

Children & Young People in Refuge: 1st July – 31st December 2013

A survey of ten WA Refuges to determine trends in children and young people accessing refuge services with their mother/carer



Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Child Protection**
and **Family Support**





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2014

This report was prepared by the Women's Council to inform the development of the Keeping Kids Safe Project. Keeping Kids Safe is funded by the Department for Child Protection & Family Support (WA).

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Executive Summary

In Western Australia, there are 38 crisis accommodation services for those escaping domestic and family violence. Of those 38 services, 4 are for single women only, 5 are for families only, 9 are for both families and singles, 1 is for Aboriginal women and children¹ only, and 19 are regional, rural and remote refuges that support women and children.

During the consultation period (1st July – 31st December 2013) 10 refuges responded to the consultation request. Seven were from the Perth metropolitan area and three were from regional or remote locations.

The Keeping Kids Safe (KKS) Project aimed to provide information, training and resources to Refuge staff working with women and children to improve outcomes for children who have grown up with domestic and family violence.

To inform the development of the KKS project Child Support Workers and Child Advocates were surveyed in order to obtain insight to the demographics of children entering refuges and the number of children and their mothers seeking crisis accommodation over a six month period.

¹ Child defined broadly as a young person 0-18 years of age. Refuges vary in terms of the age of the children they will take e.g., some only take boys to 12 years.

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Background

In Western Australia (WA), there are 38 crisis accommodation services for those escaping domestic and family violence, 34 of these accommodate women and children, while 4 only support single women with no children. In 2013, 9,595 people made up the homeless population in WA. For 43.5% of these people, this was a result of domestic and family violence (Homelessness Australia, 2013). Children under 12 comprised of 25.3% of the homeless population and young people aged 12-18 years of age made up 15.6% of those homeless (Homelessness Australia, 2013).

Table 1. A list of Metro and Rural/Regional/Remote refuges in WA that support women and their children

	Metro Refuge	Rural/Regional/Remote Refuge
1	Bayswater (Orana)	Albany Women's Centre
2	Belmont (Nardine)	Broome (Marnja Jarndu)
3	Bentley (Mary Smith)	Town not disclosed (South West Refuge)
4	Fremantle (Warrawee)	Busselton Women's Refuge
5	Gosnells (Starick)	Carnarvon (Gascoyne Women's Refuge)
6	Highgate (Byanda/Graceville)	Derby (Marnin Bowa Dumbara)
7	Highgate (Ruah)	Esperance (Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service)
8	Inglewood (Wooree Miya)	Fitzroy Crossing (Baya Gawi Buga yani Jandu yani u Centre)
9	Joondalup (Patricia Giles Centre)	Geraldton (Chrysalis House)
10	Mandurah (Pat Thomas House)	Halls Creek (Ngaringga Ngurra)
11	Midland (Kira House)	Port Hedland (Hedland Women's Refuge)
12	Midland (Koolkuna)	Kalgoorlie (Goldfields Women's Refuge)
13	Ridgewood (Rebecca West House)	Karratha (Salvation Army Karratha Women's Refuge)
14	Rockingham (Lucy Saw Centre)	Kununurra (Gawooleng Yawoodeng)
15	Stirling	Narrogin (Djookanka House)
16		Newman (Newman Women's Shelter)
17		Northam (Waminda House)
18		Tom Price (Karijini Family Violence Prevention Service)
19		Wyndham (Ngnowar Aerwah Safe House)



In recognition of the number of children accessing supported accommodation with their mother, the Keeping Kids Safe (KKS) project aimed to provide information, training and resources to Refuge staff to enable them to better support children.

To inform the development of the KKS project child support and child advocacy staff within Refuges participated in the consultation process by filling out surveys sent to them via email. The surveys targeted key areas such as; how support was provided to children and young people escaping domestic and family violence; the ages and backgrounds of the children; the number of children seeking refuge; and, the feedback about service provision from mother's/carer's. Where a child support or child advocate staff member could not be contacted at the refuge, or if the refuge did not have a specific position for a child support worker or child advocate, any staff member that had a role in working with children was able to fill out the survey.

The purpose of the consultation process was to obtain insight into the amount of children seeking refuge; the amount of child-specific staff in each refuge to work with the children; the hours each child-specific staff member worked; the demographics of the children accessing refuge; and the overall feedback about the service. Data also helped in designing training seminars for child support and child advocate staff.

Clients that Western Australian Refuges Support

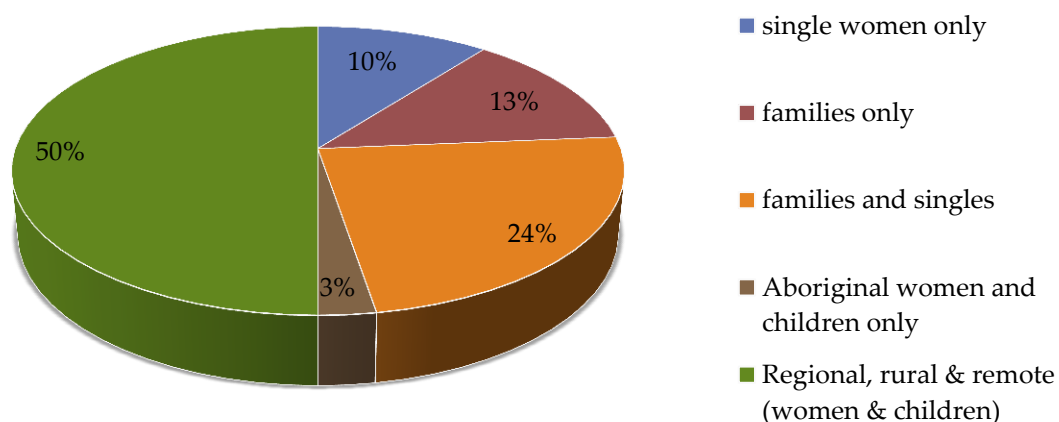


Figure 1. *Clients WA Services provide supported accommodation to*

Total amount of Children & Young People in Refuge

During the consultation period (1st July – 31st December 2013) there were 10 refuges that responded to the surveys. Each refuge had varying numbers of young clients ranging from 17 to 78. The total number of children and young people that sought crisis accommodation at the responding refuges was 500. The average number of children and young people accessing these services over the six month period was 45 per refuge.

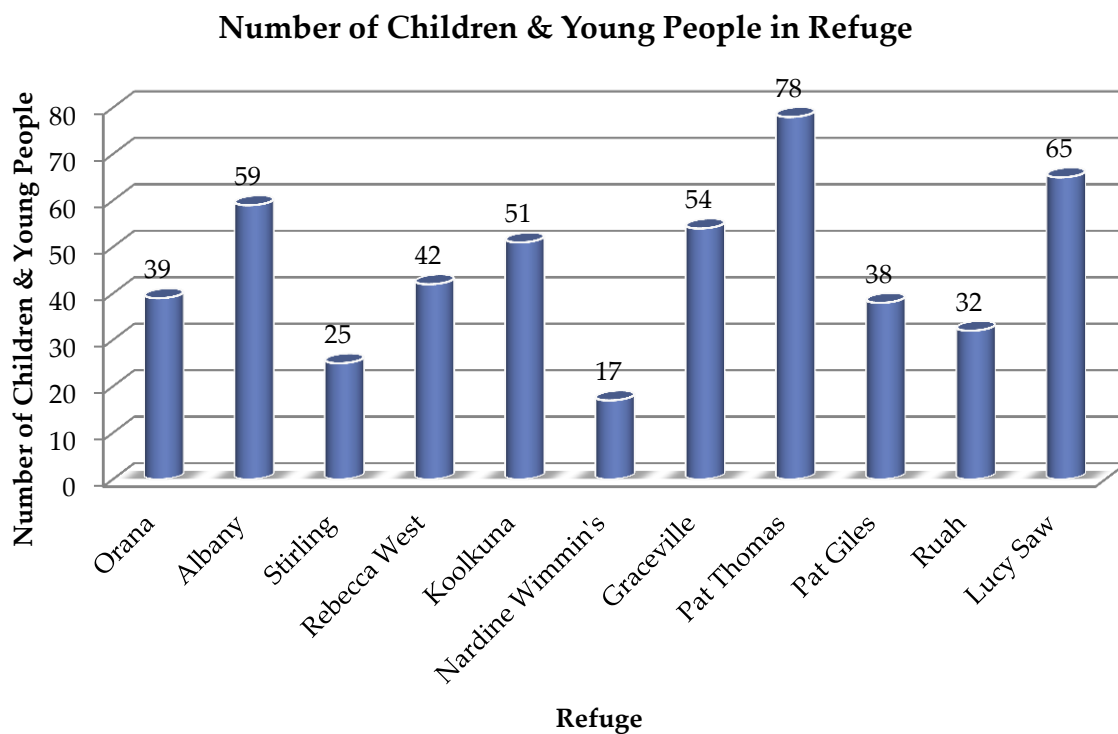


Figure 2. The total number of children and young people in refuge

Most Common Age-Grouping of Children & Young People

Respondents were asked to note the most common age group of children and young people accessing refuge services with their mother/carers:

“What was the most common age group of children that were in your refuge?”

They were provided with five categories:

- 0 – 3 years
- 4 – 8 years
- 9 – 13yrs
- 13 – 16yrs
- 16 – 18yrs

While refuges might have supported children and young people of all of the various age groupings, there were two most common age groups: 0 – 3 years and 4 – 8 years.

Table 2. Most common age group in refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Most Common Age Group</i>
<i>Orana</i>	<i>4 – 8 years</i>
<i>Albany</i>	<i>0 – 3 years</i>
<i>Stirling</i>	<i>0 – 3 years</i>
<i>Rebecca West</i>	<i>4 – 8 years</i>
<i>Koolkuna</i>	<i>0 – 3 years</i>
<i>Pat Thomas</i>	<i>4 – 8 years</i>
<i>Pat Giles</i>	<i>0 – 3 years</i>
<i>Ruah</i>	<i>0 – 3 years</i>

Note: Orana and Stirling only take boys up to 17 years

Ongoing Clients

During the consultation period (1st July – 31st December 2013), only 8 of the 10 surveyed refuges responded to this question. There were a total of 89 ongoing young clients from June into the consultation period.

There was an average of 11 ongoing young client's into the consultation period. Lucy Saw had the most ongoing young clients (47) while Stirling had the least (2).

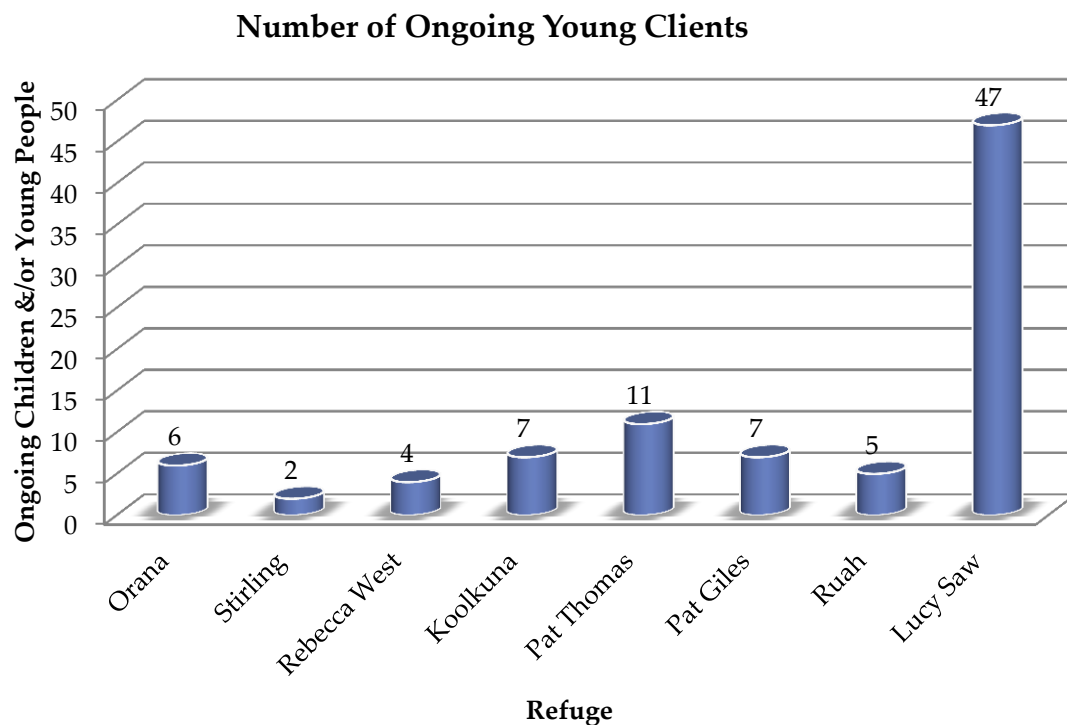


Figure 3. *The number of ongoing children and young people in refuge*

The Average Length of Stay in Refuge

Refuges were asked to provide an average time that young clients stayed in refuge for. Only 8 of the 10 refuges replied to this question.

An overall average was derived from each of the data given for the refuges. The overall average length of stay in refuge was approximately 43 days (nearly a month and a half per child staying at the refuge with their mother). The longest average duration was seen at both Rebecca West and Ruah at 60 days (3 months). Shortest period was recorded at Koolkuna at only an average of 8 days per young client.

While a high turnover rate of young clients and their mother's/carer's means that others escaping domestic &/or family violence can be accommodated, it also had implications for the amount of safety planning, protective behaviours training etc. can be provided to the young client/s while in refuge.

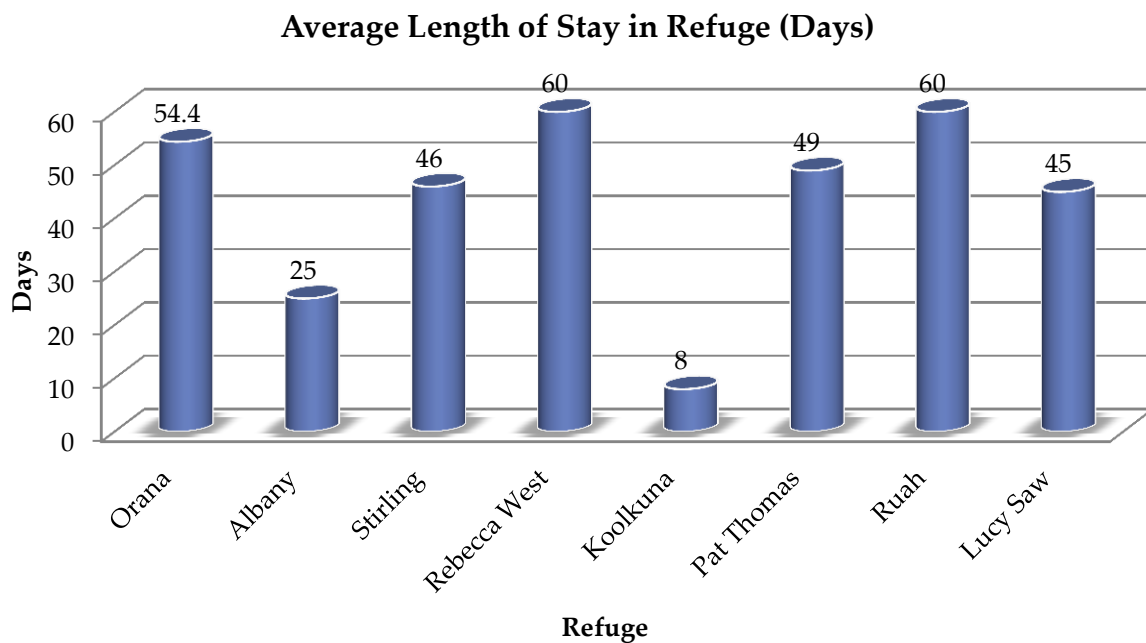


Figure 4. *The average length of stay in refuge*

The Range of Days Spent in Refuge

The range of days children and young people spent with their mother's/carer's in refuge differed somewhat. In 7 out of the 10 refuges that responded, it was noted that some young clients had only stayed for one day. It is hoped that during this period, at the very least, safety plans were developed.

In 3 out of the 10 refuges, young clients stayed for more than one night (from a minimum of 4 days to 14 days).

Table 3. Range of days spent in refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Range of days</i>
<i>Orana</i>	<i>4 days - 196 days</i>
<i>Albany</i>	<i>1 day - 88 days</i>
<i>Stirling</i>	<i>14 days - 182 days</i>
<i>Rebecca West</i>	<i>1 day - 90 days</i>
<i>Koolkuna</i>	<i>1 day - 78 days</i>
<i>Nardine Wimmin's</i>	<i>1 day - 180 days</i>
<i>Pat Thomas</i>	<i>1 day - 97 days</i>
<i>Pat Giles</i>	<i>1 day - 184 days</i>
<i>Ruah</i>	<i>1 day - 150 days</i>
<i>Lucy Saw</i>	<i>7 days - 90 days</i>

The maximum time spend in refuge was 196 days at Orana refuge. This was followed by 182 days at Stirling and 180 days at Nardine Wimmin's refuge.

"Children stay with us from a few days at a time right up to six months (if they're waiting for housing)."

– Nardine Wimmin's Refuge



Children & Young People Accompanying their Mothers/Carers

Refuges across WA are still referred to as “Women’s Refuge’s” or “Women’s Services” when the data clearly indicates that children and young people are a very large cohort accessing crisis accommodation services.

During the consultation respondents were asked to report on how many children were accompanying their mother/carer. On average, there were more than twice as many children seeking refuge with their mother/carer (a ratio of 2.1:1).

Children and young people must be seen as clients in their own right and be supported by child-specific staff such as child support workers or child advocate refuges in the refuge.

A Comparison of the Number of Children to Mothers in Refuge

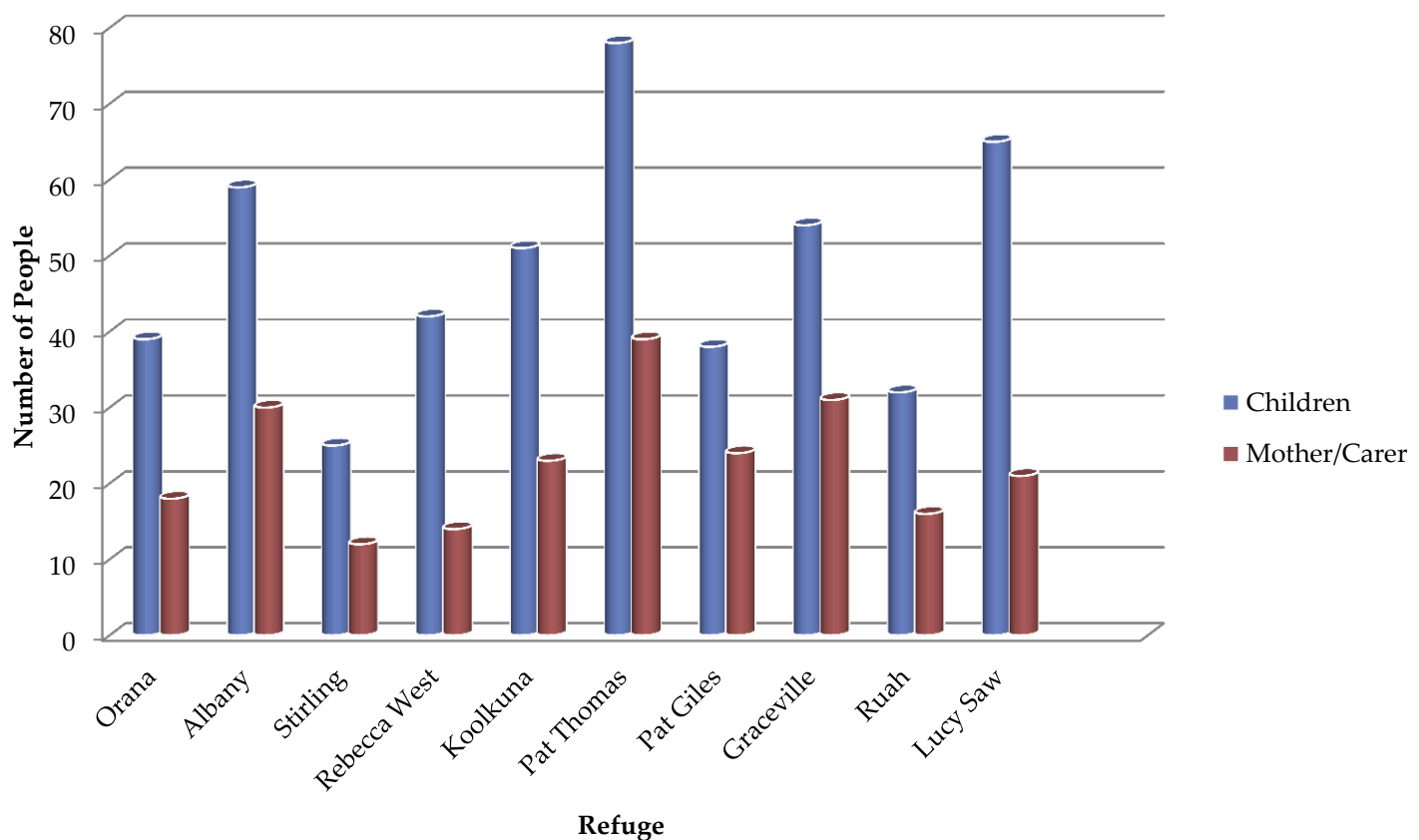


Figure 5. *The average ratio of children to mothers in refuge was greater than 2:1*

Children & Young People Accessing Services

During the consultation respondents were asked whether the children living in refuge were also accessing other services such as; schooling, health care, legal services or community recreation activities. Only 9 out of the 10 refuges responded to these questions.

Schooling

Of the children and young people seeking refuge, 209 were supported by the refuge staff to become linked into schooling. This predominantly meant that children were enrolled in schooling. In addition to this, the child advocate/support worker may have supported them at their existing schools, helped them to settle into a new school, communicated with the school to speak about the perpetrator and any violence restraining order in place etc.

Table 4. Children & young people linked to schooling while in refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Total children</i>	<i>Link schooling</i>
<i>Orana</i>	39	19
<i>Albany</i>	59	38
<i>Stirling</i>	25	10
<i>Rebecca West</i>	42	10
<i>Koolkuna</i>	51	5
<i>Pat Thomas</i>	78	48
<i>Pat Giles</i>	38	11
<i>Ruah</i>	32	13
<i>Lucy Saw</i>	65	55
Total	429	209

"We've set up a library service for the children within the refuge and those we are supporting in transitional housing and in the community. This has been working particularly well. From this, we hope that this will encourage mothers to use the toy libraries within their own communities."

– Nardine Wimmin's

Healthcare

Respondents were also asked whether the children and young people had access to healthcare while living in the refuge. Healthcare could be encompassing of psychological care and counselling to



medical care and hospital appointments. A total of 200 young clients were linked to some form of healthcare during the six month period (*see Table 3*).

Table 5. Children & young people linked to healthcare while in refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Total children</i>	<i>Link health care</i>
<i>Orana</i>	39	39
<i>Albany</i>	59	30
<i>Stirling</i>	25	8
<i>Rebecca West</i>	42	10
<i>Koolkuna</i>	51	11
<i>Pat Thomas</i>	78	37
<i>Pat Giles</i>	38	5
<i>Ruah</i>	32	0
<i>Lucy Saw</i>	65	60
<i>Total</i>	429	200

Other types of support for children, young people and their mother/carer

The 'other types of support' included; general support, family support, recreation support, and court/justice support.

Family support could be helping to strengthen relationships between mother and child through family activities. Recreation could be seeking community grants to enroll children into sporting clubs, and court/justice could be taking the child and mother to the courts to apply for a violence restraining order or referring them to legal aid for support etc.

Table 6. Children & young people linked to healthcare while in refuge

<i>Type of Support</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
<i>General</i>	222
<i>Family</i>	119
<i>Recreation</i>	217
<i>Court/Justice</i>	39
<i>Total</i>	920

Note: More than one option could have been chosen in this question per/client



Aboriginal Children & Young People

Aboriginal children and young people make up a considerably large cohort of young clients accessing refuge services across WA. While respondents were predominantly from metropolitan areas, it is assumed that the regional/remote and rural refuge see far greater amounts of Aboriginal clients. None of the respondents identify as Aboriginal, while they all work with Aboriginal clients in their refuges. There is a need to employ Aboriginal staff to work with children and young people.

In WA, the Aboriginal population makes up 3.8% of the State's total. However, the number of Aboriginal children and young people in crisis accommodation made up 26% of all young clients.

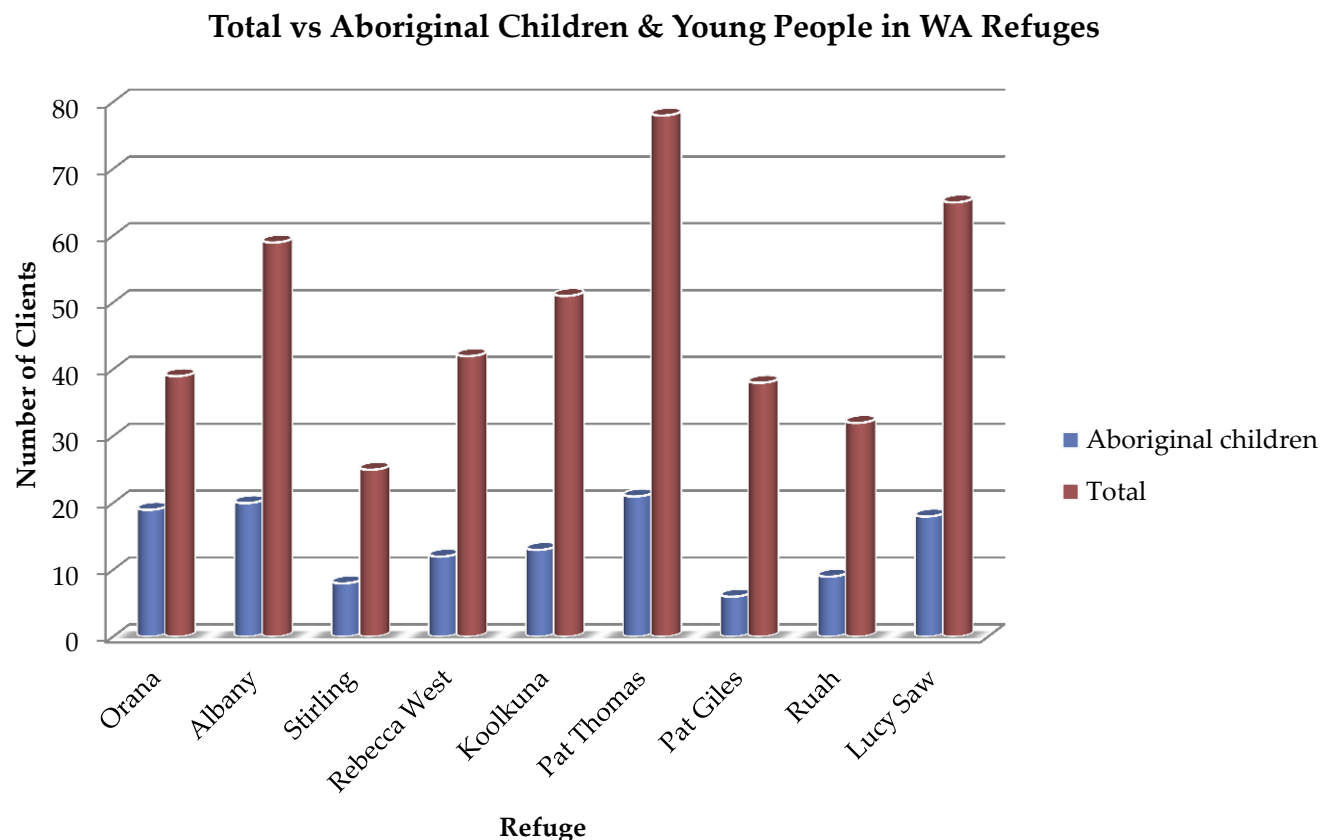


Figure 6. *The average ratio of children to mothers in refuge was greater than 2:1*



Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) Children & Young People

Respondents noted that recently there had been more CaLD clients entering refuges than previously. In the six month period there was a total of 99 children and young people from CaLD backgrounds. Out of the total number of children and young people that sought crisis accommodation services with their mother/carer, nearly one quarter (23%) were from CaLD backgrounds.

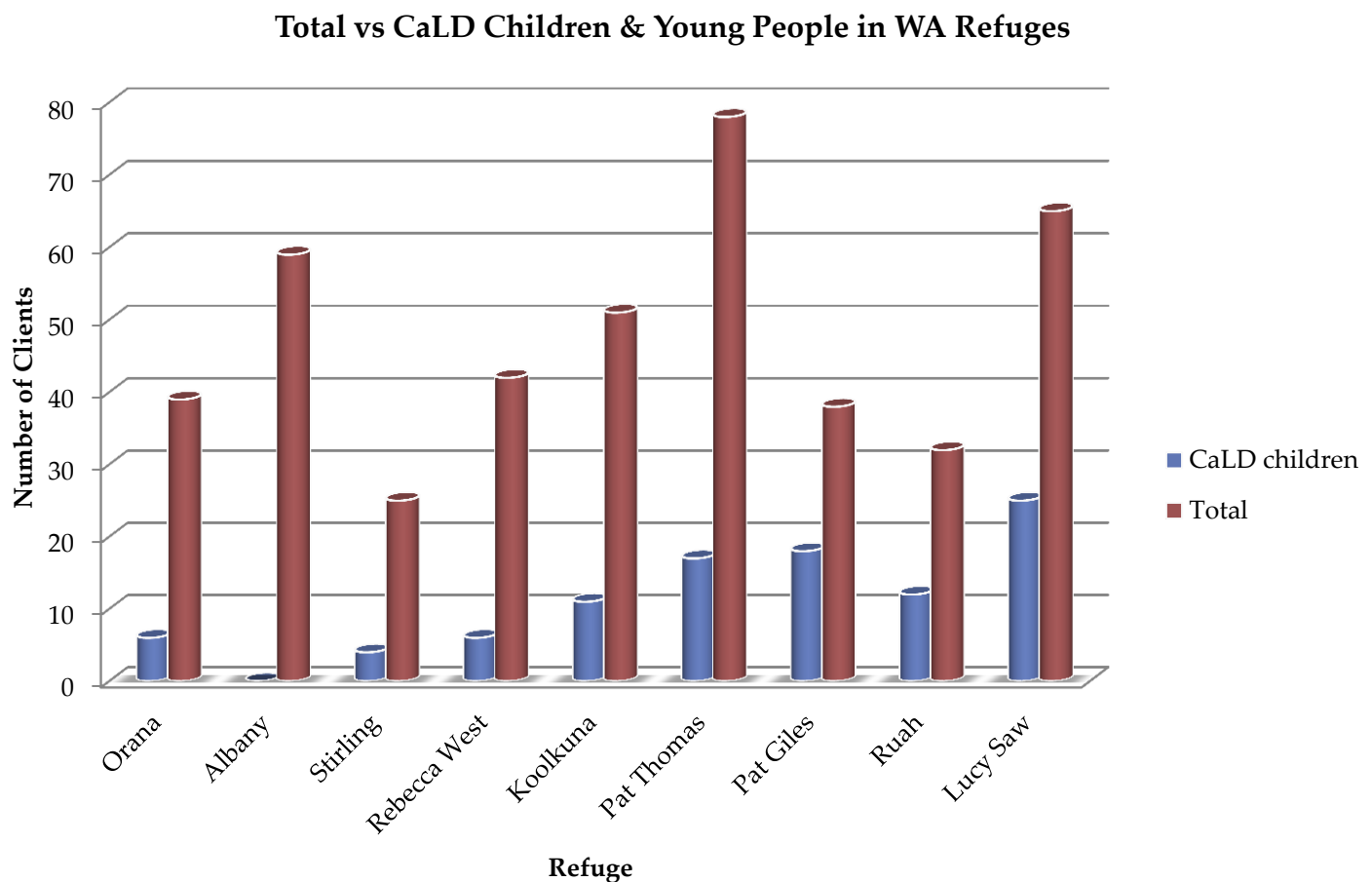


Figure 7. *CaLD children and young people comprised of 23% of the total amount of young clients in refuge*

Children & Young People with a Disability

In the refuges during the six month period, a total of 23 children and young people (or nearly 5% of the total amount of children and young people) were identified as having a disability. Pat Thomas had the greatest number of children and/or young people with a disability of some sort (9), while Albany, Stirling and Pat Giles did not have any young clients with a disability, or at least were not able to identify/diagnose any children or young people with a disability.

"We've had children with learning disabilities and a little girl with physical disabilities. We have set up a sensory play area to cater for children who need this. We have found that children who do not have special needs also benefit from the sensory play area."

– Nardine Wimmin's

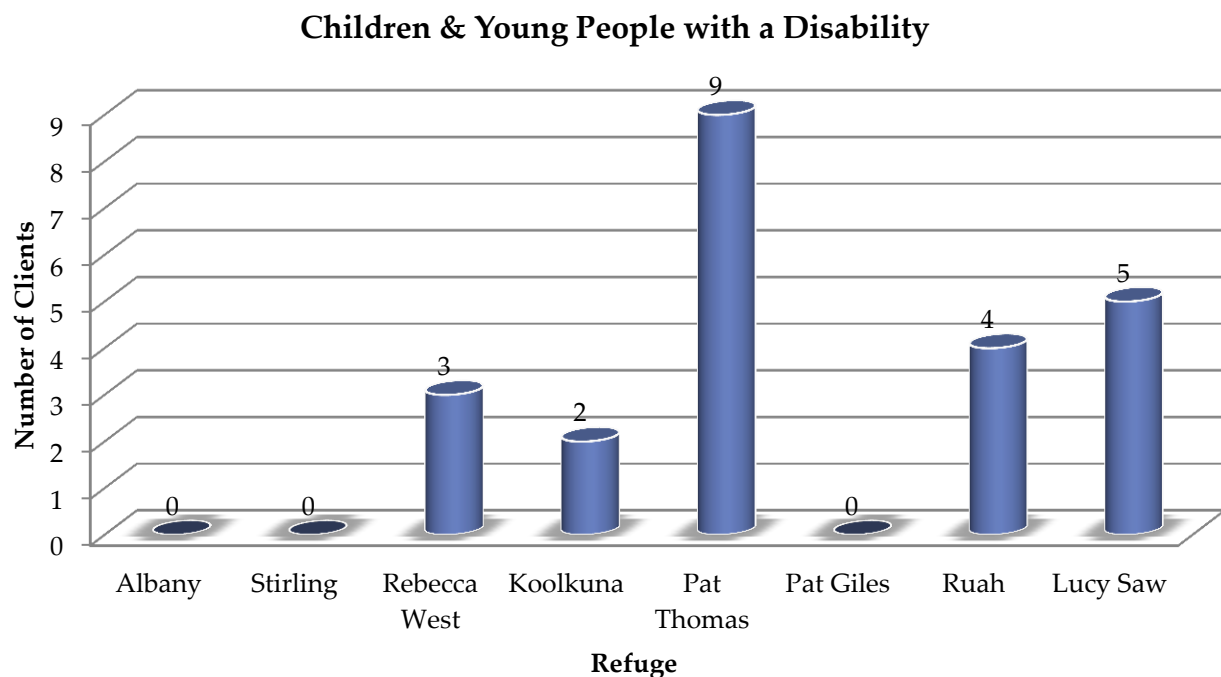


Figure 8. *The amount of young clients with a disability*

Note: in the case that no disability was visible or was not disclosed by either child or mother/carer, it would not have been recorded.

Household Structure prior to Living in Refuge

Household structures differed between young clients; living in a nuclear family with a couple and children, living with extended family, and living with a single mother. The majority of young clients used to live with their single mother (149) before entering refuge, followed by some living in a family with a couple and children (84). A few young clients used to live with their extended family (20). Respondents who were not sure about household structure and living arrangements at the time for the survey answered 'unknown' (23).

Table 7. Household structure type before entering the refuge

<i>Household type</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
<i>Couple with children</i>	84
<i>Extended family</i>	20
<i>Single female with children</i>	149
<i>Unknown</i>	23
Total	259

Source of Referrals

The majority of young clients are referred to refuges by the Department for Child Protection & Family Support (99), which is closely followed by a National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) service (75). The third greatest source of referral was made by the mother/carer themselves (42).

Table 8. Source of referrals into refuge

<i>Children referred from..</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
<i>Mother (self-referral)</i>	42
<i>NAHA Service</i>	75
<i>DCPFS</i>	99
<i>Police</i>	25
<i>Unknown</i>	2
<i>Other*+ -^#</i>	34
Total	277

Note: "Other" was DVAS, another refuge, Women's Health Care Centre's & Multicultural Agencies, Crisis Care, DV Helpline, Counsellors, Community Legal Services, Churches, Red Cross Family Service & friends.

Child Advocate/Child Support Worker Hours

While the amount of children and young people living in refuge at any one time over the six month period fluctuated, most of the refuges only had one full time child-specific worker (either a child support worker or child advocate), despite the amounts of children and young people who accessed crisis accommodation.

Pat Giles had two full time workers (2.0FTE) to work with the children and young people. Orana, Rebecca West, Koolkuna and Lucy Saw each only had one full time worker (Koolkuna shares 0.5FTE between two child-specific staff members per week). Albany, Stirling, and Pat Thomas had a 0.5FTE (part time) and Ruah had a 1.5FTE (two staff per week; one full time, one part time).

Table 9. Source of referrals into refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Child Support/Advocate FTE</i>
<i>Orana</i>	<i>1.0 FTE</i>
<i>Albany</i>	<i>0.5 FTE</i>
<i>Stirling</i>	<i>0.5 FTE</i>
<i>Rebecca West</i>	<i>1.0 FTE</i>
<i>Koolkuna</i>	<i>1.0 FTE</i>
<i>Pat Thomas</i>	<i>0.5 FTE</i>
<i>Pat Giles</i>	<i>2.0 FTE</i>
<i>Ruah</i>	<i>1.5 FTE</i>
<i>Lucy Saw</i>	<i>1.0 FTE</i>

Note: Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 1.0 is equal to a full time position or around 38hrs/wk, therefore; 0.5 is part time and 2.0 indicates two full time positions.

"I believe that refuges need at least two Child Support Workers, one specialising in younger children and one to cater for older children's needs which are of course very different. "

– Nardine Wimmin's



Comparison of work hours to young clients

In Figure 9., the graph shows how many children and young people sought refuge over the six month period compared to the FTE of child-specific staff. Over the period, Pat Thomas had the most amount of young clients (78), and also had one of the shortest periods of employment for the child-specific staff member at 0.5FTE (expressed as 5 on the graph). Albany also had a great number of young clients (59) with one of the least FTE of 0.5. Pat Giles had an average number of young clients (38) with two full time child-specific staff members (2.0FTE, expressed as 20 on the graph). The second least amount of disparity between young client intake and child-specific staff was at Ruah who had 32 children over the period and had a 1.5FTE (two child-specific staff per week).

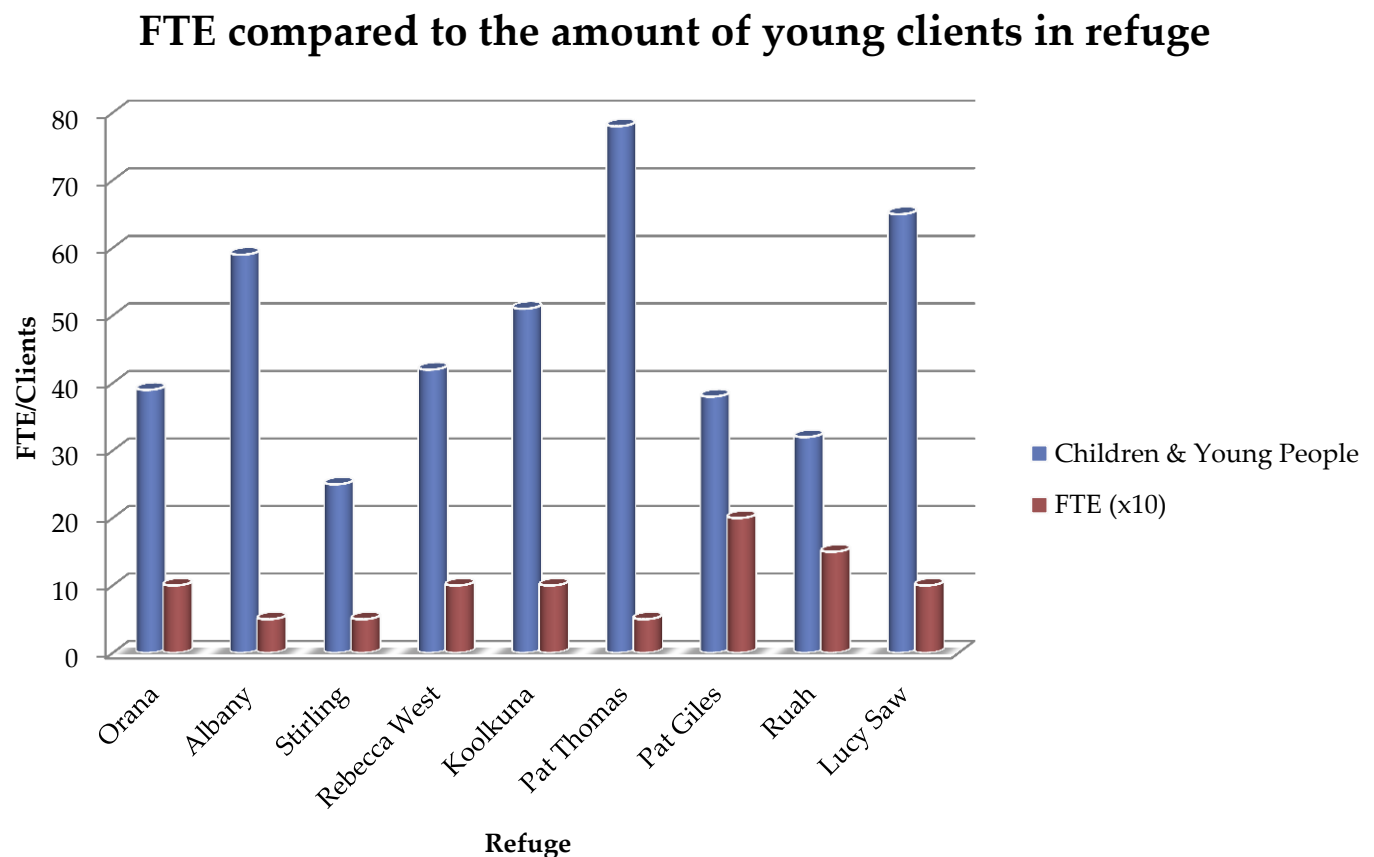


Figure 9. *The amount of young clients in refuge over the six month period compared to the FTE of the child-specific staff member*



Comments on Client Feedback

Child Advocates and Child Support Workers who responded to the survey were asked about their young client's sense of safety and wellbeing while in refuge. The reports were provided by both the children and young people and their mothers/carers.

The respondents to the consultation were asked:

"Have mothers ever given you the impression that your refuge has provided them with a safe and supportive environment, especially for their children? How so? "

Their responses included feedback relating to the:

- *Environment:* many respondents reported that mothers/carers felt that their children were comfortable and safe while at the crisis accommodation service.

"Yes. Mothers express this on the exit feedback forms we provide them, they also directly tell me that they feel safe and assistance with their children is extremely beneficial. Some mothers have also come back or phoned the refuge to let us know they are doing well thanks to the support and assistance provided by the refuge. Our annual children's Christmas party is also an occasion where mothers express how grateful they are for the support they received with their children." –

Pat Thomas

"The feedback we receive is always positive in that the environment was safe and supportive" – Koolkuna

"During the Child Assessment meeting, the mother's often indicate how their children are much more settled and happy since arriving at the refuge." – Stirling

- *Education:* resources such as protective behaviours were very well received by the children and young people and valued as an excellent educational tool by mothers/carers.

We provide Family Fun, Magic 1-2-3, Protective Behaviours, Family Rhyme Time and any other referral to other agencies required by the family. The feedback always refers to the mums and children ' - learning new songs to distract their children, ways



to manage their children's behaviour in a more positive manner, and educating and empowering the mums by gaining confidence in their parenting ability".

– Koolkuna

- *Health:* the mothers feel as though their children have been supported well through counselling and referrals to other health professionals and attending medical appointments with the children and young people.

"Sometimes children have to attend hospital appointments, which of course we assist with" – Nardine Wimmin's

"Always. As children are supported with counselling ,schooling, recreational, and a safe warm place to reside, the Mothers always remark how supportive and happy the children became whilst staying at Orana." – Orana Refuge

- *Socialisation:* the type of safe and secure environment for children and young people allowed them to 'open-up' and socialise with their peers.

"That they are able to sleep peacefully and are getting all the support, That when the kids are with the Child support worker they are able to do relax, chat with staff, That they are independent, That they are ready to move on and do some courses & That their children are able to interact with other children and improve their social skills." – Lucy Saw



References

Homelessness Australia. (2013). *Homelessness in Western Australia*. Retrieved from:
[http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/images/publications/Infographics/WA -
updated Jan 2014.pdf](http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/images/publications/Infographics/WA-_updated_Jan_2014.pdf)

Appendix

Survey Respondents

Regional/Remote

Albany Women's Centre	<i>Albany</i>
Pat Thomas Memorial House	<i>Mandurah</i>
Lucy Saw Centre	<i>Rockingham</i>

Perth Metropolitan

Orana	<i>Bayswater</i>
Stirling	<i>Stirling</i>
Rebecca West	<i>Ridgewood</i>
Koolkuna	<i>Midland</i>
Nardine Wimmin's	<i>Belmont</i>
Graceville	<i>Highgate</i>
Patricia Giles Centre	<i>Joondalup</i>
Ruah	<i>Highgate</i>



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