

Integrated Family Housing

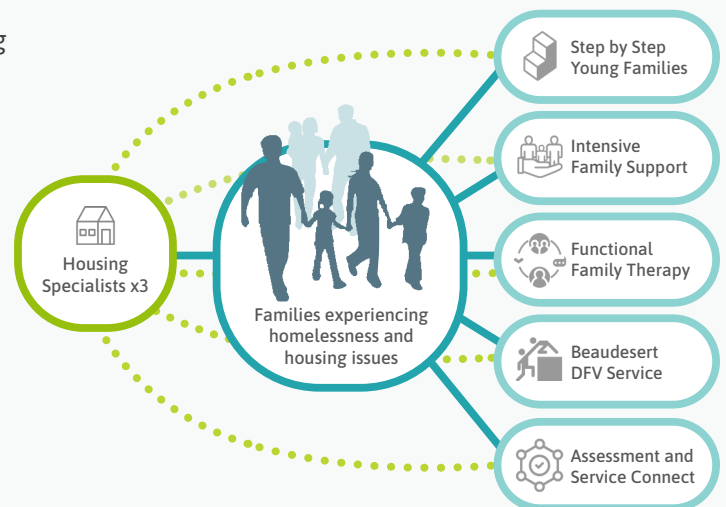
In October 2021, YFS introduced an Integrated Family Housing approach with funding from the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and Hand Heart Pocket, the charity of Freemasons Queensland.



This initiative enables us to embed three experienced Housing Specialists across five of YFS' family support and domestic violence teams.

Across these family programs, 45% of families are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Now, families linked with these teams can access expert help to stabilise their housing fast, while improving their safety and family functioning.

Integrated Family Housing builds on YFS' Thriving Families demonstration project and is part of a suite of service integration projects aimed at improving service access, efficiency and effectiveness.



Outcomes and achievements

Housing specialists and family support workers worked together to ensure that families received the right type and level of support at the right time.

89% of support periods ended with the family in secure housing, despite the difficult housing market.

Additional outcomes related to improved:



capacity and skills



safety



mental health.

Participants reported feeling less stressed and more supported.



Benefits of integrated approaches

Families and staff reported the integrated approach was more beneficial than receiving the same support from two different services, particularly:

Enhanced communication and collaboration:

participants highlighted streamlined communication, teamwork and problem solving resulting from the integrated approach, along with the benefits of having two workers with different expertise working together.

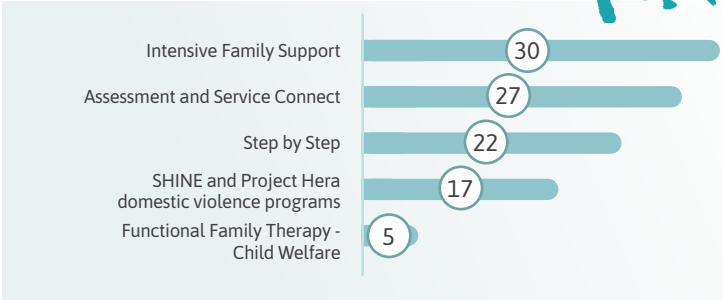
More holistic responses: having a specialist housing worker in the mix enabled family and domestic violence workers to focus on issues such as health and counselling. Positive housing outcomes helped secure engagement from parents to work on other issues – without secure housing it's hard to focus on underlying issues or longer-term goals.

Better faster outcomes: joint work led to achievement of housing goals, for example through more effective, timely information sharing than if workers were operating autonomously. Workers involved each other's expertise, particularly the skills and knowledge housing specialists bring.

In its first year, Integrated Family Housing worked with 101 people.

Who participated in Integrated Family Housing?

Participation across host programs in the first 12 months

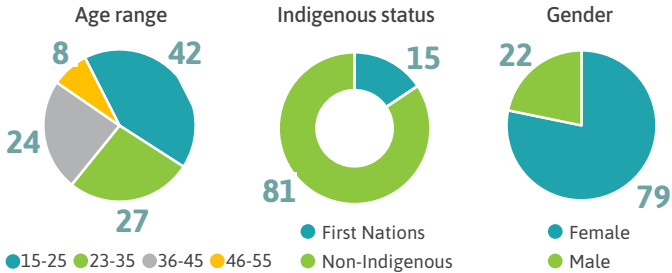


"Getting a place - that was my number one big thing otherwise I would have been homeless"

"we're in a better place now and they've shown me how to deal with stuff"

"I'm able to look at mental health now... my kids need a healthier mum".

"They help me every step of the way"



What we have learned from working together in integrated teams

YFS undertook an evaluation of the first year of implementation to review progress and identify opportunities for improvement. This integration effort was ambitious in that it places technical specialists with a very focused, task-oriented work style into teams with a longer-term relationship-based approach.

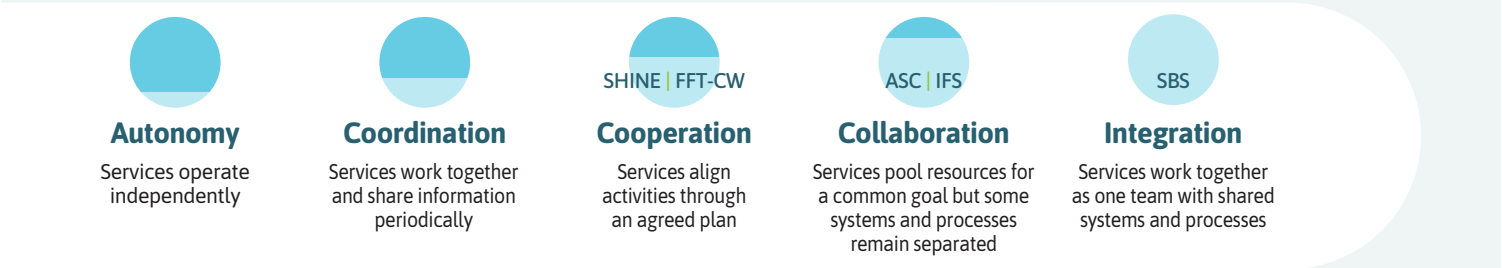
The Integrated Family Housing Initiative reinforces learnings from Thriving Families and deepens our understanding about what it takes to bring services together and work effectively across disciplines.

"[YFS] made me feel I'm not alone in this horrible process. Previously I felt let down by other services, this time I had the strength to follow through with this support".

There are many ways to work together

Integrated Family Housing is a collection of five integration initiatives. Each host program has its own objectives, characteristics and funding constraints, which cause integration to look a little different in each case, as shown below.

Although host programs may operate at different points on the integration continuum, early outcomes data demonstrates positive housing outcomes at all levels of integration. This suggests that integration can be effective in any form as long as the services involved are brought together in an appropriate and purposeful way.



Integration looks different depending on the types of services brought together. Within Integrated Family Housing, there are two main types of host programs, those that deliver longer-term, generalist services (relationship-based support for families across a range of life domains, such as Step by Step and Intensive Family Support) and those that deliver shorter-term, specialist services focused on a particular need, such as domestic violence, family therapy or assessment and referral, such as SHINE, Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare and Assessment Service Connect. The way the housing specialists worked with these two service types varied.



Leadership and management



Shared goals and understandings



Policies and procedures



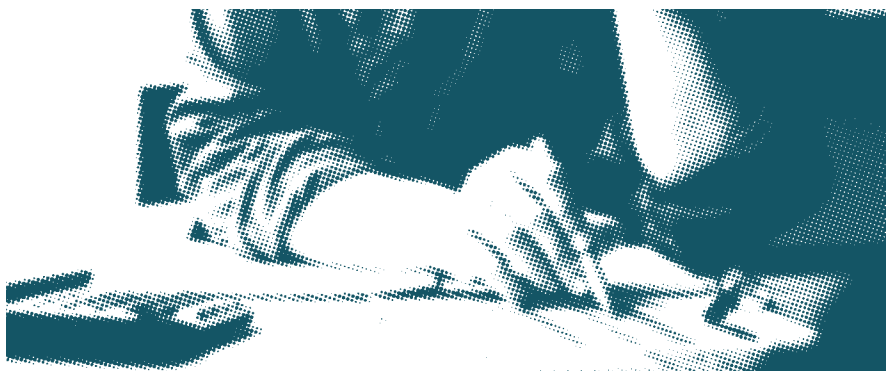
Roles and responsibilities



Co-location



Information sharing and communication



Effective integration requires resourcing

Interviews and staff surveys identified a number of inter-related integration mechanisms which appear to influence the effectiveness of outcomes and need intentional focus.

YFS invested in an Integration Manager to establish and oversee the initiative. This role was critical. It was also crucial for program managers from the families teams to back the initiative and support the embedded workers and their own teams to trouble shoot and refine the model for each team's context.

It is clear that all workers involved in Integrated Family Housing at YFS share a common goal in terms of wanting the best outcomes for their clients. They are further united under the YFS Theory of Change and Practice Approach. However, there is room to deepen shared understandings, mutual respect and appreciation and collaborative practice through working and learning together.

Processes from the Thriving Families project were allowed to evolve organically within each host program through some trial and error. It became clear that policies and procedures should build in some flexibility to reflect the context of each team, while clearly highlighting elements seen as ideal for achieving positive housing outcomes.

Role clarity was important to workers but less so to families. The evaluation highlighted the need for flexibility and teamwork over time, with housing and family workers taking the lead at different times as circumstances changed.

Physical space-sharing was an important enabler of service integration – without it integration was difficult in practice. It enables rapid reviews of the situation, ongoing information sharing and responses to crises.

Different information sharing arrangements were in place across the initiative, based on contractual recording and reporting requirements, making it easier in some contexts than others. Regular, direct communication between workers was pivotal for service coordination.

The Integrated Family Housing initiative has come far in its first year and achieved great outcomes for families despite the difficult housing market. It takes time and resources to adopt and embed new approaches.

Integration can be challenging – YFS will continue to refine and embed our approach. We will explore opportunities to expand the integrated housing specialist model.





Meera's story

YFS spoke to Meera* about her experience with support from our Step by Step young families team, the Housing Specialist linked with that team and other specialist workers.

I didn't have anything; I had lost hope. It was very hard. I really appreciate you guys and what you've done. ”

Meera - Step by Step client

When 24-year old Meera* arrived in Queensland with her two children after fleeing domestic violence, she didn't know anyone and had nowhere to stay.

She approached several housing services while she stayed in short-term emergency accommodation, even sleeping at a train station with her children when there was nothing else available.

When the Department of Housing referred her to YFS the Step by Step young families team worked together to support the family.

YFS Integrated Housing Specialists helped her to sort out her housing situation. Other YFS team members provided a range of wrap-around services, including financial counselling, family support and employment mentoring, to help them get back on their feet.

*Name changed for privacy

For more information please contact yfs@yfs.org.au

YFS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first peoples and the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and work.

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Building independence and participation