

Redesigning Family Preservation in NSW

– yourtown’s advocacy submission 2024



What is it about?

Family Preservation aims to strengthen a family’s ability to respond to their children’s needs and to create a safe and nurturing home. The NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is redesigning the system to improve the outcomes, experiences, suitability and accessibility for families. DCJ is hoping that this redesign will create a system that is evidence-based and more responsive to the diverse needs of families.

Why is it important?

yourtown’s San Miguel is a child-centered residential service for young parents and their children in Western Sydney. It focuses on family preservation and restoration, working with young parents up to the age of 25 and their children who have experienced trauma and are at risk of harm. However the redesign of the Family Preservation system does not include a residential component, and we do not see the critical service that San Miguel offered reflected.

“Here [San Miguel] it’s like it’s our home. I’ve never had a home. I’ve always been in drug houses or institutionalised care. Here’s my chance to be the best mum I can be.”

San Miguel Client (2023)

Some of **yourtown**’s key messages:

1. The NSW Family Preservation system must recognise the importance of housing in supporting families with children experiencing or at risk of harm

We cannot protect those most at risk if we are not looking at ensuring the ultimate safety net is in place – safe and secure housing. At **yourtown** we recognise the importance of intervening early in the cycle of homelessness, and the earlier we intervene, the more impact we can have. In order to have an effective Family Preservation model in NSW it is critical that housing insecurity and homelessness are addressed through inclusion of a residential component. Once immediate practical needs such as shelter, food and safety have been met, more complex issues that the family is experiencing can be addressed.

2. The NSW Family Preservation system must prioritise the service gap and inter-relationships between homelessness and child protection, particularly for young parents who are a highly vulnerable group

Young parents represent a highly disadvantaged group of parents whose experience of parenthood is more likely to be testing, and whose children are more likely to be at risk of harm. They are also particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. We know that when families are homeless, it multiplies the multitude of other complex issues and risk factors they are experiencing such as poor wellbeing, mental illness, domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, residential care history, contact with the justice system, and lack of support networks. Intervening earlier in the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and complex trauma is key to helping young families achieve long-term positive outcomes and keeping children out of care. To do this successfully we must start by addressing their housing needs alongside long term intensive support.

3. A residential component needs to be included within the Family Preservation system and appropriate funding allocated.

While community-based support can be effective for many families within the family preservation system, those at high-risk, with significant trauma and experiencing homelessness benefit from the long-term intensive support that a residential service like San Miguel can provide. By providing safe residential accommodation and long-term intensive support to young parents and their children, we can address the complex and inter-related issues through an integrated, trauma-informed program.

4. We highlight the success of San Miguel, which provides safe residential accommodation and long-term intensive support

Young parents with complex needs and high levels of trauma are often situated within a context of social exclusion and entrenched disadvantage and many face barriers to accessing the intensive support that they need. They need the long term residential accommodation and intensive support to effectively address the complexity of issues their family is facing.

READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION

