Case Study for Sector-wide Outcomes Measurement Framework: How Justice Connect Homeless Law measures prevention of homelessness

Justice Connect Homeless Law is a specialist service for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In about 2012, they made a decision to increase their level of support to tenants who were at risk of slipping into homelessness as a result of eviction. Having decided to focus on this client group, they wanted to understand more about the extent to which their service generated better legal and non-legal outcomes for them.

Homeless Law particularly wanted to understand whether their service delivery model, which combines in-house lawyers with pro bono legal representation and social work support, was effectively preventing eviction into homelessness for the clients they were representing. They hoped that if they found they were having a significant positive impact, it would help them to articulate the benefits of integrated legal representation in sustaining tenancies and preventing homelessness.

Indicators Justice Connect Homeless Law developed to measure preventing eviction into homelessness

Homeless Law decided to start by focussing on tenancy matters where they prevented eviction into homelessness. They knew that the clients coming to them were facing eviction and, based on income, other vulnerabilities and the housing market, were facing homelessness as a result, so collecting and analysing data on the extent to which they had prevented eviction into homelessness provided a clear and straightforward measure of their effectiveness.

Justice Connect Homeless Law indicator	Comparable indicator from Sector-wide Outcomes Measurement Framework
Number of evictions into homelessness avoided.	**1.4c More secure housing** % of service users with relevant matters who achieve more secure housing through assistance from a CLC

To be able to effectively measure this indicator, Homeless Law needed to further define what 'number of evictions into homelessness avoided' meant in the context of their practice. The table below shows what they decided was, and was not, included for this indicator.

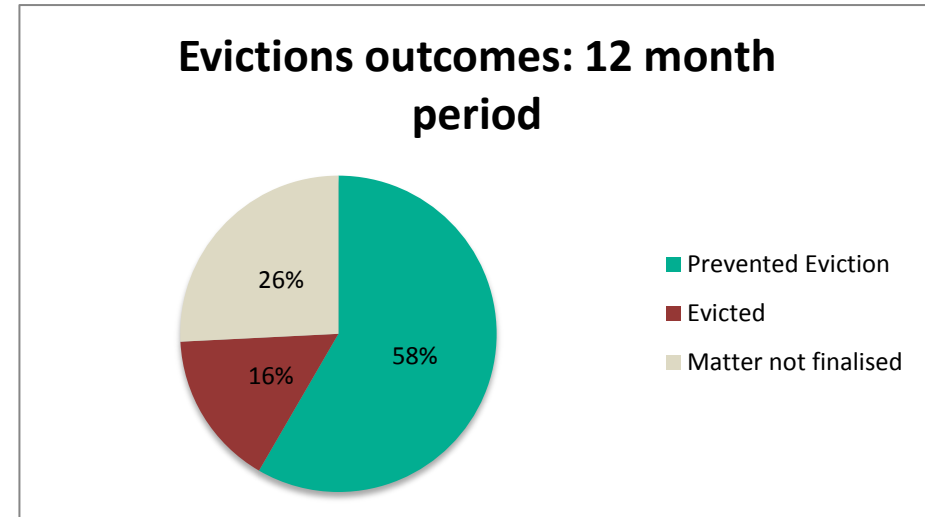| Number of evictions into homelessness avoided	
Includes	**Does not Include**
√ EVICTION CLEARLY PREVENTED	**X MORE TIME WAS OBTAINED BUT ALTERNATIVE HOUSING NOT SECURED**
• Successful outcome at VCAT, NTV withdrawn, or a landlord agreed not to execute warrant	• Did not include where clients were helped, but homelessness was not prevented
√ TENANCY ENDED BUT EVICTION INTO HOMELESSNESS WAS AVOIDED	**X CLIENT RELINQUISHED TENANCY**
• Avoided homelessness through either securing more time or postponing the warrant and alternative housing secured	• This might be due to incarceration or tenants wanting to avoid a ban
√ CLIENT LEFT OF THEIR OWN ACCORD AFTER RECEIVING ASSISTANCE AND SECURING ANOTHER PROPERTY	
• Client moving into other housing, and had attended a clinic and received advice and advocacy	

How Justice Connect Homeless Law collected data for the identified indicator

Homeless Law recorded each time they opened a file for a client facing eviction. They counted and kept track of the outcome of each relevant matter finalised in a 12-month period. The counting was manual and somewhat laborious, but they were able to develop a process for identifying relevant files and reviewing outcomes quarterly. This was supported by their online case management system, which allows reports to be run that identify files where clients were facing eviction, which is the starting point for analysing the outcome. Homeless Law also maintains separate spreadsheets for their targeted work with women and prisoners.

What Homeless Law found out from the data

At the end of the 12 months, Homeless Law reviewed the data from the 221 tenancy matters in which they had represented clients at risk of eviction into homeless. For the 167 matters that had finalised in that period, they found the following:

- Prevented eviction into homelessness for 129 clients/families
- 35 clients were evicted into homelessness

Evictions outcomes: 12 month period

26%

16%

58%

- Prevented Eviction
- Evicted
- Matter not finalised

What they did with the data

This data confirmed that their model of service delivery has a significant impact in preventing homelessness.

They used this data to support a proposal for the funding and creation of a new project: the Women's Homelessness Prevention Project (WHPP). This project replicates the successful model of service delivery through the creation of a program focused specifically on helping women and their children avoid homelessness. Women receive legal advice and ongoing representation as well as intensive assistance from a social worker to link them to a range of services.

The story goes on…

For Homeless Law, collecting and analysing data on the number of evictions avoided was the beginning of a journey in improving the monitoring and evaluation of their work. Since then, through their own ongoing data collection efforts and some expert external support, they have broadened the outcomes they collect data on. As an example, the infographic below shows the kinds of data they have been able to collect and report on for the WHPP project. It has taken time, resources and support for them to develop this expertise, but it all started with picking an area of interest, creating an indicator, collecting the data and using what it told them to inform their service delivery and create a new program.

justice connect
Homeless Law

The WHPP keeps women and children in housing through a combination of legal representation and social work support.

In its first two years...

The WHPP assisted

102
women with 157 children in their care.

90%
of clients report an experience of family violence in the past 10 years.

84%
of clients suffer from mental illness, with depression and anxiety being most common.

87%
of clients rely on Centrelink as their primary source of income.

51%
of clients live in private rental, 31% in public housing, and 17% in community/ transitional housing.

How the WHPP helped

83 per cent of finalised matters were successfully resolved.

62 women - many with children in their care - directly avoided eviction into homelessness.

21 women with 45 children in their care resolved debt or other barriers preventing their access to housing.

WHPP social worker made 113 referrals to non-legal services.

Benefits of the WHPP model

In a two year period, the WHPP has directly prevented the eviction of 62 women and their families into homelessness. Using research from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, this would mean a cost saving of $1,825,900 in health, justice and welfare costs.