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North West Children's Resource Program Homeless Children's Brokerage Support Project

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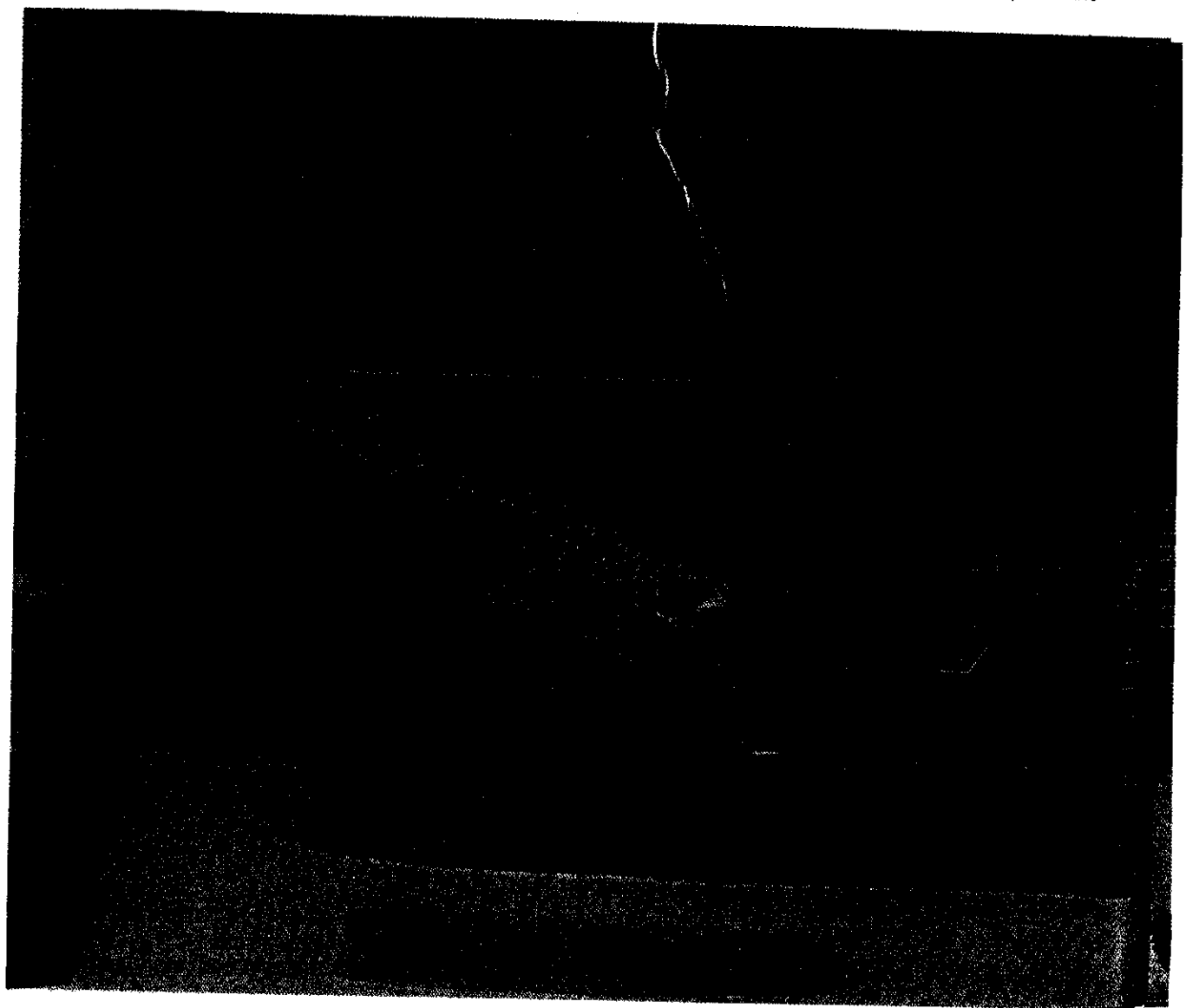
In 2001, the Victorian State Government funded Regional Children's Resource Coordinators in every region. As a state-wide group the programs share the core functions of providing support, resources, secondary consultation and brokerage support to the homelessness and family violence support sector with the aim of building capacity and improving outcomes for children in homeless families. The children's resource coordinators have developed models to meet specific needs of the region they are working in.

The North West Regional Children's Resource Program (NWRCRP) is a homelessness support funded program which supports and resources service providers in the North West Region who are working with children who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence.

Our program is managed by Merri Outreach Support Service a not for profit community organisation providing support to homeless men, women and children. NWRCRP supports homelessness and family violence services by disseminating information on children's issues, maintaining the homeless kids count website, providing a specialist secondary consultation service around

children's needs who have experienced homelessness, providing advocacy, policy development support, facilitating community development/group work programs and writing research.

The experience of homelessness and/or family violence can have a significant impact on a child's education; their physical, emotional and mental health; and their sense of connectedness to their peers and the broader community. Children's issues can be compounded by a lack of access to education, health, and support, social and recreational opportunities within the community. *Children who experience homelessness often don't feel part of the*



school community, fell behind in their work, and became disaffected with the pursuit of education. Children may want to establish themselves in school as part of a secure life (Does Camping Count, Children's Experience of Homelessness, p.51 September 2009).

The Victorian State Government and Department of Human Services recognise the importance of improving support provided to children. This is evident in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the Rooming House Standards Taskforce funded programs that have rolled out in the past 12 months including:

- Specialist children's support services
- Brokerage support project
- Support for families at risk
- Accommodation for families program
- Additional support for families program

The State-wide network of children's coordinators have consistently advocated to the department of human services the importance of education for children, and the impact of being homeless and/or experiencing family violence has, not only on their level of attendance at school but also financially, emotionally, socially and academically.

Because school is such a dominant part of a child's life the ramifications of homelessness can coalesce around school, which can represent as exclusion, isolation, and failure. Some parents are able to maintain a commitment to their children's education despite their difficult circumstances; while others are overwhelmed by the struggles of daily life

(Does Camping Count, Children's Experience of Homelessness, p.49 September 2009).

Brokerage Project

In 2010 the Victorian Department of Human Services provided \$20,000 of brokerage funds to each children's resource program across the state through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The homeless children's brokerage support project has been established to enhance opportunities for children experiencing homelessness and/or family violence to:

- Engage and maintain their education (including early education services such as childcare and kindergarten).
- Reduce social isolation by enhancing access to a range

- of support, social and recreational opportunities within their community.
- Provide social and emotional growth opportunities for children and provide opportunities to increase relational bonds between parents/caregivers and children.

The Homeless Children's Brokerage Support Project also aims to provide further encouragement to homelessness and family violence support providers to integrate child and family centred assessment and case planning into their work practice.

This resource is available to homelessness and family violence services across the state. You can also visit the North West Children's Resource Program website for the brokerage guidelines and application form on www.homelesskidscount.org.

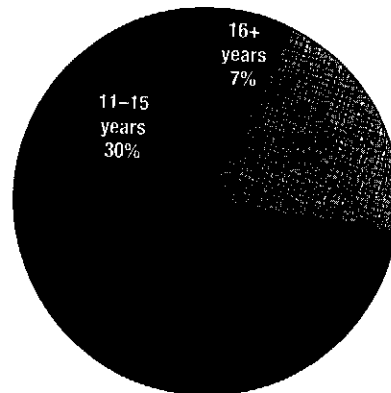
Statistics from the NWRCRP Brokerage Support Program

The NWRCRP has received a lot of interest for the brokerage support program. The majority of requests have been related to assisting with the costs of education.

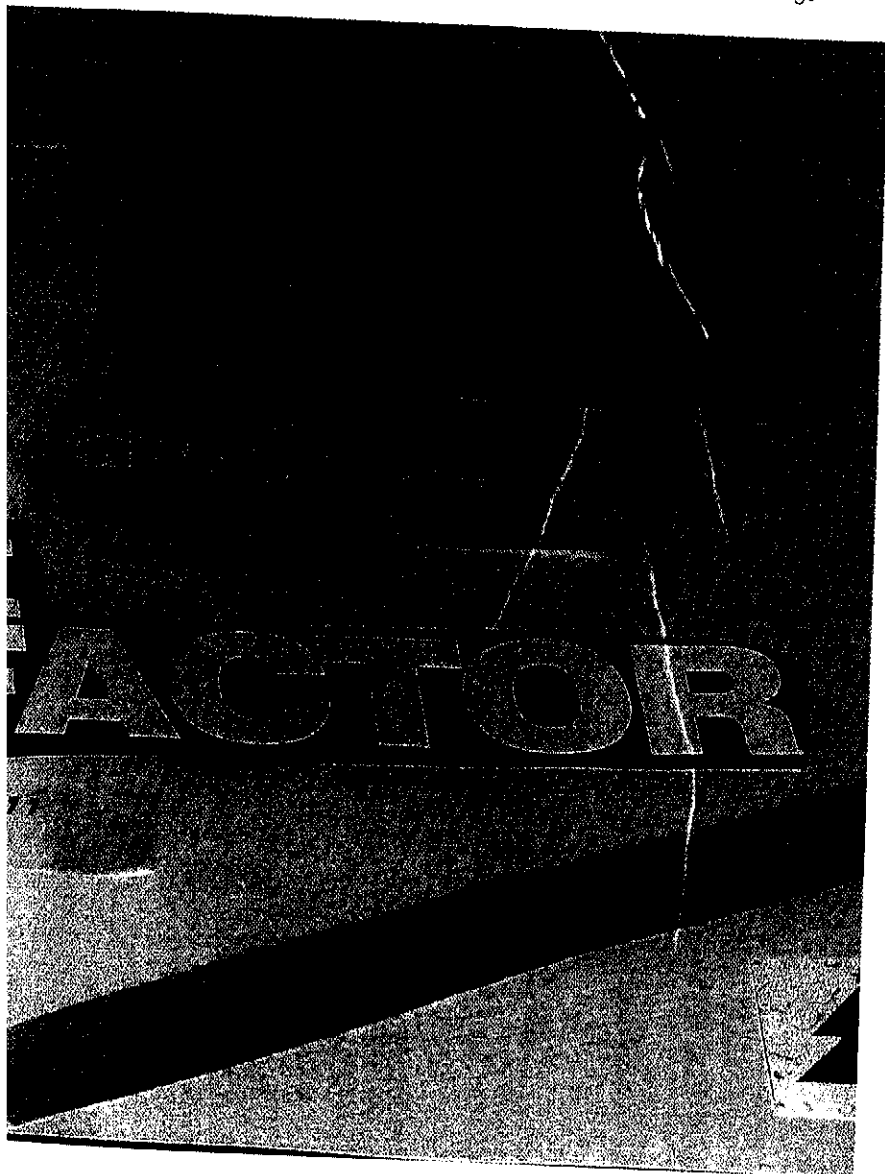
This project has attached to it reporting requirements to DHS which enable an opportunity to not only demonstrate the need but also the demand to continue funding the brokerage support project. The following data has been collated from the NWRCRP brokerage database. As the data highlights, children and families accessing homelessness support and family violence services struggle to meet the costs of education and are at risk of missing out on activities and benefits a stable educational environment provides. (In this edition of *Parity*, the article "Homeless Children's Experience of Education" explores this further).

The North West Children's Resource Program provided support to 95 applications from January to December 2010.

Age

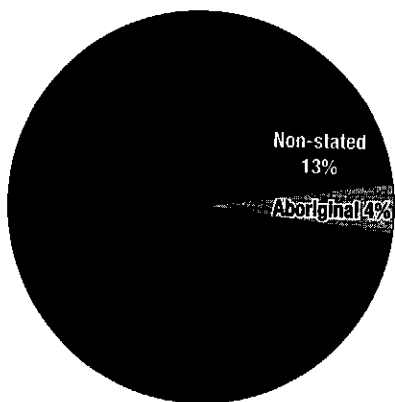


The pie chart above shows children in six- to ten-year-old primary school age (43 per cent) and children in eleven- to fifteen-year-old secondary school (30 per cent) have made up the vast majority of applications.





Indigenous status



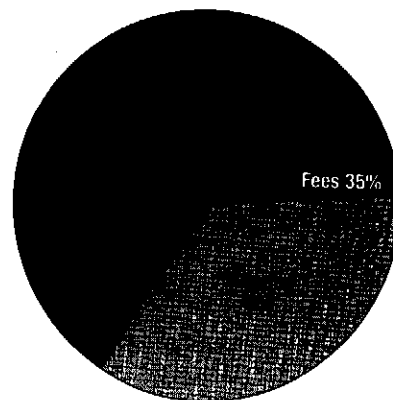
The pie chart above shows there were 83 per cent not Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander (this will include the CALD and Anglo Saxon). Four per cent of applications were received for Aboriginal children.

Brokerage support type



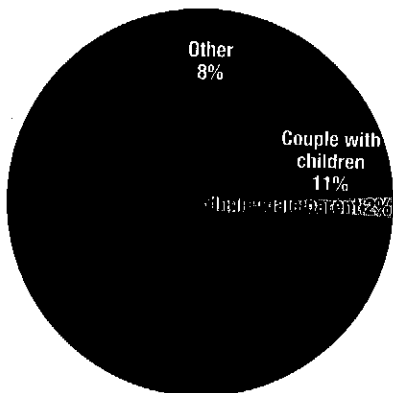
The pie chart above shows the most assistance provided was around education (57 per cent) and community/culture/family (31 per cent), this includes recreational activities.

Type of education expenditure



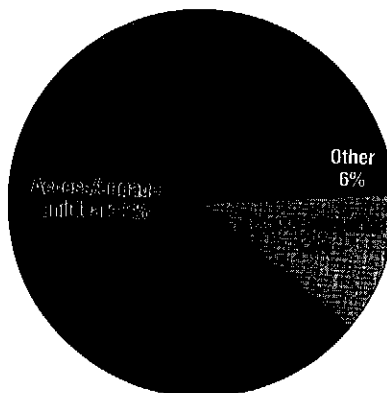
The pie chart above shows that the majority of support had been provided for camps and excursions (59 per cent) and for school fees (35 per cent). ■

Family type



The pie chart above shows that majority of applications were received from children living with a single female parent (71 per cent) followed by children living in a family with two parents (11 per cent).

Main need



The pie chart above shows that the main need for brokerage has been to engage in education (42 per cent) and to access and engage in community activities and recreation (38 per cent).

Please contact your regional children's resource coordinator for more information and support:

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