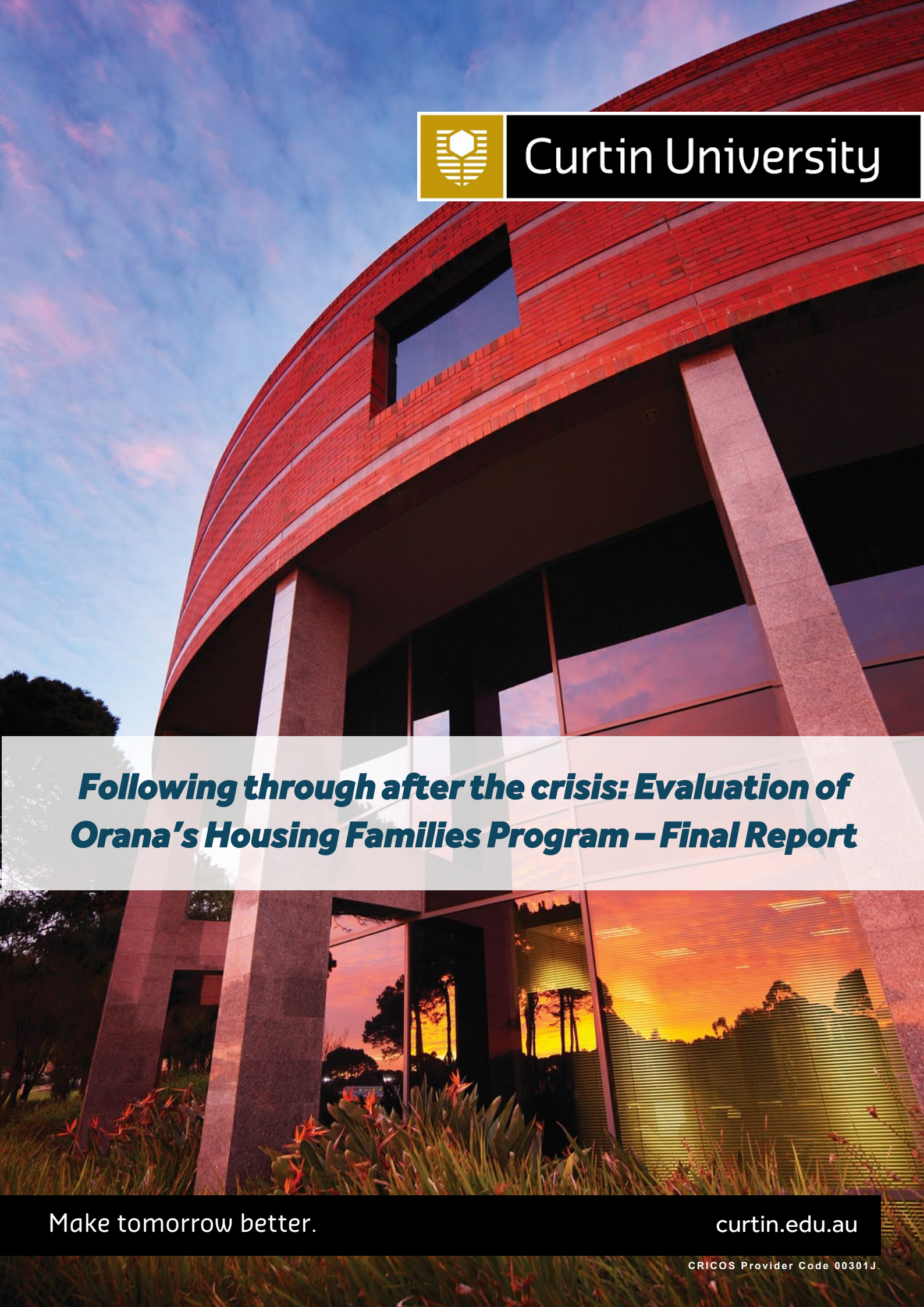


Curtin University

Following through after the crisis: Evaluation of Orana's Housing Families Program – Final Report

Make tomorrow better.

curtin.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Code 00301J

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The research team and Curtin University acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work, the Wadjuk people of the Nyungar Nation. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Nations and Traditional Owners of Country and respect their connection to the land, sea and community.

We pay respects to Elders past, present, and emerging and recognise their strength, resilience and capacity, and we acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

We also acknowledge the profound impact that domestic and family violence has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Acknowledgment of Victim-Survivors

The research team acknowledges the long shadow cast over women, children and young people who experience family violence and recognises the essential need for support that endures beyond the crisis point. We respect the strength and knowledge of victim/survivors to direct their healing journeys and understand the importance of responses that are informed by victim/survivor's experiences and advocacy. We pay our deepest respects to those who have been tragically taken by family violence and acknowledge their families, friends and communities who must endure the immeasurable grief of the loss of their loved one to an issue that is widespread and preventable. The research team is committed to conducting research that is informed by the voices of women and children with lived experience.

We believe you.

Report prepared by Ms Darcee Schulze, Ms Bec Taylor, and Professor Donna Chung.

Curtin University 2025

Suggested Citation: Schulze, D., Taylor, B., & Chung, D. (2025). *Following through after the crisis: Evaluation of Orana's Housing Families Program – Final Report*. Curtin School of Allied Health. Curtin University.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Women's access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing has been a long-standing barrier to safety and recovery from domestic and family violence (DFV), which has been exacerbated amidst the housing crisis. In the private rental market, women and children leaving DFV regularly have their tenancy applications overlooked due to a single income, lack of rental history or poor rental history.

Orana's Housing Families Program works with women to secure private rental housing by supporting them throughout the process. Importantly, the program has developed partnerships with real estate agencies and landlords supportive of housing women and children who experienced DFV. The Program is innovative in approach and demonstrates the importance of such a program being delivered by a DFV specialist service.

The combined strategies of the program have led to Housing Families clients being prioritised and securing private rentals.

The Program is vital for women and children in securing safe and appropriate housing. The support involves the Team:

1) identifying rentals that meet women's and children's needs,
    - which often includes locating homes near children's schools,
2) attending the home opens with women, when possible, and
3) assisting them with completing the application process and writing cover letters.

The Housing Families Team tailors support to the clients' needs, for some this includes sourcing furniture and appliances, assistance with moving, temporarily subsidising the cost of rent and providing security cameras. The Housing Families Team also takes time to check in with clients after moving into their home to ensure needed supports are in place, which may include linking women with other DFV programs and supports offered by the SWitCH Centre and other services to aid recovery and re-establishment.

Key Findings

The findings of the Housing Families Program Evaluation reveal that the women had a diverse range of experiences, and the responsive and inclusive approach of the Housing Families Team ensured there were common outcomes that resulted in safe and secure housing for the women and their children.

- 107 people housed through the Housing Families Program between June 2023 and December 2024 (39 women and 68 children)
- Innovative response to the ongoing private rental market inaccessibility and lack of affordable social and public housing for women
- Key to the program's success:

    - Continuity of support is critical to optimise outcomes for women and children
    - Maintaining partnerships with real estate agents and property owners to keep them involved and supportive
    - Affordable and stable housing for who have access to a regular income and are at a stage of being ready to move forward
    - Of note, the women's situations generally did not involve high levels of post-separation violence and abuse as this could impact the tenancy if the perpetrator or his supporters were stalking and placing the woman under surveillance
    - Excellent collaboration that shows Orana House's capacity to work with diverse stakeholders and strongly demonstrates the importance of supporting women and their children through housing
    - Great consideration has been given to the affordability and how this can be constantly managed and supported by all parties. However, it can limit the size of the program due to needing collaborators to hold a similar view about supporting women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence (DFV)
- Based on the program's total expenditure, the per client cost is $2522, for which women and children are safely housed with a continuum of support as needed so that tenancies are successful, and families are able to recover and re-establish their lives.

The social and economic policy approaches of governments have not prioritised affordable housing for families, either through housing policy or DFV policy. Therefore, women have to rely heavily on the private rental market in order to live safely away from DFV and coercive control. Evidence shows that most women are financially disadvantaged after separation, but this is even worse for women experiencing DFV who may have been subjected to financial abuse and not been able to have regular paid employment. The Housing Families Program stands out as an example where necessity is the mother of innovation by developing and refining this program for women and their children.

Recommendations

Due to limited funding, the Housing Families Team does not have capacity to meet the demands, there are more women and children needing support into private rentals. Program expansion would help meet demand; however, the Housing Families Program has a range of interdependent components and relies on the availability and suitability of the wrap around services which includes:

- The real estate agents,
- Supportive landlords,
- And the SWitCH Centre.

The recommendations cover various components for the future development of HFP.

PROGRAM MODEL

It is recommended that:

1. HFP's innovative approach engaging multiple stakeholders be continued.
2. Working with the collaborating real estate companies and property owners to identify ways to extend the reach of the program and what could incentivise greater participation from real estate companies, and this be prioritised in the next stages of the HFP to understand the level of expansion that is viable.
3. The DFV training for real estate agents be continued, particularly as the program expands and new agents become involved in the HFP, to ensure they are equipped with an understanding of DFV and able to respond safely to women and children with experiences of DFV. The DFV training should also be offered to property owners involved in the HFP.
4. The HFP Program Model with its continuum of responses from support with the application process, where needed, through to re-establishment be maintained and if possible expanded as this is key to achieving the positive outcomes for women and children.
5. Funding be secured so the HFP can continue to assist women with the costs of moving and other unexpected costs without the HFP relying on philanthropic funds. Obtaining philanthropic funds often takes HFP staff away from their primary role as Advocates.
6. The subsidised rent and other mechanisms that increase the affordability and accessibility of rental properties for women re-establishing after DFV is continued, extended and secured. Whilst recognising limitations of HFP, it offers families an option of safe and secure housing that would not otherwise be available.
7. Consideration be given to extend the period of affordable rental costs such as subsidised rent for longer periods because the post-separation recovery and re-establishment process can take years due to disruptions to employment, poor health, care responsibilities, engaging in protracted legal situations. This is particularly critical at this time with the current cost of accommodation and living more generally.

STAFFING

It is recommended that:

8. Staffing levels for the HFP are prioritised with any further funding to optimise the capacity of the program and to support current demands. An additional 2.0 FTE could double the program's current capacity.
9. Orana continue its practice of HFP staff being experienced in domestic and family violence work and survivor-centred practice to ensure quality of practice, program integrity and outcomes.

INCREASING THE AVAILABLE HOUSING FOR THE HOUSING FAMILIES PROGRAM

As the HFP is reliant on a supply of affordable, secure and suitable housing, there were recommendations about how to increase the supply. It is recommended that:

10. There continues to be awareness raising with property managers to discuss with potential investors about HFP and offer them the options to discount the rent for HFP clients.

11. Orana and HFP stakeholders consider further strategies to engage real estate agents and potential landlords in ways which will maintain their involvement.

IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF DFV ACROSS THE PRIVATE RENTAL SECTOR

As noted within the recommendations of the program model, DFV training should be continued. However, it is vital for all real estate agents, property managers and property owners in the private rental sector to have an understanding of DFV, regardless of their involvement in HFP. As the original research conducted by Orana House (2022) identified, women who have escaped DFV face discrimination in the private rental market. Therefore, it is recommended that:

12. DFV training be delivered to all involved in the private rental sector to reduce the discrimination experienced by victim-survivors of DFV.

WIDER POLICY CHANGE

Whilst not specifically within the requirements of the evaluation, in several interviews stakeholders suggested wider policy changes which could provide incentives to increase the housing available to the HFP. These have been included as they show the commitment by stakeholders to the program and could be useful for future advocacy.

It was recommended that:

13. An approach similar to the WA Government's Vacant Property Rental Incentive Scheme and Short-Term Rental Accommodation Incentive Scheme be extended to residential property owners who transfer their property to the Housing Families Program, with licensed real estate agents involved with the program submitting applications on behalf of owners. These two schemes offer financial

payment to property owners of vacant residential properties or short-term rental accommodation to transfer their property to the long-term rental market. If this approach is extended to include residential property owners transferring their property to the HFP, the financial incentive would offset the cost of renting their property below the market rate.

- https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-energy-mines-industry-regulation-and-safety/vacant-property-rental-incentive-scheme
- https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-energy-mines-industry-regulation-and-safety/short-term-rental-accommodation-incentive-scheme

14. The Western Australian Government give consideration to other state-based incentives for property owners to participate in affordable housing such as HFP.

Introduction

Women's access to affordable, secure and appropriate housing has been a long-standing barrier to safety and recovery from domestic and family violence (DFV). This was exacerbated during COVID and continues with Australia's housing crisis with a lack of supply and high cost. DFV refuges providing crisis accommodation are often full and victim-survivors are needing to stay longer due to the lack of safe, affordable housing. The waitlist for public housing is significant and alternative options, such as transitional housing are often unavailable and time limited. Furthermore, in the private rental market, women and children leaving DFV regularly have their tenancy applications overlooked due to lower incomes, a lack of rental history or poor rental history for which the abusive ex-partner may have been responsible.

To lessen the impact of Perth's housing crisis and assist women and their children who have experienced DFV to secure rental accommodation, Orana House developed the Housing Families Program (HSP). The Program is an innovative grassroots initiative underpinned by community ownership. It involves Orana House working with local real estate agencies and property owners to support victim-survivors of DFV to secure private rentals. It consists of Orana House increasing real estate agents' understanding of DFV through training, developing partnerships with real estate agencies and property owners who are supportive of housing women and children who experienced DFV and Orana staff providing ongoing support to housed families as needed. These combined strategies of the program have seen prioritisation of Housing Families clients and rentals secured.

Overview of the Research

In 2024, Orana House approached Curtin University researchers to evaluate its Housing Families Program and SWitCH Centre. Through the evaluation, Orana House sought to identify the benefits and limitations of providing a holistic model that addresses the four domains outlined in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032:

1) Prevention
2) Early Intervention
3) Response
4) Recovery and Healing

The aim of this research was to evaluate the Housing Families Program and SWitCH Centre. The evaluation commenced in April 2024, and the following objectives were developed in collaboration with Orana House:

- Review the range of activities involved with the HFP and provided at the SWitCH Centre.

- Examine the impact of the SWitCH Centre and HFP on the safety and longer-term wellbeing of women and their children accessing Orana.
- Identify how the HFP and SWitCH Centre contributes to other local family and domestic violence services and to the overall purpose and objectives of Orana.
- Provide recommendations about how to sustain and improve the HFP and SWitCH Centre.

The evaluation utilised a mixed methods approach to achieve its aims and objectives, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. Orana House provided administrative data related to the costs associated with the HFP as well as de-identified client data from June 2023 to December 2024 including demographic information and supports provided by the HFP. The research team collected in-depth qualitative data from four groups involved in the HFP.

1) Orana House key staff members
2) Key Stakeholders
3) Real estate agents and property owners
4) Women who have been housed through the HFP

The research team required ethics approval from Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to collecting and receiving data for the purpose of the evaluation of HFP and SWitCH Centre. Ethics approval was granted on 23 May 2024 (Approval Number: HRE2024-0252). The evaluation followed the requirements of the National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Seven key staff members from Orana House participated in semi-structured interviews between June and August 2024. The interviews were conducted in person or online using Microsoft Teams. One staff member also provided a written response prior to their interview. Three key staff members were employed in Orana House management roles, one staff member was involved with marketing and communications and three had experience working in the HFP.

Seventeen key stakeholders participated in the evaluation between July and October 2024. The key stakeholders represented Orana House's management committee, referring agencies, organisations that work collaboratively with Orana House to support women and children experiencing DFV, and volunteers and supporters of Orana House and the HFP.

Three participants were real estate agents from two different partner agencies who work with the HFP. Four property owners who have HFP tenants were interviewed for the evaluation. Two of the four property owners shared ownership of one property. One property owner had two rental properties tenanted by HFP clients, and one participant solely owned one property and jointly owned a second property both tenanted by HFP clients. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and/or written responses.

Eight women who have been housed through the HFP participated in interviews between June and October 2024. Women received a $40 gift card to a store like Woolworths, Coles or Kmart in recognition of their time and participation.

Origin and Evolution of the Housing Families Program

During COVID, Orana House continued to meet regularly with other DFV services in the Eastern Metropolitan Corridor and it was apparent that all the refuges were struggling to find housing for women and children who had escaped DFV. There was little movement in the private rental market with additional measures put in place for the WA community in response to COVID, such as a moratorium on rent increase and some evictions. As a result, there were very few options for refuge clients on limited incomes to access housing after staying at refuge. The limited housing supply added to the existing barriers women who escape DFV face, such as discrimination in the private rental market.

This prompted Orana House to apply for a grant to conduct research to identify the barriers to housing for women who have escaped DFV and develop ways to eliminate those barriers and secure private rentals for women who had experienced DFV. The grant was successful, and Orana House received funding through Department of Communities' COVID funds. The research commenced in September 2021 and involved collecting data through surveys from four groups, women who have experienced DFV, DFV workers, real estate agents and landlords.

In March 2022, the research findings were presented at a round table attended by representatives of the four groups and delegates from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA). The roundtable discussions led to an agreement to implement a pilot program "to enable women and families who have experienced DFV access to their right to secure and safe housing" (Orana House, 2022, p. 18)

The core elements of the program, the Housing Families Program (HFP), were designed by the roundtable participants, taking a grassroots approach. One of the core elements determined by the group was to offer DFV training for real estate agents to equip them with an understanding of DFV and an ability to respond safely to women and children with experiences of DFV. Another core element was to create communication between industries so that the applications of women who have experienced DFV will be prioritised.

The initial vision for HFP was to create a self-serving housing registry that allows real estate agents and DFV workers to share information about available rental properties and client details. Clients' housing requirements were shared, and personal details were excluded for privacy reasons. Requirements included the number of bedrooms, price range, location and any other unique requirements, such as single level housing. This information was accessed by DFV workers and real estate agents to find suitable houses for clients.

In the early stages of the HFP, there was significant interest, and women were being housed in private rental properties, but there were also notable challenges that necessitated a revamp of the program. The pilot program did not include the HFP undertaking direct support with clients, this was initially provided by the DFV worker that referred them to the program. However, over time the support from the DFV worker reduced because of the need to prioritise clients in crisis and/or the women who were housed later disengaged from the DFV service. This led to communication challenges between industries, DFV services and real estate agencies, and the women who were housed. When tenancy issues arose, the necessary communication channels were not in place to address the issues.

An external issue impacting the HFP was the rapidly increasing cost of rents following the removal of the moratorium on rental price increases post-COVID. Some of the women housed were experiencing financial stress, either at the time of signing a lease and/or at later stages, and with the early communication challenges, there was no discussion with the property manager and DFV worker, which resulted in rental arrears and some failed tenancy agreements.

Orana House identified that the program needed to include direct client work as the tenancies would have been successful had the women received ongoing support from a dedicated worker. The program was adapted so dedicated HFP Advocates provide support to women by assessing whether the rental property could be maintained with their income, and providing emergency relief, bond or rent assistance if needed as well as facilitating communication with all parties. The HFP now has two part-time Housing Families Advocates who provide support to women during the process of securing a private rental property and after moving in to ensure the tenancies are successful.

The Housing Families Advocates works with women to secure private rentals by developing case management plans, locating suitable rental properties, attending home opens, advocacy, providing support letters, and assistance with rental applications. The HFP also assists women to maintain the cost of private rentals and build their financial security through referrals to financial services and employment or education services. Following a successful application, they provide support with furniture, moving, rent top-ups and bond assistance. The HFP also supports clients with the impacts of DFV with once-off emergency relief, referral to legal services, court support, referral to the SWitCH Centre or other services that support DFV victim-survivors, such as counselling and advocacy services.

The core elements of the HFP established through the roundtable discussions continue to be the foundations of the program. DFV training for real estate agents is still offered, particularly when new agencies sign up and communication between industries continues to be a priority. With the current HFP, the relationships with real estate agents became formalised, which has involved publicly acknowledging the agents and agencies who support the HFP by naming them as Impact Agents. Being named an Impact Agent is based on the real estate agency's financial commitment to HFP clients with three tiers of membership, Silver, Gold, Platinum. The first tier, referred to as Silver,

involves a real estate agency contributing $50 per week towards a HFP client's rent over a 12-month period, which equates to $2,600 for the year. The second tier, Gold, consists of the real estate agency joining the HFP registry and advocating for HFP clients to be tenants of the rental properties they manage that are affordable (i.e., $500/week or below). The third tier, Platinum, consists of both aspects of the Silver and Gold tiers as well as a commitment to DFV workplace education through Orana House's training program designed specifically for real estate agents.

The HFP also includes property owners who want to support women and children by renting their investment property to HFP clients through an Impact Agent. Many of the property owners elect to rent their properties at below market rate and some of the Impact Agents offer a reduced management fee for these owners. The Housing Families Advocates liaise with the property owners and Impact Agents to communicate expectations, guarantee the house is secure and link HFP clients with rentals that meet their needs.

With the housing crisis, the cost of weekly rent for a woman and her children, even at below the market rate, requires clients of the HFP to have an income from employment as typically Centrelink payments are insufficient to manage the cost of rent. While employment is not a criterion for the program, women do need to be able to sustain the rent. Orana House is continually searching for funds and ways to contribute to or 'top-up' women's weekly rent, but this is a stopgap that is not always possible. For this reason, not all women referred to the HFP can be supported into the private rental market in this economic climate.

The one criterion of HFP is that the woman cannot be living with the person using violence at the time of referral or when engaged with HFP. The reason is associated with funding and staffing, currently the staff do not have the capacity to conduct risk assessments and develop safety plans to mitigate risk for women and children when escaping a perpetrator of DFV. Orana House continues to explore ways to support these women and their children into safe and secure housing.

HFP offers a way for women and their children to move forward in their transition to safety at a time when the private rental market has limited affordable rental properties (Anglicare WA, 2024) and a low rental vacancy rate (REIWA, 2025). This reflects the continuing emphasis by successive Commonwealth governments to rely on the private rental market for housing Australian residents. The HFP represents an innovative response to a much larger social problem of women's and children's homelessness and housing insecurity when escaping DFV. It is not intended as a 'one size fits all' program, it is a supported pathway for some families, mostly where women are earning an income, to access appropriate and affordable private rental accommodation. This is not a limitation, rather the HFP is a creative strategy to support some groups of women which can also reduce pressure on other forms of housing. Multiple strategies are needed to support women and their children in obtaining secure, affordable and appropriate housing as their needs and circumstances are diverse.

Findings

PROGRAM EXPENDITURE

The total cost of running the HFP in the 2023-2024 financial year was $269,823. The average per client cost is $2,522 based on the number of clients housed. The per client cost does not include the likely savings that resulted from families being housed. For example, if remaining unhoused there would be further emergency accommodation costs, costs related to possible non-school attendance and earning capacity is compromised when unhoused. Such costs economically would be far greater than the $2,522 cost of the HFP as well as preventing the social and emotional impacts on families.

The findings presented below show the use of the HFP by women and information about clients who were housed and women who were unable to be housed through the HFP over the period June 2023 to December 2024.

CLIENT DATA

Housed

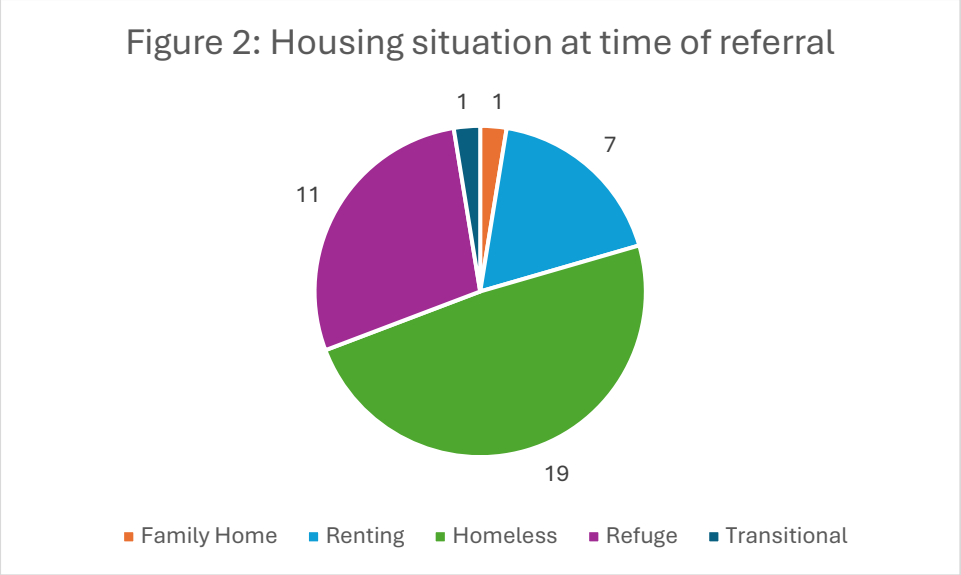
One hundred and seven people were housed through the HFP between June 2023 and December 2024. There were 39 women and 68 children in total. The majority of referring services were other DFV services, such as refuges, outreach services, FDV Response Team, or services supporting multicultural women. Some referrals were also from mental health services and WA Department of Communities.

The age of the women ranged between 25 to 50 years old, with eight women between the ages of 25 and 34 years old and 31 women between the age of 35 and 50 years old. Most women identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (n=26), five identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and the ethnicity of eight women was not identified. Almost two thirds (n=25) of the women housed were engaged in employment, 13 women were employed full-time, and 12 women were employed part-time employment,14 women were not employed. This high percentage of employment reflects the high cost of rent in the private market. Thirty-five (90%) women were caring for 68 children in total. Eleven women had one child with ages ranging from one to 17 years old, 15 women had two children ranging in age from one year old to 15 years old, nine women had three children ranging in age from one year old to 18 years old.

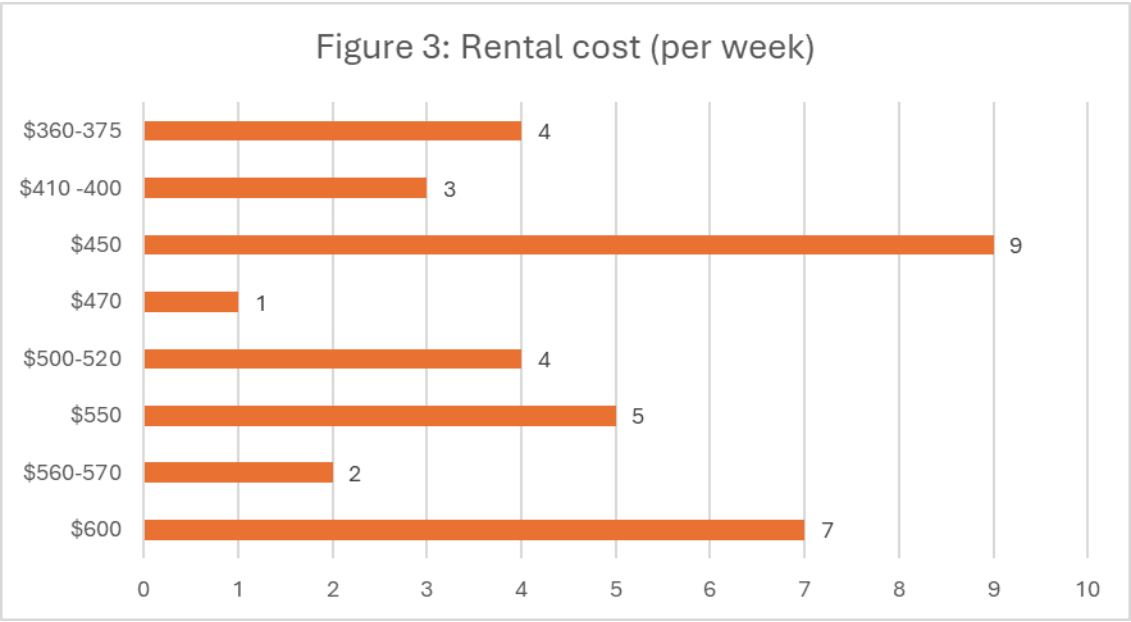
Figure 1: Demographic information of women housed through HFP	**N**	**%**
Age		
25 to 34 years old	8	21
35 to 50 years old	31	79
Ethnicity		
Culturally and linguistically diverse	26	67
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	5	13
Ethnicity not identified	8	20
Employment		
Full-time	13	33
Part-time	12	31
Not employed	14	36
Have children		
Yes	35	90
No	4	10

As depicted in Figure 2, 49% of women were homeless at the time of referral to the HFP. Eleven women (28%) were in refuge, 18% (n=7) were renting, one woman was in transitional housing and one in the family home. The HFP client data records the date of women's case closure. The time between referral to HFP to case closure varies widely from two weeks to eleven months, with the most common support duration being two to four months reflecting their establishment in the house.

It is important to note case closure is usually after the client is housed, as many clients continue to receive support from the Housing Families team after securing their housing with settling in aspects. Some supports provided by HFP are directly linked with housing, such as assistance with bond, rent-top-ups and furniture. Supports, such as referrals to financial services and employment or education services, assist women to maintain the cost of private rental housing and build financial security. The Housing Families team also supports clients with the ongoing impacts of DFV, such as once-off emergency relief funding, referral to legal services, court support, and referrals to other services that support victim-survivors of DFV, including the SWitCH centre, counselling and advocacy services.



The 39 HFP tenancies were managed by fifteen different real estate agencies, seven of these agencies have formally partnered with the HFP. These seven agencies have the majority of HFP tenancies (n=28). Seventeen of the rental properties were made available to HFP by the property owners' initiation. Eighteen women have received rent top ups. The funds gathered for the rent top-up are from a range of sources, such as small grants and philanthropic donations. The funds are pooled by Orana House and distributed as needed and noted in the client data that top up was provided. However, the client data indicates some instances of rent top-ups from other sources Mettle (n=1), Zonta (n=2) and Starick (n=3). The rent top-ups are designed to financially assist women temporarily, but the amount is not so significant that it is unable to be managed in their own budget when it ceases.



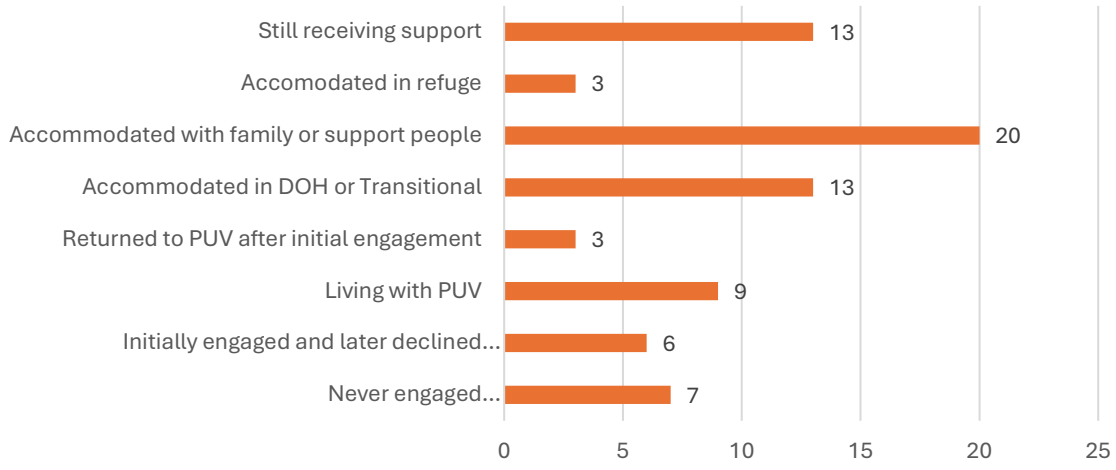
As Figure 3 indicates, weekly rental costs for participants ranged from $360 to $600. The average cost per week across participants was $487 with most women paying within the range of $450 to $550 per week. In contrast, the average weekly rent of a 3-bedroom house in Perth metropolitan area is $650 (REIWA, 2025). The average weekly Parenting Payment receive from the Commonwealth Government for women without paid employment is $505 per week (Services Australia, 2025). Concerningly, even with the additional benefit of Rent Assistance, the cost of renting privately is likely to be unsustainable in the current economic environment if women are not earning an income through employment. Women being able to gain paid employment remains critical in the current social and economic policy context. It is therefore pressing that initiatives, such as HFP, that support affordable and secure housing for women and their children who have experienced DFV are continued and expanded where possible.

Unhoused

Between June 2023 and December 2024, 74 women referred to HFP were not able to be housed through the program. The client data template offers six reasons for women not being housed:

1) Never engaged,
2) Initially engaged and later declined,
3) Living with person using violence (PUV),
4) Accommodated in Department of Housing (DOH) or Transitional accommodation,
5) Accommodated with family or support people, and
6) Still receiving support.

Figure 4: Reasons women were not housed through HFP



When grouping the categories, 45% of women were in alternative accommodation, 18% of women lived with or returned to the person using violence, and another 18% did not engage. Four women who were not housed were not linked to the six reasons above. The notes however show that three of these four women were accommodated in refuge at the time. The remaining woman who did not have a reason selected had additional details explaining that she had returned to the person using violence (PUV). Two others had this noted in the comments section of the client data although one of the other reasons were indicated in addition to or instead of the reason "living the perpetrator". For the evaluation, a new category "returned to the perpetrator after initial engagement" was included. as depicted in Figure 4. Each of these women had different housing situations at the time of referral, one woman was living in the family home, one woman was living in refuge and one woman was homeless. Two of the women were between the ages of 25 and 35 and one woman was between the age of 35 and 50 years old. One of the women was employed in full-time work. It was noted that one woman was culturally and linguistically diverse, the ethnicity of the other two women was not identified. All three women had children with ages ranging from one to 16 years old.

Nine women who were referred but not housed through the HFP did not meet the program criteria as they were living with the person using violence (PUV) in the family home at the time of referral. Eight of the nine women were between the ages of 35 and 50 years old, the other woman was between the age of 25 and 35 years old. The majority of these nine women were culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) (n=6), the ethnicity of the other three women was not identified. Four of the nine women were engaged in part-time or full-time employment. All women had a least one child, the age of children was unknown for four women, the ages that were specified ranged from six years old to 15 years old.

As indicated in Figure 4, seven women referred to the HFP never engaged (this does not include those women that returned to PUV since initial engagement or are residing with PUV). In the comments section it noted that four of the seven chose to stay in refuge, one woman had no visa and no income so would not be able to afford the rental. All four of these women were living in a refuge at the time of referral.

Six women referred to the HFP initially engaged and later declined (this does not include those that returned to PUV or living with others). Two of the six chose to stay in refuge. One woman who was living in a refuge at the time of referral chose to disengage with services. Another woman, who was boarding, later declined HFP support due to her poor rental history. There were not additional notes for two women but the housing situation at the time of referral was renting for one and the other was living in the family home.

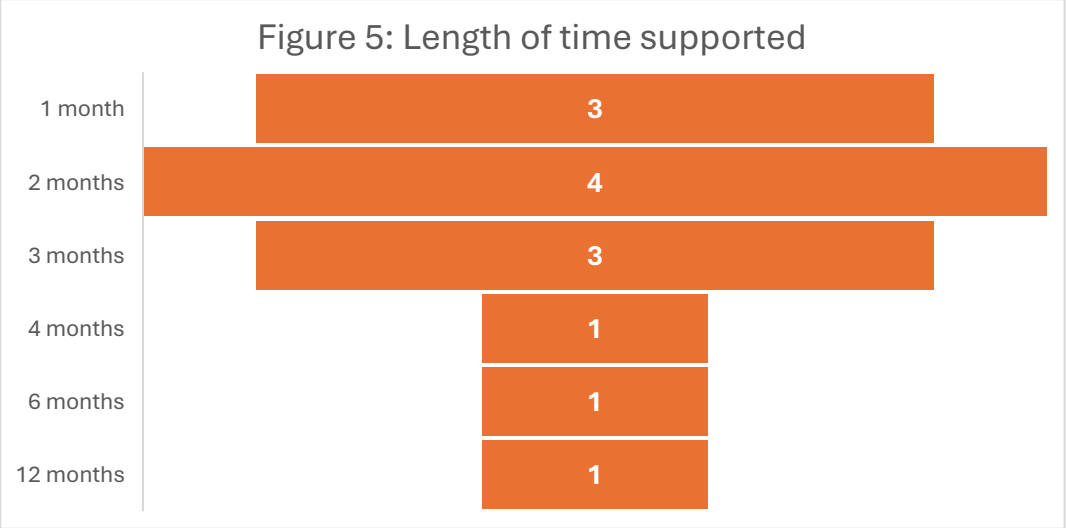
Figure 4 indicates that thirteen women were accommodated in DOH or Transitional housing rather than the HFP. Two of the thirteen women were accommodated with DOH, both were homeless and unemployed at the time of referral. One woman was between the ages of 25 and 35 years old and the other woman was between the ages of 35 and 50 years old. One woman had two children six years old and younger, the other

woman had four children with ages ranging between 10 years old and 16 years old. It was noted that one woman was Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, the ethnicity of the other woman was not identified. Eleven of the thirteen women were accommodated in Transitional accommodation. At the time of referral to HFP, eight of the eleven were living in a refuge, one woman was living the family home, and two women were already living in transitional accommodation and chose to remain there.

Twenty women not housed through HFP were accommodated with family or support people instead as depicted in Figure 4. Nineteen of the 20 women had children. Sixteen of the 20 were culturally and linguistically diverse, the ethnicity of the other four women was not identified. At the time of referral, the housing situation for 15 women was categorised as boarding, two women were living in refuge, two women were homeless, and one woman was renting. The records indicate that HFP was not suitable primarily due to rental unaffordability and insufficient income for the current cost of rent. The client data indicates that five of the twenty women were employed either part-time or full-time, and one woman had no visa and was not able to obtain an income. One woman with one child was able to secure a rental lease agreement with a friend, and one woman who was accommodated with family or support people was sleeping in one room with her four children.

Thirty-six women not housed by HFP were able to be housed in accommodation that allows them to live away from the PUV. However, accommodations such as refuge and transitional are temporary and will require more secure and permanent housing in the near future. Furthermore, living with family or support people can be difficult as it can be temporary and lead to overcrowding, which can impact health and wellbeing as well as children's development (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2022).

Figure 5 shows 13 women referred to the HFP were still receiving support from the Housing Families team although it did not involve a tenancy. Figure 5 shows the length of time the women have been receiving support, the time period ranged from one month to 12 months and the reasons for their length of support are often associated with their circumstances. For instance, the woman receiving support for 12 months is going through the Family Court while working full-time and wanted a temporary break from the process. The woman receiving support for six months was not working and had a low income, limiting the housing options available to her and her children. The client data indicates that the woman receiving support for four months had limited housing options due to affordability, although working part-time, because she needed a large house to accommodate her six children. Other details included reasons such as looking for work, waiting for property settlement, being restricted to set area/location (due to court arrangements), and intermittent engagement.



REAL ESTATE AGENTS & PROPERTY OWNERS

Challenges of securing housing

The HFP has developed partnerships with real estate agencies and property owners supportive of housing women and children who experienced DFV. Those interviewed recognised the challenges women escaping DFV face when trying to secure housing. As one real estate agent expressed, "that affordability issue really at the moment it's just such a big one. Just life expenses in general, even if you earn a good income, it's hard, like I mean going to the shops is painful" (Participant HB). One property owner reflected on affordability when sharing that their real estate agent suggested to double the rent on the rental being tenanted by a HFP client, they felt doubling the rent would be "cruel" and explained that if they did, "the tenant wouldn't be able to afford it. She wouldn't be to afford food, nothing. And she'd have to leave" (Participant HD). Real estate agents and property owners interviewed recognised the importance of offering a subsidised rent rate.

Another key challenge recognised was the competitive rental market and the volume of rental applications which can place women who have experienced DFV at a disadvantage. One real estate agent spoke about the "getting the application strong enough in comparison to others" but noting the challenge for women with a single income when applying for the same rental as applicants with two incomes. The lack of rental history of women escaping DFV was also acknowledged as a challenge in the competitive market and a barrier to securing housing. One real estate agent also identified the stigma around women who have escaped DFV and disclosed the initial hesitation of their team to rent to them.

Orana House seeks to address the challenges with the HFP. As one property owner articulated,

> "I think what the Housing Families Team is doing really well is looking for how do we create a system where these families can take their steps out into a rental market, which is also absolutely booming, and I think what they're doing is they're providing through houses like the ones we're able to offer [and] two things, one is subsidised rent but probably more importantly the opportunity that you might not get in an open competitive market … And so, with both of those things solved, because it's just something you get to step into, then what I see Housing Families doing is providing this wonderful stepping stone." (Participant HG)

Motivation of property owners to be involved in the HFP

Two property owners interviewed had a long-standing relationship with Orana House before the HFP was implemented and already owned a rental property. They became involved with the HFP following an event Orana hosted showcasing the HFP. Shortly after, they met with a real estate agent involved in HFP to rent their property to a HFP client. They clearly articulated, "we are not in it for the money" (Participants HD) and demonstrated this by maintaining a below market rent rate for the HFP client tenanting their property despite prompts from the real estate agent.

One property owner learnt about Orana and its HFP through their work with a WA newspaper.

> "And it was then I started writing about it regularly and I guess I realised what a credible organisation it is and how smart they are, as well as compassionate. They absolutely maximise every single dollar they get. …. Obviously, you need to have a compassionate landlord to start with because there's a rental discount but guaranteed that your home will be absolutely taken care of and that you are helping someone to break the cycle and that they're getting the other wraparound services. Because although I'm a property reporter, it is not just about bricks and mortar. I mean, they need to deal with their trauma and retrain and get jobs and all those practical things to help them stand on their own." (Participant HF)

This property owner already owned an investment property and when it became available for new tenants, they connected with HFP and a real estate agency involved to rent their property to a HFP client.

> "I was so impressed with everything Orana has done that I put together a group of eight investors to buy a home in [Perth suburbs], which is now rented to another woman and her [children] escaping domestic violence at a heavily discounted rental price." (Participant HF)

Another property owner was initially considering purchasing a holiday house and shared that they felt uncomfortable putting so much money into a holiday house. It was around the same time that they read an article on the HFP and decided that this is what they

preferred to do with their money. They contacted Orana House who then connected them with a real estate agent who advised them on purchasing an investment property and provided the property owner a discounted management fee. The positive experiences with the HFP, real estate agency and the HFP client renting their property led them to purchase a second investment property for the HFP. All property owners interviewed were committed to taking a below market rate on their rental properties to support HFP clients.

HFP clients as tenants

The real estate agents and property owners were asked about their experiences with HFP clients as tenants. One real estate agent shared that “they're just good tenants like they want to make it a home, they're your most motivated tenant ever. They'll be long term as well, right. Like if they make that their home, that's their home so” (Participant HC). One property owner shared that one HFP client initially declined the property because she was worried about her young children damaging the carpet, she eventually did move in after receiving assurance that the owners were okay if the carpet was subjected to wear and tear, the owners added that from the rent inspection photos the place looked so clean “you could eat off the floor” (Participants HD).

One real estate agency, who is a dedicated supporter of the HFP and has housed many HFP clients in properties they managed, stated that no HFP clients have ever been issued a breach notice during their tenancy agreement. They also shared that the properties have been very clean and tidy at all routine inspections, with ninety percent of them receiving an eight to ten out of ten for presentation on inspections. They also noticed HFP clients were past the point of the perpetrator damaging the property.

Both real estate agents and property owners spoke about trusting Orana House with the HFP clients they refer. One agent framed it as having “another layer,” explaining “we’ve not had any issues with Orana Families, they’ve been wonderful, and if there is a problem, can go straight to Orana and say, listen, this has happened” (Participant HB). This was echoed by an owner who has two properties tenanted by HFP clients,

> “The security they offer in terms of finding really good tenants. They know these tenants inside out and they vouch for them as really good tenants. Whereas when you go on the private market, you still don't know. You might have a good rental history from someone, but you don't know if it's real or you don't know if they're going to suddenly change their tune. Whereas my experience with Orana is that all the tenants have been absolutely amazing.” (Participant HF)

Positive aspects of the HFP

During the interviews, the real estate agents and property owners reflected on the positive aspects of the HFP. One property owner who has been involved with HFP since the pilot spoke of the changes with the redevelopment of the Program,

> "I felt in the beginning at least that this tenant was maybe not getting as much wraparound service as I had hoped. But that very quickly changed when [the Housing Families Advocate] came on and now this tenant is preparing, she's going back into the workforce. There are a lot of good things that she's been able to do. [The Housing Families Advocate] has taken the HFP program to the next level, ensuring great wrap around services." (Participant HF)

They elaborated on the importance of the wraparound service, how it supports women "to stand on their own two feet" through practical support, such as clothes for a job interview, or referrals to counselling. With these additional supports and services, it is "not just a Band-Aid" (Participant HF).

Property owners and real estate agents identified the effort of the Housing Families Advocates put into setting up the homes for the families, "the property's unfurnished and they have it all furnished beautifully for that family going in with kids' toys. Making sure the properties are nice" (Participant HB).

Two committed real estate agencies also offer reduced management fees to HFP property owners which assists with the below market rental rate. One property owner interviewed has a time-limited free property management through a grant Orana House received which has made it more achievable for them to offer reduced rent to HFP clients. This property owner expressed they were "so impressed with everything Orana has done… they more than maximise a single dollar" (Participant HF). From their understanding, free property management has meant Orana House was "able to get more landlords than they otherwise would've, so that $30 or $60 a week saving actually results in more homes" (Participant HF).

One real estate agent who became involved shared that "it's exciting to be a part of [the HFP]" (Participant HC). The Housing Families Advocates they communicate with has been "brilliant," quick to provide answers, and "exceptional to work with." The agent expressed they were keen to support and promote the program, saying "I'll shout it from the rooftops; it's such an incredibly important cause." They also emphasised the importance of empowering women who experience DFV, to assure them that "it doesn't matter what their partner does, they'll be ok" (Participant HC).

One owner applauded the agent managing their property, saying she is "really compassionate and at the same time, my house has never been kept in such great condition. It's just really top shape" (Participant HF). The owner explained that they have been assuring the HFP client that she can ask for things, such as air conditioning, and "you won't get kicked out." In doing so, the agent has shown this woman "that she's respected and valued and has a voice" (Participant HF).

Impacts observed by real estate agents and property owners

Real estate agents and property owners were asked about the impacts the HFP has on its clients. The long-term impacts of the HFP are still unknown as the program is still relatively new. For instance, at the time of the interviews, the longest tenanted HFP client managed by interviewed real estate agents was nine months.

Through reports prepared by the real estate agency or Orana House, one owner felt there was appreciation from the HFP clients and "that it is opening up life for them that wasn't there before" (Participant HG). Another property owner shared that they heard the children of the HFP client were happy at their school and understood the tenant was feeling secure in the property as she had asked for a long lease. One owner could not comment on the HFP clients tenanting their property but through their work as a property editor has spoken with other HFP clients and described, "it is literally life-changing," … "these [women and children] would most likely still be living with their abusers, as none of them had secure housing" (Participant HF).

Duration of tenancy and subsidised rent

The interviews included discussion about the duration of tenancy support for HFP clients, in particular the length of time HFP clients can tenant the rental property and how long they can receive subsidised rent. One property owner shared their understandings, that it was "not an ongoing forever thing," each HFP client is offered one year as opportunity to establish a rental history/reference, save some money and then enter the private rental market without the support HFP provides (Participant HG). The one-year time limit was established to give opportunity for other women to secure affordable housing in the private market. The owner expressed uncertainty about how that would play out when the lease agreement ends, what happens if the clients' children are settled in the local school and cannot find another affordable rental in the area?

The other property owners interviewed had already undertaken a lease renewal. At the time of renewal, one HFP client asked the owners for a lease longer than one year, to which the owners agreed. The owners reflected that the woman who was initially worried about damaging carpet felt secure enough to want to remain, and the owners wanted her to have stability. Over time, the owners did increase the rent by $50 per week, keeping the rent well below market rate even though the real estate agent advised them of their property's market value and suggested they double the rate.

Another owner has been renting their property to a HFP client for about three years at a significantly reduced rent rate. At two years, the owner gave the client one year's notice that the rent would be increasing by $100 per week for several reasons and informed them they had year's notice to give opportunity to retrain. The owner also explained to the tenant that if they needed longer to retrain, they would find a way to keep the rent at

the same rate. The owner is not sure if tenant retrained but she now pays an extra $100 per week, which is still $175 below the market rate.

One real estate agent, who at the time of interview had not yet had a lease renewal with HFP, spoke about wanting to help as many people as possible. They explained that they "don't want to keep [HFP clients] on a cheaper rent when it could be there to help someone else that needs to go through that process" (Participant HB). They also identified the need to check-in with HFP clients at the time of lease renewal to ask about their income and affordability, noting that rent should not exceed more than thirty percent of their income. The agent understood that HFP clients may need more time on a subsided rent, especially given the current rent rates in the competitive private market. This comment reflects the scarcity dilemma for owners and agents who are committed to HFP and are aiming to balance women's needs for establishing themselves and security of tenure with giving other women opportunities to access the properties and get started on their lives being re-established.

The numbers of women who would benefit from HFP is ever present in the decisions of HFP workers, agents and owners and translates into discussions on the length of time HFP clients can tenant a property and how long they can receive subsidised rent due to the scarcity. The result has been the need for decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the HFP client's circumstances, including factors such as affordability, the need for stability and security and the ex-partner's risk of post separation violence and abuse such as interference and threats while in a new property.

Ways to strengthen and sustain the HFP

Real estate agents and property owners were asked what was needed to improve the HFP and how it could be strengthened and sustained. One property owner recommended HFP put more focus on training or re-training women who have experienced DFV for the workforce to support women's financial futures. They understood that due to the complexities of DFV and its impacts, not everyone can participate in employment, but emphasised the other value it can offer if women are able to work, such as confidence, independence, and financial security.

One real estate agent suggested having the housing registry available again. They acknowledged the additional resources required to keep it updated, however, it was suggested it would be useful for real estate agents to have current information on houses becoming available and the housing needs of HFP clients. The agent expressed a willingness to support the HFP to re-introduce the register.

There was significant discussion on how to strengthen and sustain the HFP. Most spoke about getting more people involved. One property owner spoke about raising awareness, they shared "I had no idea the problems women escaping domestic violence were facing in trying to get a rental amid the rental shortage" (Participant HF).

They also added that after publishing articles on HFP, three property owners contacted them to offer their rental properties to Orana.

The real estate agents interviewed confirmed the importance of promoting the HFP and identified that real estate agents have a contribution to make. One agent said it was about having conversations with property owners, asking them if they are able to rent their property at below market rates and explaining the potential benefits, as noted two committed agencies provide reduced management rates. In addition to this benefit, some property owners might be better to offer a reduced rent rate as a higher rent can impact their taxable income. The two real estate agents in support of this approach explained they were confident to have these conversations and have had success with getting property owners involved in the HFP. But they realise not all agents are confident or willing, whether due to the assumptions about women escaping DFV and concern if the tenancy does not go well, it will negatively impact their reputation. One real estate agent suggested that agents currently involved in the HFP provide statistics on HFP clients, data on routine inspections and breaches, to encourage other real estate agents to become involved.

The real estate agents spoke about the reduced management fee encouraging property owners to offer a reduce rent rate. Reduced management fees are not possible for most agencies, as they may not profit from managing these properties. One property owner interviewed shared that the free property management fee they received through a grant Orana House received was a "game changer" and suggested this element of the HFP be extended and expanded (Participant HB).

It was unanimous that HFP needed more financial support, almost all interviewed stated that more support from governments was needed. Two property owners compared what the Australian government was doing for housing compared to European countries, saying "the government should be doing far more" (Participants HD). They suggested,

> "Perhaps the government needs to step in and say to people, 'if you are happy to rent it out at a lower rate, we will give you the difference between' … to get them on board. Using the negative gearing type thinking. My suggestion would be that the government allows a tax deduction for any discount against established benchmarks. … If your market rent is $600 and you rent it out for $450, $150 is considered a charitable donation and that comes off your income as per se." (Participants HD)

One real estate agent made a similar suggestion, if property investors "were able to be given a grant or… some tax relief. It'd be a lot easier to sell to an investor" (Participant HB). They added that the government has previously awarded grants and tax benefits for other housing schemes, such as the Short Stay Application. The agent emphasised that it is not the responsibility of investors to fix the housing crisis, "it's the governments'" pointing out that they are making "the government's life easier by giving all of this support to them, but we're the ones all taking the risk" (Participant HB).

Another real estate agent criticised the government's incentives to get people into their first homes with the First Homeowner Grant, noting that the priority should be on housing women and children who have experienced DFV. They suggested that the government should prioritise investing money into providing a house for women and children, to be supported in re-establishing their lives over supporting someone to purchase their first home who already have some form of accommodation.

Increasing support and involving more real estate agents and property owners in the HFP would result in more housing opportunities for women and children who have experienced DFV. However, it also results in higher caseloads for the Housing Families Advocates, which could impact the vital wraparound supports that lead to successful tenancies. One property owner spoke about the crucial role of Housing Families Advocates, specifically how they do their job and communicate with the range of stakeholders. The Housing Families Advocate they mostly worked with conveyed an appreciation for their efforts and gave them a sense that they were doing something worthwhile, which contributed to them purchasing a second rental property for the HFP. The owner added had they not felt appreciated with the first purchase, they might not have purchased the second property.

Additional houses would also necessitate training to all new real estate agents partnering with HFP. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to allocate one person or a small team to oversee the property management for HFP clients. This recognises the DFV that the families have experienced and adopts a DFV informed approach by creating a safe environment by having consistent property managers coming into their home. This approach is currently being modelled by one real estate agency. The real estate agent shared that the property manager looking after the HFP clients is training in DFV, understands the program and is also a "nurturing, mature lady" (Participant HB).

STAKEHOLDERS

Need for a Housing Program

The stakeholders participating in the evaluation from organisations that refer and/or work collaboratively with HFP emphasised the need for a housing program that supports women who experienced DFV into long-term accommodation. One organisation noticed the enthusiasm HFP generated and attributed this to it responding to a crucial need. The organisation recognised the need for women to have an advocate with the real estate agencies to ensure they are given a chance and enabling an alternative entrance to the private rental market. They explained that their service provided short-term crisis accommodation and were unable to spend the time on longer-term needs, they needed "someone to come in and go 'well, okay, housing is my forte, I've got this'" (Participants SA).

Stakeholders spoke about the impact of the housing crisis and the cost of rent exacerbating the barriers to secure housing. One organisation noted that this has

resulted in women staying longer in refuge, which negatively impacts their mental health. Another organisation that provides support and services to culturally and linguistically diverse women who are experiencing DFV found housing to be a significant barrier for their clients. Before the HFP, clients would try to secure private rentals on their own but "struggled quite a bit" and "come across a lot of rejection" (Participants SB).

A few organisations spoke about the limited housing available through WA Department of Housing and the lengthy wait list. One stakeholder noted that the current wait list for priority housing, which is three to five years, is not feasible for women and children who experience DFV and need a house soon after separation. Some stakeholders noted that in the meantime women were forced to continue to apply for rental properties where they are likely to be declined (Participants SA).

Experiences with the HFP

One organisation commented that in the early stages of the HFP it was challenging without Housing Families Advocates to run the program, it required the referring organisation to advocate on behalf of their clients. They added that the way HFP is currently being operated has been helpful, their clients now receive step-by-step support from the HFP as they look for a house and they are confident their clients will be "supported in a meaningful way" (Participants SB). Another organisation spoke about the reassurance HFP provides to the property owners that the HFP clients who will tenant their property have support.

The HFP requires referring organisations to complete a form stating they will continue to engage with their clients for the next six to twelve months. One organisation found working with HFP to be a helpful and collaborative process, which helps both organisations as HFP supporting clients with housing and their organisation supporting clients with other matters. They also found it to be helpful for their clients as it provides them with regular contact and support, a "safety net for the clients" (Participants SB). This also enables women to have an ongoing relationship with their initial service provider/organisation where they have developed a trusted relationship and not have to re-tell their story and it does not overburden HFP workers to take on all such responsibilities.

One organisation has partnered with Orana House for more than five years and describes them as an incredible organisation. They noted that Orana House and the HFP have always been open to collaboration even though both organisations rely on the same funding sources and work in the same space. They also shared that Orana House is "always really open to feedback if it allows them to better their work," which is a "really commendable thing" (Participant SH). This is particularly notable in the contracted environment of human services where agencies can be in direct competition for service funding.

Overall, organisations found the HFP to be responsive and quick to secure housing for their clients. Although there were instances when there was a wait time due to the number of clients, but once the clients were onboarded with HFP it was generally a quick and seamless process. One organisation shared that the HFP act with "due diligence to make sure that they're putting in viable candidates" (Participant SH).

Organisations also commented on the way the HFP works with their clients, for instance one stakeholder shared HFP has treated their clients with respect. One organisation found the Housing Families Advocate that works with their clients to be "understanding and kind so that the client still feels empowered to keep going" (Participants SB). They also noticed the transparent communication when there would be delays in securing a rental, the circumstances were clearly explained to the client. Another organisation noted that the Housing Families Advocate they have worked with "bends over backwards to try and move mountains for people" (Participant SH).

One participant had a few negative experiences with HFP where the support provided to their organisation's clients was largely procedural. This resulted in the organisation needing to provide housing support to those clients, which meant they were unable to support clients with their other needs and goals. The participant was unsure about the circumstances that led to these negative experiences and speculated that it coincided with staff changes because it was contrary to their previous interactions with the HFP.

Impact of the HFP

Stakeholders were asked to discuss the impact of HFP on women and children. In their responses, many stakeholders spoke about the impact of not having a house particularly for women and children who experience DFV. One stakeholder noted the anxiety and fear women feel when they are not able to secure a house, the concern they have for their children, and "from a mental health perspective, it is awful, it has a huge impact" (Participant SI). One client relayed to the stakeholder that if she did not have the supports then she would still be with the partner or homeless. One organisation reflected on the diminished self-worth and self-esteem often seen in their clients and the change that occurred for clients when housed, "it kind of empowered her, it really did" (Participants SA).

Another organisation said securing a house with the support of HFP helps empower clients and gives them confidence to move forward. They also spoke about the noticeable changes in one client after being supported into secure housing by the HFP.

> "She seems so happy and it's still, the experience of DFV is ongoing, so there's a lot of stress around that still. But this one barrier was removed, and they could be in a home that's safe and no one else could come to in the middle of the night. … This sense of possibility, it opens up possibilities and it brought a lot of hope to this particular client, which was really nice to also observe." (Participants SB)

Securing safe housing separate to the house once shared with the person using violence was noteworthy. For instance, one woman was receiving threats from their former partner that he would sell the house, then HFP came on board and helped "her find a place was really what helped her turn a corner" (Participants SB). One participant shared,

> "The turnaround that happens when a client moves out of that property into a new one where they can restart something, the environment is completely different, is quite significant in helping the client move forward. … Everything starts moving forward, property settlement happening, they can start, they may not have the opportunity to apply for child support until they move out to, due to the fact that there may be retaliation, all that sort of stuff." (Participants SB)

Many organisations expressed that without HFP, their clients might not have secured a house and may be homeless, especially given the current housing crisis. One participant from an external organisation credited HFP for helping their clients secure housing so quickly. Similarly, a participant from another organisation stated that their clients' time in refuge was reduced due to HFP and how this was beneficial to client mental health. One participant from an external organisation stated that "if it wasn't for the HFP, the alternative is returning to a roof over their head with a dangerous person." (Participant SH).

Participants recognised that the financial support provided through the HFP affords clients the time for their Centrelink payments, including rent assistance, to be adjusted following the move and/or formal separation. One external organisation participant noted the financial support has been "very helpful for them to settle in and fall into the pattern of paying their rent on a regular basis" (Participants SB).

The care and support the HFP provides beyond securing housing were also discussed. One participant shared that the Housing Families Advocate has conducted multiple check-ins with one of their clients. Because of this care and support, "she doesn't feel alone. She doesn't feel like she's just been left to figure it out herself. She still has those touch points with Orana quite frequently, and I know they mean a lot to her" (Participant SH).

Feedback on how to improve and sustain HFP

Stakeholders were asked to provide feedback on how HFP could improve and better support women and children who have experienced DFV. Organisations shared that with the housing crisis, the cost of private rentals is unattainable for women whose sole income is Centrelink or for those who have no income because they cannot access Centrelink or because they do not have capacity to work due to parenting responsibilities, visa restrictions, etc. As a result of the systemic barriers, the HFP is unable to support women in these situations. Organisations recognised the need for income as free rental properties are unrealistic but noted if the HFP was awarded

further funding, women could receive greater financial support that would enable them to enter the private rental market.

Organisations also highlighted that there are women who may not be eligible for refuge due to the nature of the abuse, the age of their male children and there are circumstances where women may not want to move into refuge, all of the situations leave women and their children without safe accommodation if they do not have the income for private rentals. Another concern noted by stakeholders were women that were ineligible for support from the HFP because they were still living in the house with the person using violence. There was recognition that Orana House was trying to find ways to support these women when the HFP is currently not a viable option for them. It was suggested that Orana House continue to explore alternative housing options for women who do not fit the criterion of the HFP or DFV refuges while they look for housing in the private rental market.

Stakeholders also shared their insights on how to sustain the HFP. Funding was identified as obviously being essential to sustainability. As one stakeholder clearly articulated, “any suggestions would only ever be possible with more funding” (Participant SH). It was also emphasised that funding was needed to continue offering financial support to clients during their re-establishment. One stakeholder suggested that the Program be marketed more amongst the philanthropic community to garner their support for HFP and women and children who have experienced DFV. Stakeholders also viewed continuing positive relationships with real estate agents as necessary to sustaining the HFP.

Funding for the HFP staffing was stressed as critical to its sustainability. One stakeholder expressed the importance of needing additional staff to share the caseloads. Participants from collaborating organisations also spoke about staff being DFV informed, who understand the experiences and impacts of DFV and are aware of how women and children may present and respond in the short and longer term. Additionally, they discussed the importance of HFP staff communicating clients’ needs and experiences to real estate agents and property owners with sensitivity, without careful communication agents and owners might be likely to decline the women’s application.

WOMEN HOUSED THROUGH THE HFP

The women housed through the HFP had a diverse range of experiences prior to receiving support from HFP. Their referral pathways to the HFP varied, and as described in the earlier sections of the report women had varied cultural and family backgrounds.

Some women accessing HFP had been persistently trying to secure rentals in the private rental market on their own without success. Some spoke about going to home opens with more than fifty people attending and feeling daunted and stressed knowing they would be unlikely to be selected as tenants. One woman who could not find a

rental in the private market after searching for 12 months describes the impact, “going to the inspection, you see a lot of people and then all suddenly your confidence just disappears straight away. There’s no way I'm going to compete with these people. Just turn back.” (Participant U). Another woman who had applied for over seventy rental properties was feeling “hopeless” when she was referred to the HFP who supported her in the search and with the application process (Participant F).

One woman recognised that before she was referred to the HFP how distressed she had been about her housing. She had been a SWitCH client and contacted the SWitCH Centre in tears needing housing support since her current rental lease was not being renewed and the fierce competition in the rental market she would have to face. The woman described feeling reassured knowing the Housing Families Advocate was helping her. The support from HFP provided clients with hope, relief and reassurance after such experiences.

Support received in searching for a rental property

In the interviews, the HFP clients talked about how the Housing Families Advocates helped them to find a rental property that met their needs and the needs of their children. For instance, many women with school aged children wanted to remain in the same catchment area so their children did not have to move schools. The Housing Families Advocates helped them to set up apps designed for finding available rentals and attended home opens with them, when possible. One woman said that the Housing Families Advocates assured her at the home open that although there was a lot of people attending, “We help you. Don't worry.” (Participant M).

One woman shared that the Housing Families Advocate liaised with the property owners and real estate agents and knew about rentals that were listed on the normal sites, adding that “she helped me get into where I am” (Participant J). Another woman commented on the relationship HFP has with real estate agents and property owners, saying “it's just connection between the people like me, the tenants, and the people who own the house” (Participant T). She added how this saves her time explaining to owners and real estate agents what has happened in her life, which she really appreciated. For a victim-survivor to not have to re-tell their experience in a setting which may be judgemental, or hostile is extremely beneficial, as there are power dynamics in play in relation to whether a woman is going to be housed.

HFP clients spoke about being supported by the Housing Families Advocate to complete the documentation for the application, including cover letters, and provide letters of support. One woman shared her experiences with the Housing Families Advocate.

> “She spent time with me… just feel very appreciate. She was very patient with me because the second language as well is English. I'm not very good with reading or

typing. She support me a lot on that, to fill the form and get the document ready" (Participant T).

When rental properties were presented to HFP clients, they were assured by the Housing Families Advocate that they would be supported in their choices. Women expressed they felt no pressure to accept the rental properties and declined properties that were offered to them if it did not suit their needs. This act of declining rental properties demonstrates the non-judgmental support and safe environment created by the Housing Families Advocate.

The support of the HFP also facilitated an environment where women felt listened to and talked openly with their Housing Families Advocate. One woman shared that "many time I cry with [the Housing Families Advocate] ... and she support myself as well" and provide encouraging words (Participant M). Other women described their Housing Families Advocate as "supportive and caring" (Participant K) and "so respectful and honest and reliable" (Participant F). Another woman who received support from Orana House refuge, the HFP and SWitCH Centre reflected on her positive experiences, "it's so good, you have someone that you can talk [with]", adding that the workers respect what her choices and stating "that's why I found everyone is so helpful since day one that I came here" (Participant B). The support offered by the HFP reflects key aspects of trauma- and violence-informed care, such as creating safe and non-judgmental environment, providing opportunities for choice, actively listening and understanding the impacts of DFV (Wathen & Varcoe, 2019).

Support received after securing a rental

Many women commented that the Housing Families continued to check in to see how they were settling into the rental property and if they need additional support. For some women this involves financial support, such as assisting with the bond and providing rent subsidies and top-ups. One woman shared that when Centrelink temporarily stopped her payments, HFP paid for two weeks of her rent (Participant M).

If needed, the HFP supports clients by assisting with moving, sourcing furniture and appliances, and providing security cameras at no cost to the client. Shortly after moving into the rental, one woman contacted the Housing Families Advocate with a maintenance issue, who later relayed the issue to the property manager, which demonstrates the safety and trust in the Housing Families Advocate.

Benefits of securing a rental after escaping DFV

The women who were housed through the HFP and interviewed were asked to share how HFP has impacted them. Many women shared that they and their children are now happy. One woman said, "I'm now more safe and I'm happy, the kids happy" (Participant M). One woman had her child's therapists notice that her child was happier after just

weeks of moving into their new place, saying to the mum “wow, look at her, she's so happy. She's showing [us] the house” (Participant V). The mum attributed the change in her child’s disposition to her feeling safer and having stressors lowered, contributing to this is that they now live in a quieter area.

One woman reflected that “I totally feel a different person. I can sleep. Before I could not even sleep or eat, just terrible, terrible feeling. But nowadays I can put my head down pillow and then I can finally sleep” (Participant T). One woman expressed that she now felt strong and talked about being able to provide a roof for her family, provide for school, put food on the table (Participant K). Another woman shared “I can feel so stable because I got the place to settle down with my kids if even for just one year” (Participant F).

Lease periods

Some women expressed concern and fear when thinking about the end of lease, which is one year, and when the financial supports stop. It is unlikely that the HFP clients interviewed would be able to sustain rent at the competitive market rate. If they were employed, it was only part-time and not in high paying positions. One woman shared that the HFP would be improved if the financial support could be extended. One woman who was only a couple months into her lease agreement disclosed it “scares me though that it’s only a year. Yeah, I was like probably love this house and I don't want to have to move” (Participant V). These comments from women show how negatively impacted they are without access to affordable and secure rental properties. A situation where HFP can provide an important buffer in a situation where rental market demand is greater than supply and the costs continue to increase.

Summary & Recommendations

These findings show the unjust trade-off women have to confront if trying to escape DFV, where the system of responses is still oriented to her leaving and confronting the ongoing risk of homelessness for her and her children. The scarcity and unaffordability of housing in WA was highlighted in Anglicare’s 2025 Annual Rental Affordability Snapshot which shows none of the private rental properties advertised were affordable to people relying on income support or earning minimum wages. WA’s median rent in 2025 was $680 per week, five per cent higher than 2024 and 21 per cent higher than 2023. Anglicare define affordable housing as being less than 30 per cent of a household's income.

This shows that the social and economic policy approaches of governments have not prioritised affordable housing for families, either through housing policy or DFV policy. Therefore, women must rely heavily on the private rental market to live safely away from DFV and coercive control. Evidence shows that most women are financially disadvantaged after separation, but this is even worse for women experiencing DFV who

may have been subjected to financial abuse and not been able to have regular paid employment or leave with their share of household and other items. The Housing Families Program stands out as an example of necessity being the mother of invention by developing and refining a highly innovative program for women and their children which works alongside property managers and owners to support women and buffer them being subjected to the brutality of the current demand for private rental housing. As has been noted the HFP is not intended to be a universal response to all clients, however, for those who are able to participate, HFP has made a considerable difference to their lives.

The HFP addresses a key gap in the support for women and children trying to live safely in a secure environment where they can recover and re-establish their lives. The innovation of HFP and its flexibility to respond to varying and diverse re-establishment needs of women and children is highly valuable and can prevent families feeling 'forced' to return to the family home where the violent party resides. In this way HFP interrupts women being subjected to further violence in the home and works with them to mitigate the tactics of post separation violence and abuse which occur in DFV when women leave.

With the current level of funding, the HFP does not have capacity to meet the demands, there are both more women and children needing support into private rental housing and current clients need ongoing support once housed. Program expansion would help meet demand; however, the HFP has a range of interdependent components and relies on the availability and suitability of the wrap around services which includes the real estate agents, supportive landlords and the SWitCH Centre.

HFP operates on a very small amount of staffing (2 part-time staff equating to 1.1 FTE) to undertake a wide range of tasks from developing and expanding the program, working closely with stakeholders, directly supporting women from seeking accommodation to settling in. Women's circumstances and needs vary, and it is notable that HFP staff provide survivor centred specific responses to the women. Whilst many programs offer a standardised set of responses, HFP wraps around the varying and multiple needs of women to promote long term outcomes and wellbeing for families. This longer view with HFP's extensive connections to other services provides a strong wraparound service to optimise outcomes. This can also offer assurance to property managers and owners that women are getting supported to maintain their tenancies where needed. This was achieved with the HFP because staff were committed, strategic and skilled in bringing together the range of stakeholders and demonstrating to property managers and landlords the considerable benefit that if offered to families. Whilst at the same time they were also supporting women at various stages accessing the HFP.

The views of women who participated in the evaluation demonstrate the difference this supported transition to access private rental housing has made to their lives in relation to not being subjected to large numbers of application rejections where they may return to the family home with the abuser, instead gaining safety and security from knowing they will not be homeless. The evidence from women suggests that it is the combination

of the support into housing and the ongoing opportunity to access support to establish their lives again post DFV which makes HFP unique and successful.

Orana's careful development of the HFP, including being flexible to adjust the program as needed, has led to an original program which takes account of the current realities of housing for women and their children, draws on their in-depth knowledge of women escaping DFV in the program approach and recognises the important difference which ongoing support can make to longer term recovery outcomes. The stability provided and quality of housing is greatly appreciated by women and it is unlikely this could be achieved for families without the Housing Families Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRAM MODEL

It is recommended that:

1. HFP's innovative approach engaging multiple stakeholders be continued.
2. Working with the collaborating real estate companies and property owners to identify ways to extend the reach of the program and what could incentivise greater participation from real estate companies, and this be prioritised in the next stages of the HFP to understand the level of expansion that is viable.
3. The DFV training for real estate agents be continued, particularly as the program expands and new agents become involved in the HFP, to ensure they are equipped with an understanding of DFV and able to respond safely to women and children with experiences of DFV. The DFV training should also be offered to property owners involved in the HFP.
4. The HFP Program Model with its continuum of responses from support with the application process, where needed, through to re-establishment be maintained and if possible expanded as this is key to achieving the positive outcomes for women and children.
5. Funding be secured so the HFP can continue to assist women with the costs of moving and other unexpected costs without the HFP relying on philanthropic funds. Obtaining philanthropic funds often takes HFP staff away from their primary role as Advocates.
6. The subsidised rent and other mechanisms that increase the affordability and accessibility of rental properties for women re-establishing after DFV is continued, extended and secured. Whilst recognising limitations of HFP, it offers families an option of safe and secure housing that would not otherwise be available.

7. Consideration be given to extend the period of affordable rental costs such as subsidised rent for longer periods because the post-separation recovery and re-establishment process can take years due to disruptions to employment, poor health, care responsibilities, engaging in protracted legal situations. This is particularly critical at this time with the current cost of accommodation and living more generally.

STAFFING

It is recommended that:

8. Staffing levels for the HFP are prioritised with further funding to optimise the capacity of the program and to support current demands. An additional 2.0 FTE could double the program's current capacity.
9. Orana continue its practice of HFP staff being experienced in domestic and family violence work and survivor centred practice to ensure quality of practice, program integrity and outcomes.

INCREASING THE AVAILABLE HOUSING FOR THE HOUSING FAMILIES PROGRAM

As the HFP is reliant on a supply of affordable, secure and suitable housing, there were recommendations about how to increase the supply. It is recommended that:

10. There continues to be awareness raising with property managers to discuss with potential investors about HFP and offer them the options to discount the rent for HFP clients

11. Orana and HFP stakeholders consider further strategies to engage real estate agents and potential landlords in ways which will maintain their involvement.

IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF DFV ACROSS THE PRIVATE RENTAL SECTOR

As noted within the recommendations of the program model, DFV training should be continued. However, it is vital for all real estate agents, property managers and property owners in the private rental sector to have an understanding of DFV, regardless of their involvement in HFP. As the original research conducted by Orana House (2022) identified, women who have escaped DFV face discrimination in the private rental market. Therefore, it is recommended that:

12. DFV training be delivered to all involved in the private rental sector to reduce the discrimination experienced by victim-survivors of DFV.

WIDER POLICY CHANGE

Whilst not specifically within the requirements of the evaluation, in several interviews stakeholders suggested wider policy changes which could provide incentives to increase the housing available to the HFP. These have been included as they show the commitment by stakeholders to the program and could be useful for future advocacy.

It was recommended that:

13. An approach similar to the WA Government's Vacant Property Rental Incentive Scheme and Short-Term Rental Accommodation Incentive Scheme be extended to residential property owners who transfer their property to the Housing Families Program, with licensed real estate agents involved with the program submitting applications on behalf of owners. These two schemes offer financial payment to property owners of vacant residential properties or short-term rental accommodation to transfer their property to the long-term rental market. If this approach is extended to include residential property owners transferring their property to the HFP, the financial incentive would offset the cost of renting their property below the market rate.
    - https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-energy-mines-industry-regulation-and-safety/vacant-property-rental-incentive-scheme
    - https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-energy-mines-industry-regulation-and-safety/short-term-rental-accommodation-incentive-scheme
14. The Western Australian Government give consideration to other state-based incentives for property owners to participate in affordable housing such as HFP.

References

Anglicare WA. (2025). *Rental affordability snapshot 2025*. https://www.anglicare.asn.au/research-advocacy/rental-affordability/

https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/news/2024/05/09/2024-rental-affordability-snapshot#:~:text=There%20were%202%2C989%20available%20private,in%20March%202020%20(7%2C256).

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2002). *Australia's children: Overcrowding*. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/housing/overcrowding

Orana House. (2022). *Housing families report 2022*. https://orana.net.au/housing-families/

REIWA. (2025). *reiwa.com rental vacancy rates*. https://reiwa.com.au/the-wa-market/rental-vacancy-rates/

REIWA. (2025, March 30). *Perth market insights: Rentals*. https://reiwa.com.au/the-wa-market/perth-metro/

Services Australia. (2025, March 20). *How much you can get*. https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/how-much-parenting-payment-you-can-get?context=22196

Wathen, C.N. & Varcoe, C. (2019). *Trauma- and violence-informed care: Prioritizing safety for survivors of gender-based violence*. https://gtvincubator.uwo.ca/resources/