



100 Families WA

Summary Report





Acknowledgments

This project would not be possible without the willingness and generosity of the 400 families who took part, gave us a window into their lives and shared their stories with us.

This summary report has been prepared by a 100 Families WA Working Group consisting of representatives from the Community Advisory Group, community service sector partner organisations and the University of Western Australia.

Acknowledgment of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that the 100 Families WA project was undertaken on Whadjuk/Noongar land, and that Noongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practise their values, languages, beliefs, and knowledge. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Lived experience foreword

“Struggle has always been around my family for as long as I can remember. It’s time we speak up and do something.”



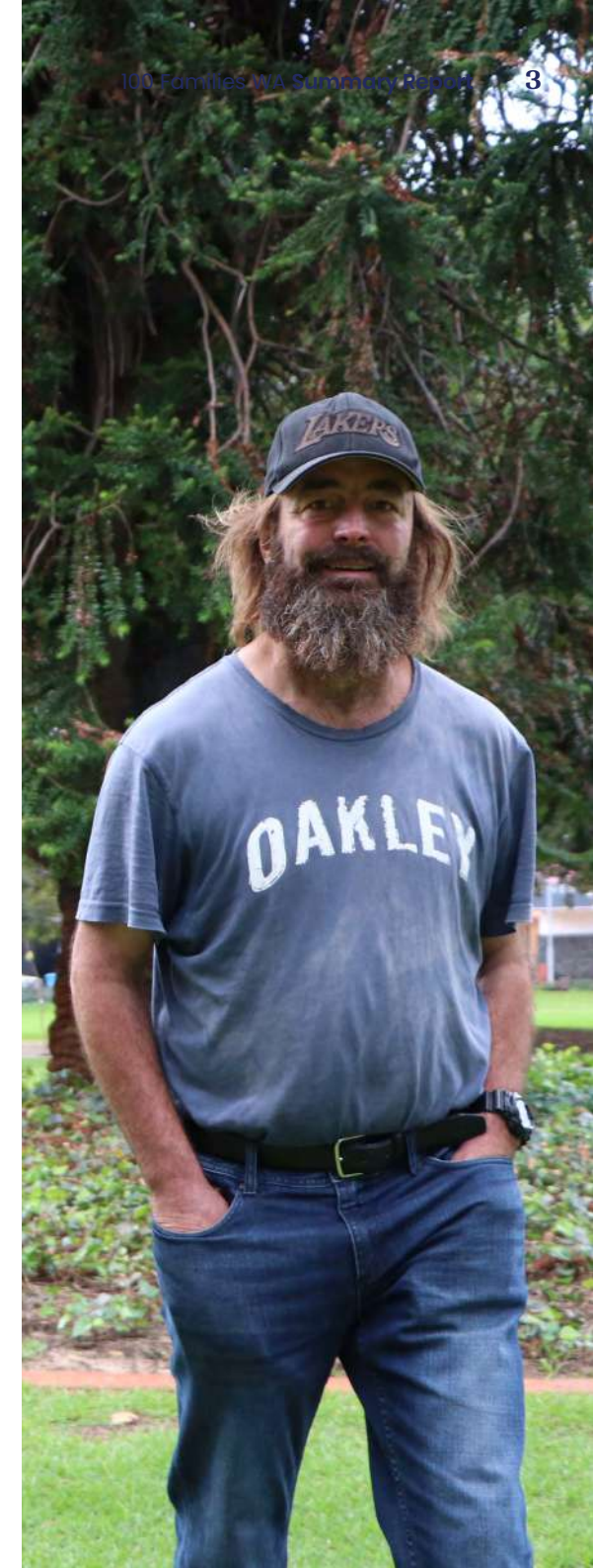
Excitement, hopefulness and apprehension were amongst the feelings experienced by family members when we were invited in mid-2018 to participate in the 100 Families WA Research Project. We are people who have accessed various support services and agencies in and around Perth. Many of us were desperate already and had lost hope things could get better.

We want what every human wants, a safe home, adequate food and resources for ourselves and our families, access to healthcare and opportunities to pursue connection, purpose and to be treated with dignity.

This three-year project has felt like a long and uncertain journey, however many of us have been living with uncertainty, scarcity and exclusion for our entire lives, some of us for generations. Our hope is that having shared our stories, our expertise and advice, others will gain insights and commit to engage with our lived experience beyond seeking to simply service our immediate needs.

We invite you now to begin to reimagine and redesign systems and processes, policies and legislation so that people and families stuck in entrenched disadvantage can realise a new and hopeful future. Many of us are keen to continue helping you to do this.

➔ [For the full Lived Experience Foreword see the 100 Families WA Full Report](#)





Importance of this project and how this document should be read

This document serves as a bridge to connect you with the voices of the families and walk you through the key findings. It then presents calls to action and some ideas as to where you might go from there.

While other examples of research exist in this space, the importance of this project and its evidence cannot be understated. The evidence, findings, and calls to action come directly from the experiences of the 400 families who took part. This scale of engagement has not been carried out in Australia before and it is this that makes the project unique and the evidence important.

A clear message that families repeatedly gave before, during and after their engagement with interviewers was **'how will my information be used to make a difference?'**. It is through this lens and in the context of your own influence and responsibility that this document should be read.

Project background








100 Families WA is a unique research project made up of a collaboration between seven not-for-profit agencies, researchers at The University of Western Australia (the Centre for Social Impact, School of Population and Global Health, and the Social Policy Practice and Research Consortium), the Community Advisory Group (CAG); comprising of members who hold lived experience of entrenched disadvantage, and the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS).

By conducting researching alongside 400 families, we have been able to better understand, through their experiences, what current efforts to alleviate disadvantage are working, what is not working, and what needs to change. This project's overarching goal is to develop an evidence base that that can inform the community, service sector, and state and federal governments, on how we can work together to address entrenched disadvantage.



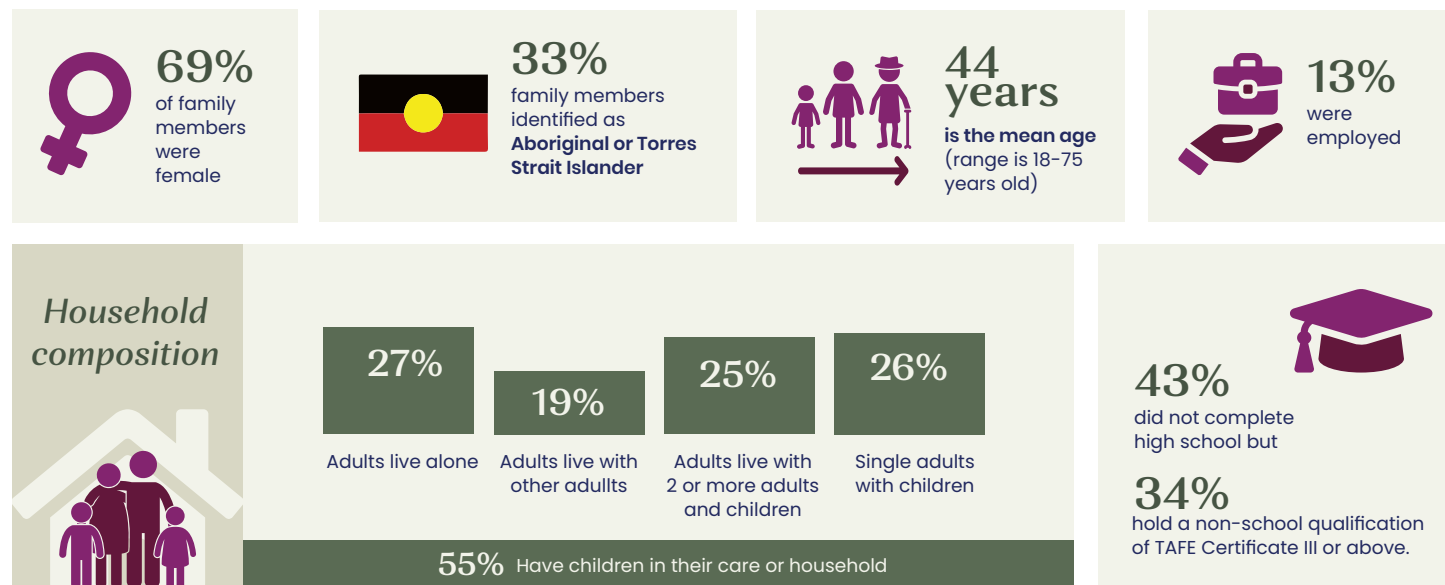
How we engaged with families

To better understand the experiences of families living in disadvantage, how these experiences impact on their day to day lives, their interaction with service and policy systems, as well as the part community plays (or could play), the following activities were undertaken:

| Quantitative data | Qualitative data |
|---|--|
|  Baseline survey (n=400) |  Fortnightly interviews (n=100) |
|  Wave 2 survey (n=255) |  Four focus groups |
|  COVID-19 supplement (n=158) |  Interviewer debriefs |
| |  Interviewer reflection |

Who are the families?

Diversity amongst the 400 families who took part was broad. Their varying backgrounds and lived experiences are unique to them and so, while we draw out commonalities, themes and groups, we should always look to treat people as the individuals they are.





Key Research Findings

- 1 Multiple and compounding adverse life events deeply entrench disadvantage
- 2 Families draw on a range of formal services and informal supports to try and get their basic needs met but still face multiple barriers to access
- 3 Families' positive service experiences involve being listened to, respected and supported according to their particular circumstances and needs
- 4 Families positively contribute to society above and beyond labour market participation
- 5 Families continue to bear the burden of stigmatisation



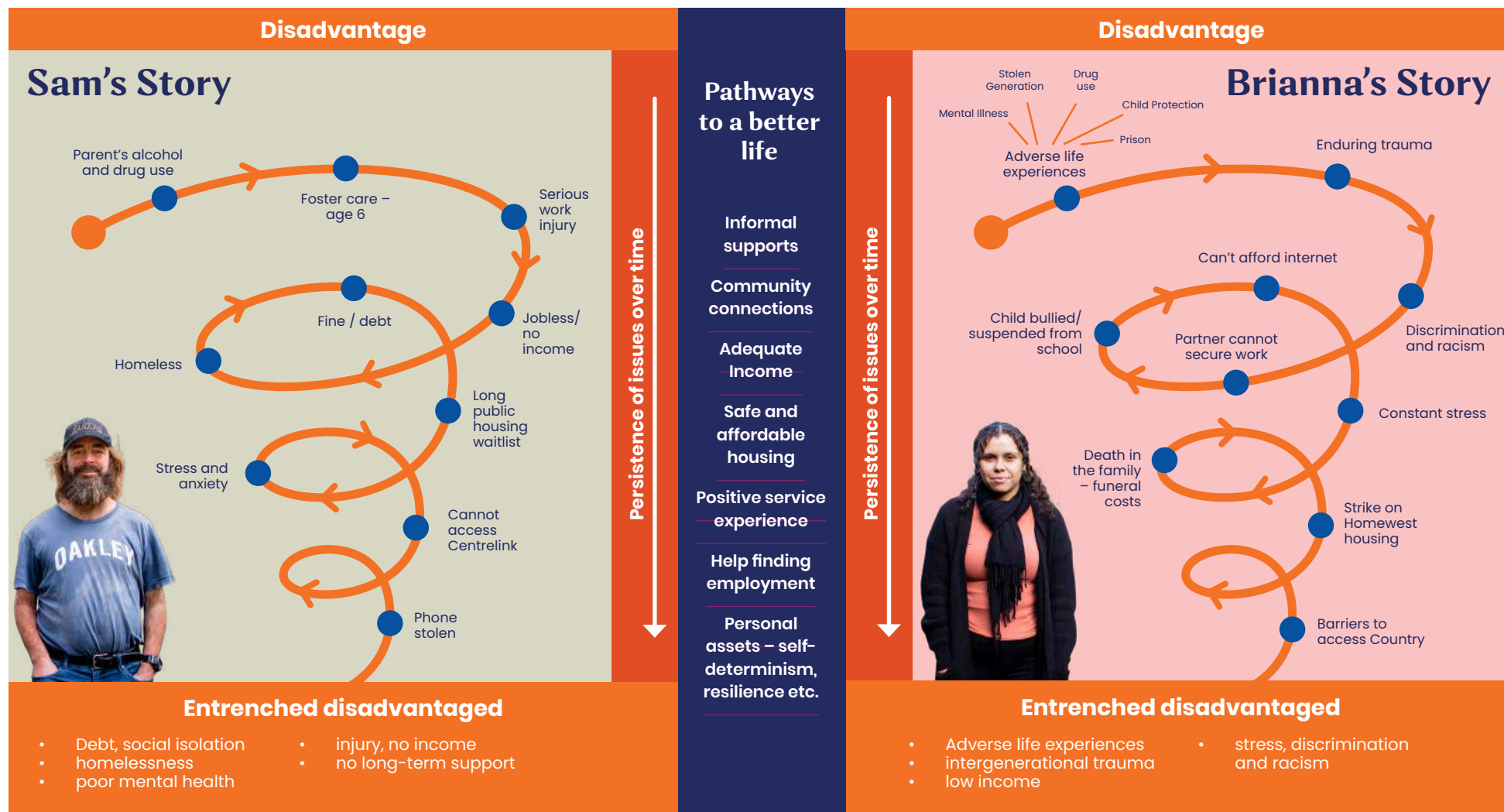
Calls to Action

- 1 Support people to identify and achieve their life goals – their way
- 2 Elevate the role and amplify the voice of people experiencing disadvantage
- 3 Ensure every Australian has access to adequate income to meet their basic needs
- 4 Build and strengthen local community networks and supports
- 5 Challenge stigma
- 6 Create a safe, supportive environment for people
- 7 Make it easy as possible for people to access support when they need it
- 8 Prioritise and develop trusted and enduring relationships
- 9 Invest in prevention and early supports
- 10 Recognise the value of caring roles and other contributions to society

What is entrenched disadvantage?

Entrenched disadvantage is characterised by persistent low income and negative life experiences across multiple areas of wellbeing, including physical and mental health, employment, housing, education, safety and social inclusion. People’s pathways into entrenched disadvantage are varied and complex, distinguished by a series of interlocking and compounding challenges that make everyday life very difficult.

Exiting entrenched disadvantage is not a simple nor easy process. Families need holistic, innovative and wide-ranging flexible supports that allow them to make improvements to their lives. Where these pathways are not present or are insufficient to the individual’s needs and there is an absence of early intervention and preventative measures, over time families risk slipping further into their disadvantage and becoming stuck or entrenched.



* Sam's and Brianna's stories are made up of a composite of families experiences. To learn more and see these stories in full visit www.ourworld.100familieswa.org.au.



finding 1

Multiple and compounding adverse life events deeply entrench disadvantage

“My kids and I have never known any different. Life just happens. Sometimes it is very bleak and then every now and then a ray of sunshine breaks through”







Adverse life experiences can act as pathways into disadvantage, and adding to this, those who experience disadvantage are more likely to face certain adverse experiences in their lives.

Of the 400 family members that completed the baseline survey:

- 51.8%** experienced homelessness
- 24.3%** experienced foster or out of home care
- 18.3%** experienced having their own child/ren removed from their care
- 78.0%** experienced domestic violence (as victim, perpetrator, or witness)
- 22.8%** experienced prison as an adult
- 84.3%** reported diagnosis of at least one chronic health condition
- 69.3%** reported diagnosis of at least one mental health condition
- 20.5%** have a permanent, physical disability that limits their mobility

A combination of adverse life events, the trauma associated with the experience/s, and broader structural factors can create significant barriers to exit from disadvantage. Structural factors may include how resources are distributed across the population, how people relate to each other, and how institutions, agencies and programs are organised through policies, legislation and processes. This interplay of factors, coupled with persistent low-income, can significantly constrain people’s ability to secure a better future for themselves and their families.

Families face difficult choices when it comes to their basic human rights, such as:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
|  Reducing debt |  Paying bills |  negotiate discounted rates for school fees |
| OR | OR | OR |
|  Treat chronic physical and mental health conditions |  purchasing essentials (e.g. groceries, medication) |  go without basic services and items such as internet at home or new school clothes for their children. |

Despite families’ active attempts to improve their situations, they continue to face significant barriers in one or more major areas of well-being including mental and physical health, housing, education, safety, jobs and social relationships. Families are acutely aware that their standard of living falls short of what most Australians consider to be acceptable. They want more for themselves and, especially, more for their children.

finding 2

Families draw on a range of formal services and informal supports to try and get their basic needs met but still face multiple barriers to access

“[We] keep getting told this was not the appropriate service as we ‘don’t fit criteria.’ We were told we are in the ‘grey areas’, ‘not their problem’, ‘can’t help and can’t suggest who can.’”

Families often exercise an incredible amount of resourcefulness to try and meet their basic needs in relation to safety, health, clothing, food, shelter, economic security and emotional wellbeing. Social networks and relationships can act as significant buffers against the impacts of entrenched disadvantage and provide tangible supports, such as assistance in finding a job, caring duties or emotional resources. However, when families have to navigate the complexities of the formal service system, they can become overwhelmed trying to find out what support is available to them and burn up the limited resources they have, such as money on transport costs, without any guarantee of increased support.

| Service | Family members that accessed in prior 12 months |
|--|---|
| Emergency accommodation services | 28.8% |
| Housing pathway/housing support services | 38% |
| Food emergency relief services | 71.8% |
| Essential items e.g. laundry | 23.5% |
| Health services | 63% |
| Addiction support | 16.5% |
| Mental health and counselling | 45.5% |
| Legal services | 27.5% |
| Financial services | 44.5% |
| Employment services | 41.8% |
| Family and parenting services | 19.3% |

*many families accessed these services multiple times in this 12-month period.

Barriers to accessing formal and informal support



Personal circumstances

mental and physical health difficulties; experiencing stigma, shame and embarrassment when engaging with supports; and conflicting priorities and pressing commitments such as caring responsibilities, employment and study commitments.



Organisational factors

difficulty accessing information about what services are available, difficulty contacting services, services feeling unsafe or discriminatory, and services' hours of operation and availability of appointments.



Systemic factors

strict eligibility criteria, limitations on the number of times families can access services, unmet or complex needs not fitting neatly into service boxes, transport accessibility and affordability, and services closing due to a lack of sustainable funding.

Many families are disheartened by the lack of straight forward and flexible support options available to meet their needs. Current approaches are inherently shaped and constrained by policy and funding models as well as the capacity of individual workers and clients. A lack of integration across a complex web of services and supports results in families being referred from service to service, being turned away from services or trying the same approaches repeatedly, often incurring hidden financial and emotional costs. This can leave families feeling depleted, or for some, it can make them feel like giving up.

Families felt that while formal support services helped them to survive and maintain their circumstances (which they were grateful for), they could not meet their greater wish for transformational change: a better life for them and their family. They want a service system that responds to the whole person or family's circumstances and better addresses the underlying causes of disadvantage, as opposed to symptoms.


 finding 3

Families' positive service experiences involve being listened to, respected and supported according to their particular circumstances and needs

“(Worker’s name) has been my angel. Even at times when I have been at my worst and I walk past (Agency name) just seeing her and that lovely smile makes my day. I swear there have been times, if she hadn’t been there, I wouldn’t have made it.”

Families have a range of fundamental human needs: to be listened to, to be supported, to be safe, to be treated fairly and with kindness, affordable housing and healthcare options, and income that enables them to meet their day-to-day living costs and maintain an acceptable standard of living.

Interactions with key services and systems such as health, housing, child protection, education, and justice can have a deep and ongoing impact on people. For some families, the sense of feeling vulnerable or not feeling understood makes the experience of interacting with services stressful, emotionally strenuous, and physically tiresome.

It makes a real difference when families feel they are treated with empathy and respect, when they are actively listened to, when connections are made and when their individual circumstances are taken into account. Trauma-informed and relationship-based principles and practice can help cultivate trust and respect, reduce tensions, enable the speaker to release their emotions and encourage the surfacing of information that is conducive to understanding and co-developing potential pathways for recovery and wellbeing.

A good foundational principle is that policies, programs or services that are targeted towards or disproportionately

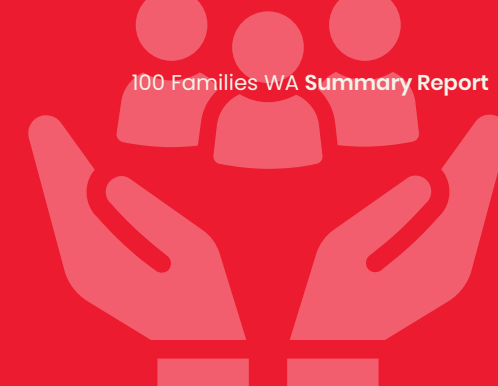
affect people experiencing disadvantage should be developed in collaboration with them. Increasing the capacity and ability of services to listen to families, and adapt service offerings in line with their needs, requires flexibility and understanding on the part of funders, as well as skilled, empathetic staff with good knowledge of the options and opportunities available for family members.

“People need to be ready to change. If you try to push people at the wrong time they get their back up and it doesn’t help. So it’s important to have time and space to just get to know each other. That’s why drop in centres are so important. They provide a space where you can have a yarn and get to know each other. You know, it always amazes me, when you get to know someone and listen to their story, it starts to make sense why they are the way they are.”



finding 4

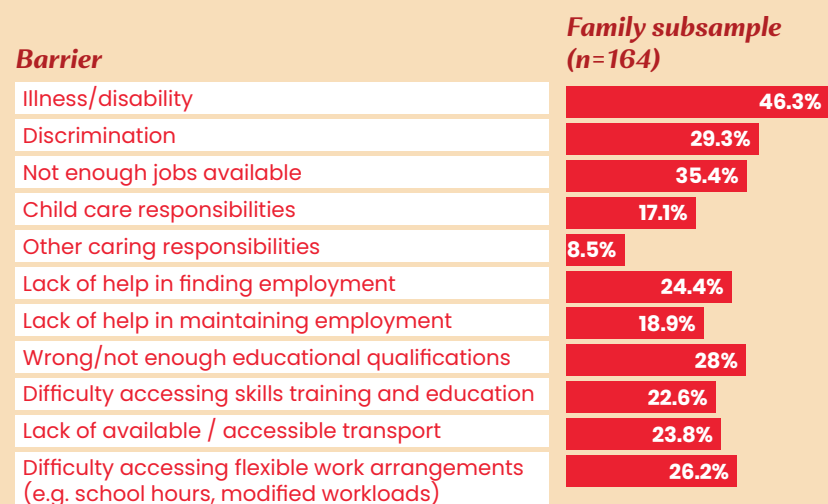
Families positively contribute to society above and beyond labour market participation



“I accept that getting a job is the best form of welfare, but the current approach is not very helpful. Work for the Dole programs are a joke, soul destroying with no real benefits. Most people want to participate in the workforce; it is about a lot more than the money. It is also about being productive and the pride that comes with that.”

Employment is not the only way for an individual to contribute to the economy and to society. Families expressed that they want the best for their families and want to be involved in achieving it for them. For many families, this involves being employed in meaningful and appropriate employment that recognises their skills and experience. However, not everybody can work, and not everybody can be working all the time. For those families who are able and want to work, systemic barriers often prevent them from realising this aim.

A fundamental issue of labour market programs is that they are based on the assumption that there are enough jobs for everyone and that everyone is able to work. This is in direct contradiction to the government fiscal policy that targets unemployment of 4-5% in order to control interest rates and inflation. Another significant underlying issue is the gross inadequacy of income support payments. Family members who receive unemployment benefits face increasingly punitive payment conditions that are frustrating, demotivating and lack positive outcomes.



Many families who aren't able to work in a traditional sense still expressed clear ways in which they participate in society, for example through the provision of support for loved ones. Grandparent carers, for example, take on caring responsibilities when their grandchild(ren)'s primary carers are not in a position to. Though in many cases they carry all the responsibilities of foster carers, they are not eligible for the same level of financial support.

People want and need the ability to choose what support they access and how they access it. In order to do this, they need multiple options that extend beyond traditional labour market participation.

“For the past 7 years I have been responsible for caring for my eldest, who has a disability, as well as an adult boarder with a disability (4 years), I was also caring for my youngest son who is now 7.”



finding 5

Families continue to bear the burden of stigmatisation

“It wears you down after a while. When you are treated like you don’t matter by so many people in so many ways it is hard to keep going and not give up. It sometimes seems better to withdraw into some corner somewhere with other people doing it tough like you and hide out from the world.”

Policies and programs have the potential to either heighten or lessen the shame that people feel as a result of living in disadvantage. From government speeches, reports and policy to mainstream media, education and everyday conversation, disempowering patterns of thought, language and practice continue to represent people living in hardship in terms of personal deficiencies and failures, perpetuating negative public narratives.

Political slogans like ‘the age of entitlement is over’ ‘leaners, not lifters’ and media portrayals of people dependent on support services as ‘dole bludgers’ and ‘welfare cheats’ deeply affect family members, depleting their self-esteem and sense of wellbeing.

People living in entrenched disadvantage do not want to be treated as defective, but as active, capable agents in their own lives and stories. They are keen to take responsibility and give something back to their communities. They want good things for themselves and their families. They want to be active citizens in a world where they can meet their own needs as well as access the support they need to overcome the challenges they experience along the way.



“For someone like me who ended up in this mess, through no fault of my own, gets called a dole bludger or a shovel leaner in the press, it completely undermines your confidence and makes you doubt yourself”

“When you are on the streets you are invisible. People pass by and look right through you, as if you are not even there. No matter how moral a person is, you find yourself being reduced to doing things you have to, just to survive.”

“Sometime you can see it in the eyes of agency staff. They have already judged you and put you in a little box with a label on it. They don’t even really listen to your story”

“We are not stupid, we are not useless, we are not out to rip off the country. We have our challenges, like everyone else, but we want the best for our families. We want to be involved in developing the sort of supports that will help us move forward”

*The above headlines comprise of comments made by leaders in our community, including politicians, and were published on leading media channels.

Calls to Action

Everyone – the Western Australian community, service providers and State and Commonwealth governments – can take action to address entrenched disadvantage and support and strengthen our communities.

1

Support people to identify and achieve their life goals – their way

Families are intimately familiar with their own circumstances and needs and hold valuable perspectives about what approaches would work for themselves and their communities.

2

Elevate the role and amplify the voice of people experiencing disadvantage

Families consistently reported that they often don't feel seen or heard in policy or practice settings and would like to add their voices and lived experience in designing, implementing and evaluating policies, programs and social change that impacts them.

3

Ensure every Australian has access to adequate income to meet their basic needs

The 100 Families WA evidence demonstrates the positive benefits that the Coronavirus Supplement had on family members, which ultimately supported them to live with greater dignity.

4

Build and strengthen local community networks and supports

Families draw on their relationships with family, friends, neighbours and community networks when available, for both practical assistance and emotional support to meet a variety of needs.

5

Challenge stigma

Family members continue to experience stigma and discrimination at individual, community, service and societal levels.

6

Create a safe, supportive environment for people

Safe, supportive environments can help reduce people's experiences of stigma and discrimination.

7

Make it easy as possible for people to access support when they need it

Family members reported a range of personal, organisational and systemic barriers to accessing formal and informal supports. Reducing these barriers can reduce the financial, emotional and time costs for families who are currently navigating multiple formal supports.

8

Prioritise and develop trusted and enduring relationships

Families' positive experiences of seeking support depends on being genuinely listened to and supported with care and understanding of their individual circumstances.

9

Invest in prevention and early supports

Policies, services and community-based programs focused on prevention and early support, in addition to crisis services, can help support people to solve issues before problems escalate.

10

Recognise the value of caring roles and other contributions to society

Recognising, valuing and supporting the multiple ways that family members contribute to their families and society can create social and economic benefits and reduce inequality.

Turning Awareness into Action

Community

In what ways can you connect and build relationships with others in your community?

For example, attending community events, or joining a social or sports club

In what ways can you help shape your community?

For example, voting, supporting advocacy campaigns, getting involved with local organisations, or peer support and consumer advocacy roles

How can we support each other as community members to ensure empathy, connection and kindness are the drivers of community?

Have you reflected on how you would like systems and services to help you achieve your life goals?

Community Services

What opportunities are there in your organisation for meaningful inclusion of people with lived/living experience?

For example, as part of your staff, committees, peer support roles, boards, organisational activities etc

How effective is your organisation at ensuring a safe and secure environment, both for staff and for families?

For example, through policies, trainings, engagement or the built environment

How does your organisation contribute to efforts to ensure all Australians have access to adequate income?

How is your organisation strengthening collaborations and connection in your community?

For example, with other not-for-profit organisations, local government, community groups and local people

How can your organisation reduce barriers to accessing support?

For example, through flexible opening hours, outreach, mobility and transport support, accessible information

Policy

How can we ensure policies and programs are informed by people with lived experience?

For example, through appropriate funding, genuine co-design, remuneration, support and development

Can eligibility criteria be more flexible and what would this involve?

For example, through flexible contracts, infrastructure and resources to support innovation

How can policymaking ensure increased recognition and value of the work of unpaid carers across genders and age groups?

How can income support payments be better designed to keep households out of poverty?

For example, through raising the rate, simplifying access, mutual obligations reform and better enabling early support and decision-making for individuals



Further Resources

100 Families WA Website

For more information on 100 Families WA and our full list of resources, news and updates, head over to www.100familieswa.org.au

'Welcome to Our World' online platform

An online tool that promotes greater awareness of what families living in disadvantage go through and what can be done to address this issue. www.ourworld.100familieswa.org.au

Speaking from Experience

In this six-part short video series, Renna and Keira address common questions faced on education, jobs, poverty and more 100familieswa.org.au/resources/cat/speaking-from-experience-series

Lived Experience Framework

Looking for a framework that helps you understand how to meaningfully partner with people who hold lived experience? Check this out... www.wacoss.org.au/library/lived-experience-framework-principles-practices-lived-experience-partnerships

Advocacy toolkit

Interested in using your voice to advocate towards change but not sure where to start. Check this out... www.wacoss.org.au/library/advocacy-toolkit/

Reports

For comprehensive information, insights and evidence, go to 100familieswa.org.au/resources/cat/reports



Bulletins

For more concise insights and findings on specific areas of disadvantage, access 100 Families WA Bulletins via 100familieswa.org.au/resources/cat/bulletin



Snapshots

key quantitative findings in specific areas of disadvantage, go to 100familieswa.org.au/resources/cat/snapshots/



