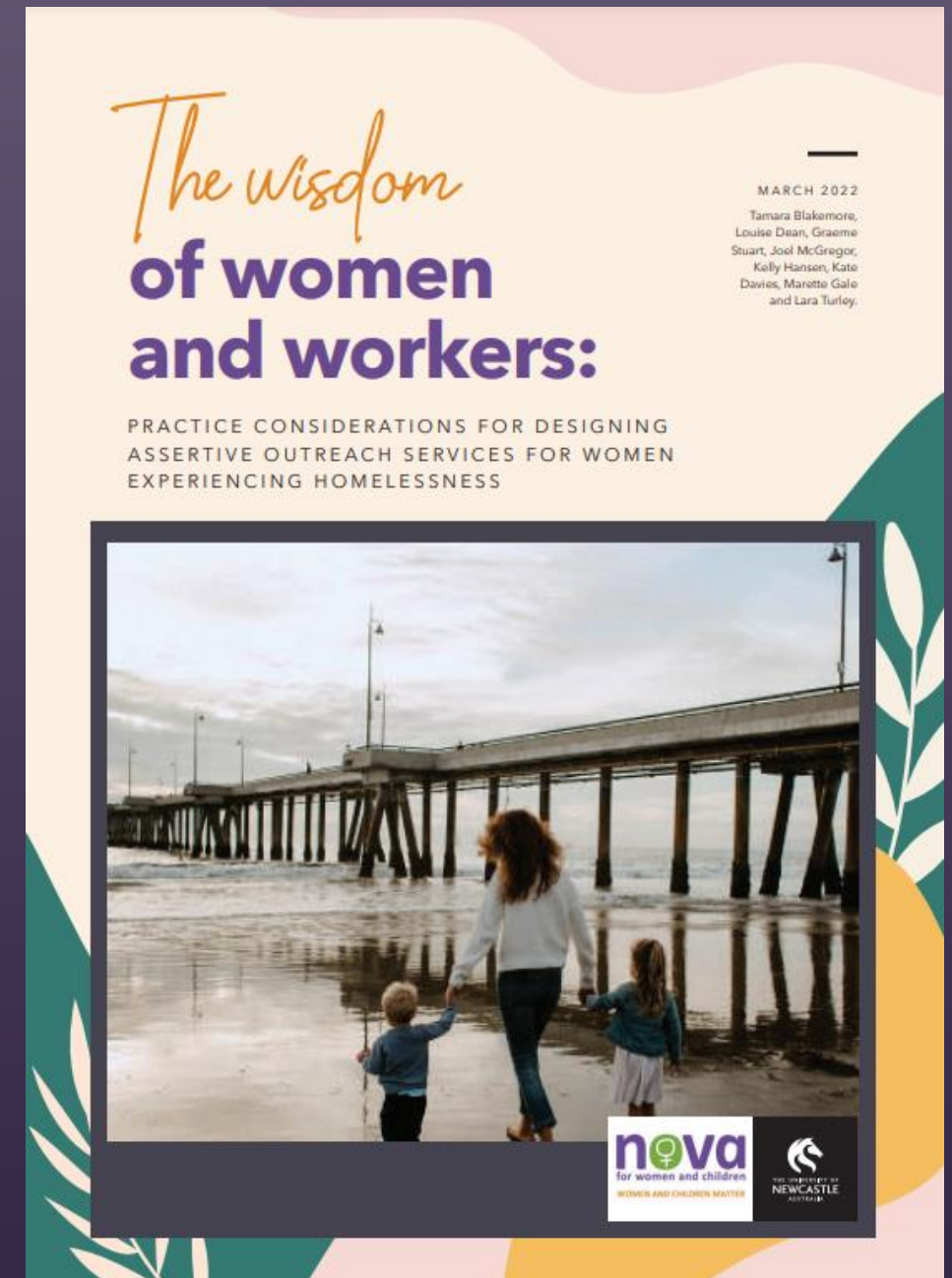


CONCURRENT SESSION

C11 Women experiencing homelessness



WOMEN AND CHILDREN MATTER



The Wisdom of Women and Workers: Practice considerations for designing assertive outreach services for women experiencing homelessness.

Blakemore, T., Dean, L., Stuart, G., McGregor, J., Hansen, K., Davies, K., Gale, M., & Turley, L. (2022). *The wisdom of women and workers: Practice considerations for designing assertive outreach services for women experiencing homelessness*. University of Newcastle. ISBN: 978-0-7259- 0186-8

The Research Team

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The Research Reference Group

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Background

- Assertive Outreach (AO) Models have been mainly targeted at male rough sleepers
- Women's experience of cyclic or chronic homelessness differed from men and was not captured by the established AO models
- Lack of research on women and their experiences and journeys out of homelessness
- Therefore, models have been gender-biased and not appropriate for women

Research Focus

- Research project was a partnership with a team of academics from the University of Newcastle and Nova for Women and Children
- The focus was upon women's experience of homelessness and services that provide services
- The research comprised of Rapid Literature Review and the following;
 1. One on one interviews with women who have experienced chronic or cyclic homelessness
 2. One on one interviews with practitioners
 3. Focus groups of practitioners from various Newcastle and Lake Macquarie homelessness services

Some Disclaimers

- The research is qualitative and the report is by no means an exhaustive representation.
- This report is meant to be a part of the conversation on homelessness, women's experiences and potential models
- Shelter is a Human Right
- Housing First is the best approach to homelessness
- However, that is not the reality of our sector with the current housing crisis.

Language

- We reflected on how the term 'Assertive Outreach' potentially minimised the structural role in women's pathways into homelessness
- And how the term sat at odds with the idea of 'meeting someone where they are at'.
- Nova proposes that working with women experiencing chronic and/or cyclic homelessness is delivered through a 'Targeted Engagement Activity Model' (TEA)

Targeted Engagement Activity

MODEL 1:

A discrete service offer provided by a small team of NOVA staff, delivered at locations women who have complex needs and who experience chronic and/ or cyclic homelessness might spend time. Model 1 would assist with meeting practical needs, linking to services and supports to either get housed or 'get ready' to be housed.



Targeted Engagement Activity

MODEL 2:

Extends the service described by Model 1 to include multi-disciplinary providers and peer workers in the delivery of regular, supportive outreach at multiple access points. It would have greater capacity to offer multi-targeted supports for more women, addressing practical need, and coordinated support through a shared pathway toward housing.



Targeted Engagement Activity

MODEL 3:

Furthers the reach of Model 2, by co-locating multi-disciplinary providers and peer workers to provide intensive, wrap-round supports with linked outreach and in-house service provision. Model 3 extends service provision to the maintenance of housing tenure through supportive case management and 'upstream' policy response through advocacy and a dedicated research and practice advisory role.



How does women's
experiences of homelessness
differ from men's experience
of homelessness?

- Women reported significant shame about being homeless
- They tended not to tell family and friends
- Women will sometimes have their children with them
- They were particularly concerned about personal care and hygiene
- Safety was a major issue for women, and they tended to be less visible

Women we spoke to reported high levels of complex trauma and cyclic experiences of homelessness over their lifetimes

It is important to develop innovative and targeted models that are trauma informed and sensitive to the gender-specific needs and experiences of this cohort

So how do we ensure best practice?

We need models that

- Ensure women and children's safety will be supported, wherever they are at
- Women and children will have improved access and connection to services, community groups and family/friends for well being
- Ensure that women and children be supported in their journey toward safe, sustainable housing

Practice Principles

- Safety
- Connection
- Recovery
- Commitment
- Consistency
- Flexibility



Details of the three Targeted Engagement Models are in the Report. That includes what will be delivered and by whom.

The practice principles are also outlined in depth in the report and emphasise the key points (ethos and evidence) and putting this into practice. You can access the full report on Nova's website.

https://www.novawomen.org.au/get_involved.html

You can read about the report in the Parity Journal article - *Reaching Out and Connecting with Women Where They're At: Exploring a Gendered Model of Assertive Outreach* – pg. 44

<https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Parity-Vol35-01-March-2022.pdf>

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE07: *“Yeah. I found myself homeless when my children were removed. I experienced domestic violence, I was in a relationship for 14 years, and I guess towards the end of that relationship DOCS [Department of Community Services] weren’t very — they sort of removed the children due to domestic violence and sort of left me with him. So, I was left pregnant with the perpetrator and the children were removed, and then I was pregnant, so my daughter was removed from me in the hospital”.*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE04: *“I remember this place in Brisbane. I don’t know what it was called but it was only for women because there were so many men’s stuff around. It was only for women that you could go there at seven o’clock in the morning, you could do your washing, you could have a shower, you could fall asleep on a clean bed there. There was no judgement about it, you know. Just that, even if it was only one day a week, it felt better to walk out of there having fresh clothes”.*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE04: *“I guess people have to feel safe within themselves. Until you feel safe within yourself, then you are not ever going to trust someone enough to feel safe in their presence”.*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE09: *“[I would sleep on the beach and I used to sleep where — you know, Salvation Army Hamilton and that. Where there’s cameras, I used to congregate. Where I knew there was cameras.... Where there were lights”.*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE09: *“Even when I slept in the refuge here, I had to put [my dog] into the RSPCA for a while, didn’t I? Which was pretty hard on me. It was pretty hard having to leave her in there for — it was only a few weeks, but it was pretty hard”.*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE02: *“I think the worst part for me ever living on the streets was the hygiene. Hygiene. Like, I could go anywhere and get a feed, walk into all, these take something, walk out. But there weren’t many places where you could walk in and have a shower and not...be judged because you fucking stink. Like, honestly.”*

Quotes from women with a lived experience of homelessness

WLE07: *“I found that I was using speed on the streets to keep myself safe, because I didn’t want to sleep in particular people’s company because then they would assault me while I was asleep”*

Quotes from Practitioners

P10: *“What I do know is what hasn’t worked for women when they’ve been homeless. So, for an example they’d found that I’d been working with this lady and she was homeless, and they said how, ‘We can’t get her to engage.’ I said, ‘Well, who is going there?’ ‘We always go in pairs, there’s always a male and a female.’ I said, ‘Do yourself a favour and get rid of the male. That’s what is going to help that woman engage. She has no trust in men, full stop, so she’s not going to talk to you if there’s a fella standing there”.*

Quotes from Practitioners

P08: *“I know that even just not having enough sleep for myself, I don’t function. So I couldn’t imagine sleeping out not anywhere comfortable, depending on where it is and not having enough sleep and you start to feel like you’re going a bit crazy even if nothing was actually impacting you. So I think if you had strangers coming up to you, you wouldn’t know whether you could trust them or not so it would be hard”.*

Quote from the Focus Group

FG2.2: *“it’s really about having a skilled workforce that can engage people respectfully in those environments, that coax people into understanding that they may need support. How do we do that in a way that’s not ramming into them that we’re here to save your lives”.*

Quote from the Focus Group

FG3.2: *“I’ve had a lot of women won’t stay in the same place for very long, particularly if they are sleeping rough in the sense that they’re in cars or in car parks, underground car parks of secure buildings and things like that. They don’t stay put for very long because of the safety risks there”.*

WLE04:

“Do you know what?

*You know they say a gateway drug,
gateway drug – do you know what it boils down to?*

*The trauma and the childhood dramas,
traumatisation of what someone’s been through”.*

Researcher: *“Trauma’s the gateway”?*

WLE04: *“It is, it is”.*

WLE04: *“Feeling like you’re constantly getting pushed into a corner where you have no other choice but to use drugs and alcohol to make you feel alert and awake because you have nowhere to sleep at night”.*

Thank you

Kelly Hansen
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Nova for Women and Children