

## Navigating the system

### 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.

### Navigating the system

Learning from other organisations and projects has highlighted that people do not have complex needs - they just have needs. It is the systems with which they have to interact, to get their needs met, that are complex. For a group of people who have experienced intergenerational trauma and homelessness, interacting with these systems is both challenging and often not a priority when they are trying to find somewhere safe to sleep, grieving for yet another family death, or grappling with one of many day-to-day crises. The role of workers at Wongee Mia is to:

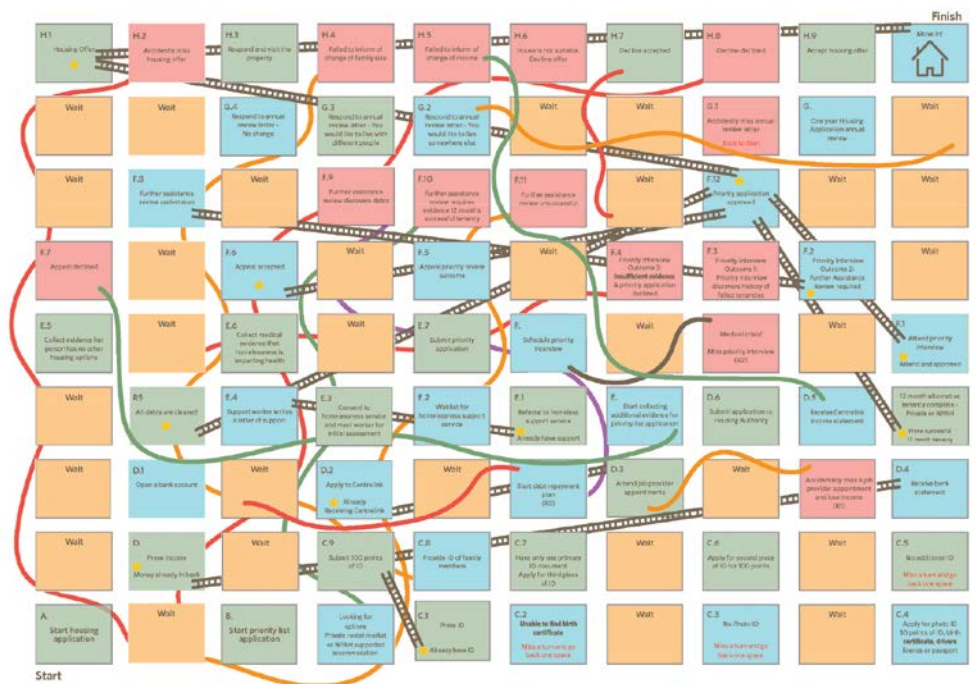
- Make it easier for these people to access services by breaking the process down into achievable steps.
- Make the system more responsive by ensuring people's experiences and needs are visible and prioritised.

### Snakes and ladders - understanding the system

As it started working with family members, the project identified that the complexity of the housing process was contributing to the serious challenges people faced trying to access accommodation. While some family members had a long history of failed tenancies and outstanding debts with housing authorities, a significant group had never applied for housing. The impact of personal challenges, such as low literacy and dealing with immediate crisis was evident, but it also became apparent that the complexity of the system itself posed a significant barrier to housing Aboriginal people, particularly

those experiencing intergenerational trauma and homelessness.

During action research sessions, the project mapped the housing system as a 'snakes and ladders' game to illustrate its complexity. The end result shows a terrifyingly tangled system, with few ladders and multiple snakes. The overall picture demonstrates why it can be so difficult to secure housing, as a single missed opportunity has the potential to return people to the start of the game. This visual tool was developed to identify barriers and as an advocacy tool for challenging government processes and policies. It was not intended to share with family members. Copies of the 'snakes and ladders' image are available on request.



## Housing bingo – simplifying the system





The 'snakes and ladders' tool was designed to help workers see the complexity of the system the community was required to navigate, however, it was not useful to share with family members. The 'housing bingo' tool followed. It was inspired by comments from yarning sessions, that "applying for housing felt like playing Bingo", that is "if you tick all the boxes to get Bingo you hopefully win a house". The 'housing bingo' tool broke the system down into simple steps so people could easily identify where their housing application was up to, without feeling worried or embarrassed about steps that were still to be completed.

## Community engagement – making the system more responsive

During the first year of the Wongee Mia project, workers attended many networking meetings with housing providers to explain the project and its commitment to finding a different way to support Aboriginal people. It was almost a 'sales pitch' approach, giving providers an understanding of what the project offered, and generating enthusiasm

for a style of working that would also encourage providers to be flexible and creative. Organisations responded positively to the Wongee Mia concept but many wanted to see how the project developed before they would commit their housing stock. Workers built early relationships with some progressive public and private housing and lodging

providers that didn't mind a 'talking now and paperwork later' approach. As a result, four of Robbie's family members were housed. Confidence in the project grew as providers saw the level of ongoing support Wongee Mia provided to its participants and the project's willingness to actively problem resolve issues as they arose.

HOUSING BINGO				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	 Paperwork done
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	 On the waitlist
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	 Change your mind
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	 Get your home
Get ID	Get income statement	Fill out form	Get support letter	
Priority interview	Review/appeal	Pay debts	Waiting	
Who you live with	Where you want to live	Contact details	Fill in annual review	
Get an offer	View property	Sign up	Get set up	

## Key questions for your own work:

- How can you break down systems and processes into bite-size chunks so they are easier for people to understand?
- What can you do to make people who need resources more visible to the systems that can help them?