

## Interconnected caseload

### About this series

This information sheet is designed to help non-Aboriginal organisations find better ways to deliver effective and relevant services to Aboriginal people who are experiencing intergenerational poverty and homelessness. It is part of a series capturing key learning and ideas from the award-winning Wongee Mia action learning project, in Western Australia.

### What is an interconnected caseload?

In conventional projects, couples, household and family members are usually given different caseworkers as this is thought to provide privacy, confidentiality and individualised support. Unlike this traditional caseload approach, all the people supported by Wongee Mia workers are related and connected to each other. In Wongee Mia, the same worker provides support to

all the members of the extended family and becomes embedded in the family, culture, and relationships. All these relationships stem from Robbie – the original tenant.<sup>5</sup>

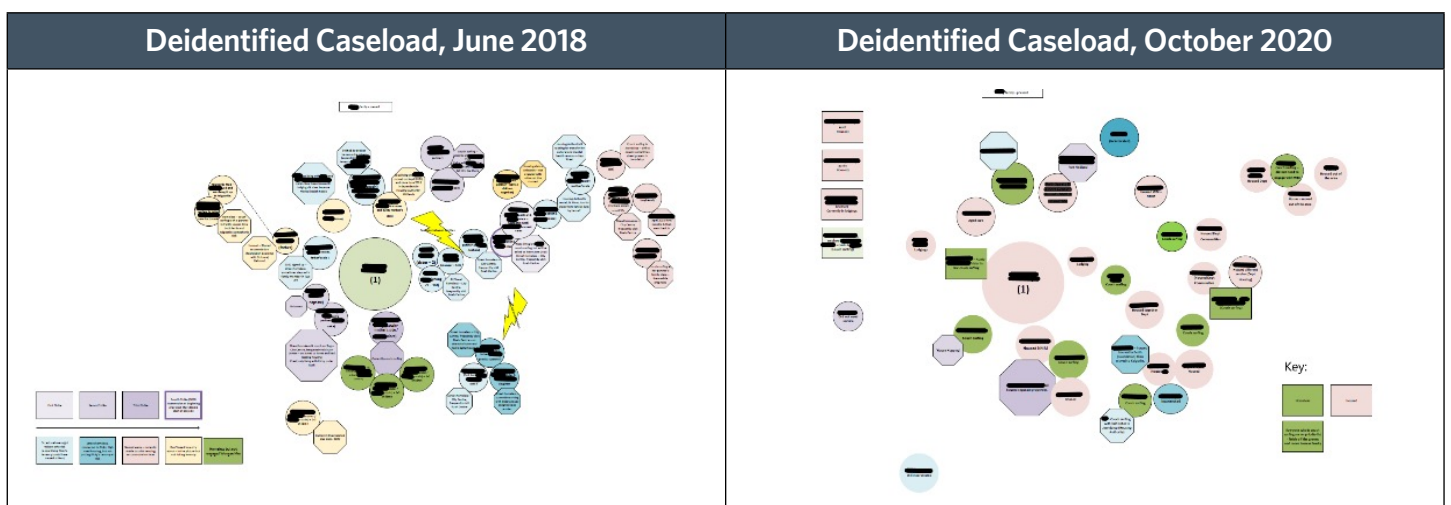
### Why use an interconnected caseload?

The interconnected caseload is the one element of the project that was designed at the start – all other elements have been directly shaped by feedback from Elders and people the project supports. The project started with Robbie and expanded its caseload to include those family members who put his tenancy at risk. The aim is to address homelessness in the wider family, identifying them as people in need, rather than seeing them as a “problem”. This has developed into a close working relationship across a large, interconnected family (both housed and homeless), with strong connections to family Elders for advice and guidance.

### Mapping the network

The caseload was established by sitting with Robbie and mapping out his family relationships and looking at all the people who stay with him, family he is connected to, and building up a picture of who is important in his life, who puts his tenancy at risk, and who needs housing of their own. The project did not accept referrals from outside sources. Everyone taken onto the caseload was identified as part of this extended family network.

The first family map identified seven family members directly linked to incidents resulting in tenancy breaches. A further eight people occasionally stayed at Robbie’s house, putting his tenancy at risk. Two more were sleeping rough but not a risk to his tenancy. Seven family members were housed in un-stable tenancies and flagged as possibly needing future support. Only five people did not require support.



<sup>5</sup> Not his real name

Out of this process comes a strong sense that Robbie and his family know who they are and who they belong to. Their experience of homelessness is not one of disconnection from family, but of being with family, both on the street and elsewhere when one of them is able to secure housing. This story is different to the homelessness often experienced by non-Aboriginal people (particularly men), where homelessness frequently comes alongside relationship breakdown, loneliness, and disconnection. For the Wongee Mia family, the story is one of family and connection. Typically, non-Aboriginal case-management models, which provide individualised supports to separate disconnected individuals, do not cater to this close connection.

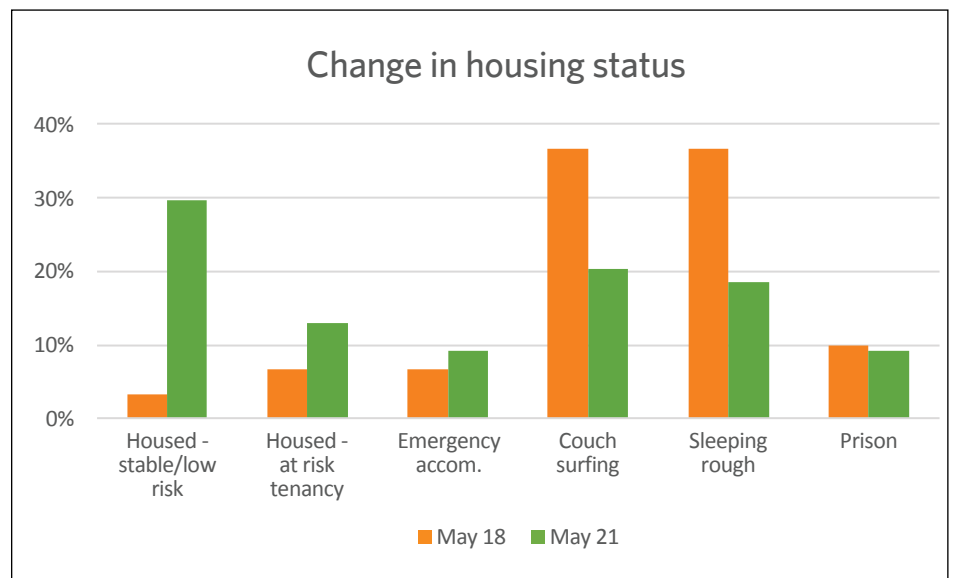
### Impact of the model

Firstly, the interconnected caseload approach took the pressure off the family and the reasons they often faced eviction. When the mapping exercise was repeated two years into the project, 21 family members were housed. The remaining 11 were couch surfing rather than street present, with two people from the original group in prison. Housing and support for family members increased the capacity of the extended family to shelter those who

were experiencing homelessness – more than doubling the number of people with accommodation, with a corresponding reduction in the number of people likely to look for shelter from family members. This graph shows the change in housing status of Wongee Mia participants from 2018 to 2021.

Secondly, the interconnected model changes the nature and depth of support by strengthening workers' connection with family members. Because all cases are connected, each person fills in a piece in the wider family story. Over time,

workers establish a deep understanding of the family history and experience. They also become trusted across the family as they are not seen as new workers when they start working with a new person. Instead, they carry the trust forward from their work with other family members. Workers' involvement across the family also introduces them to family Elders, who see it taking time to learn their history and work with their people, and who have become invested in the project. The Elders are integral to the project, providing insight and advice to workers.



### Key question for your own work:

- Can your service help family, and visitors who put someone's tenancy at risk, to get their own accommodation?
- Are there opportunities for workers to support multiple members of a family or group?