

Children & Young People in Refuge: 1st July – 31st December 2014

A survey of 10 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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Executive Summary

In Western Australia, there are 38 crisis accommodation services for those escaping domestic and family violence. Of those 38 services, 3 are for single women only, 5 are for families only, 9 are for both families and singles, 2 are 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 2014) 10 refuges responded to the consultation request. Six were from the Perth metropolitan area and four were from regional/remote/rural 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 ²
1 Orana House	Albany Women's Centre
2 Nardine Wimmins Refuge	Marnja Jarndu
3 Mary Smith	South-West Refuge
4 Warrawee	Geographe Women's Refuge
5 Starick House	Gascoyne Women's Refuge
6 Byanda/Graceville	Marnin Bowa Dumbara
7 Harmony Place (formerly Ruah)	Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service
8 Wooree Miya	Marninwarntikura
9 Patricia Giles Centre	Chrysalis House
10 Kira House	Ngaringga Ngurra
11 Koolkuna	Goldfields Women's Refuge
12 Rebecca West House	Salvation Army Karratha Women's Refuge
13 Stirling	Gawooleng Yawoodeng
14	Pat Thomas Memorial House
15	Djookanka House
16	Newman Women's Shelter
17	Magnolia Women's Centre (formally Waminda)
18	Hedland Women's Refuge
19	Lucy Saw Centre
20	Manga Tharndu Maya
21	Karijini Family Violence Prevention Service
22	Ngnowar Aerwah Safe House

² The Lucy Saw Centre and the Pat Thomas Memorial House have now been classified as Regional refuges whereas in the previous report they were considered Metropolitan refuges.

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

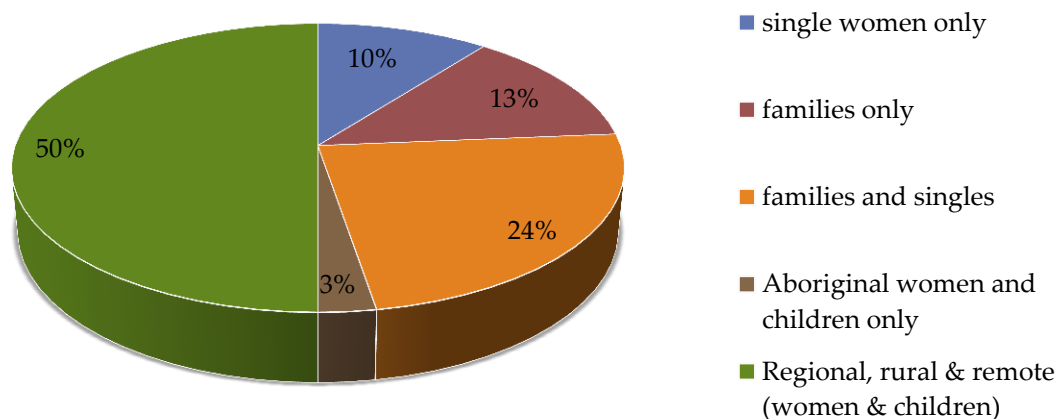


Figure 1. *WA Services provide supported accommodation to a variety of client-bases*

Refuges that do not have Child Support Workers/Child Advocates

Seven out of the eight refuges that did not have a child specific worker were from regional/rural/remote locations and one was from a Metropolitan refuge. All of the seven regional/rural/remote refuges with no child-specific staff member were predominantly to support Aboriginal clients.

Table 2. A list of Metropolitan and Rural/Regional/Remote refuges in WA that do not have a specific role for the Child Support Worker/Child Advocate

	Metropolitan Refuge	Rural/Regional/Remote Refuge
1	Wooree Miya	Marnja Jarndu
2		Gascoyne Women's Refuge
3		Marnin Bowa Dumbara
4		Ngaringga Ngurra
5		Salvation Army Karratha Women's Refuge
6		Karijini Family Violence Prevention Service
7		Ngnowar Aerwah Safe House

Total amount of Children & Young People in Refuge

Over the six month period from the beginning of July to the end of December 2014, there were 523 children and young people seeking refuge in the 11 surveyed WA refuges. The highest numbers of children and young people seeking refuge could be seen at Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service (74), the Goldfields (64) and Rockingham (61). All of the refuges with the highest totals were from regional areas.

Total Children & Young People in Refuge: 1st Jul - 31st Dec 2014

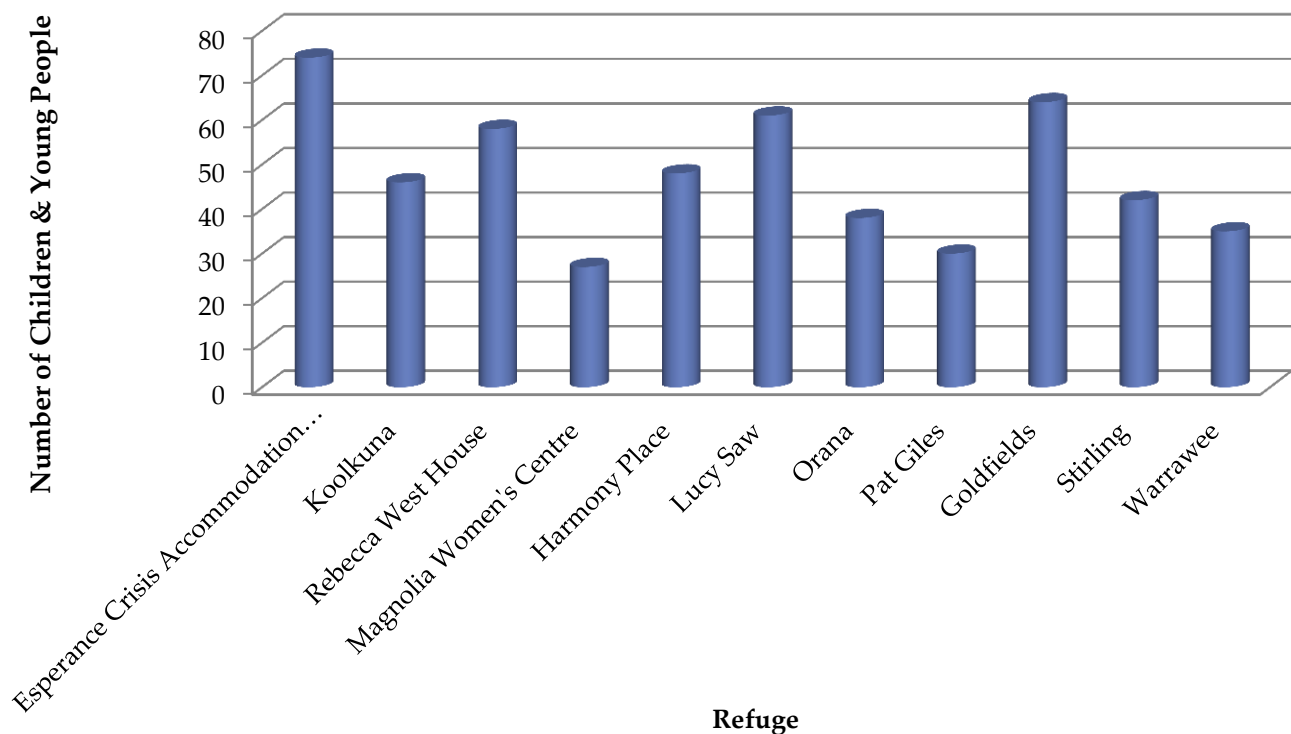


Figure 2. The total number of children and young people in refuge

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/carer:

“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
- 14 – 16yrs
- 17 – 18yrs

While refuges might have supported children and young people of all of the various age groupings, the two most common age groups were 0- 3 and 4 – 8 years. Therefore, the majority of young clients are under the age of 8.

Table 3. Most Common Age Group

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>most common age group</i>
Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service	0 – 3
Koolkuna	0 – 3
Rebecca West House	0 – 3
Magnolia Women's Centre	4 – 8
Harmony Place	4 – 8
Lucy Saw	No Data
Orana	4 – 8
Pat Giles	4 – 8
Goldfields	No Data
Stirling	0 – 3
Warrawee	0 – 3

Note: Orana and Stirling only take boys up to 17 years. “No Data” indicates no one most common age group.



Ongoing Clients

The number of ongoing clients from the end of June 2014 into the survey period was recorded. The greatest number of ongoing clients from June 2014 into July - December 2014 was 39 (Koolkuna), followed by 15 (Harmony Place).

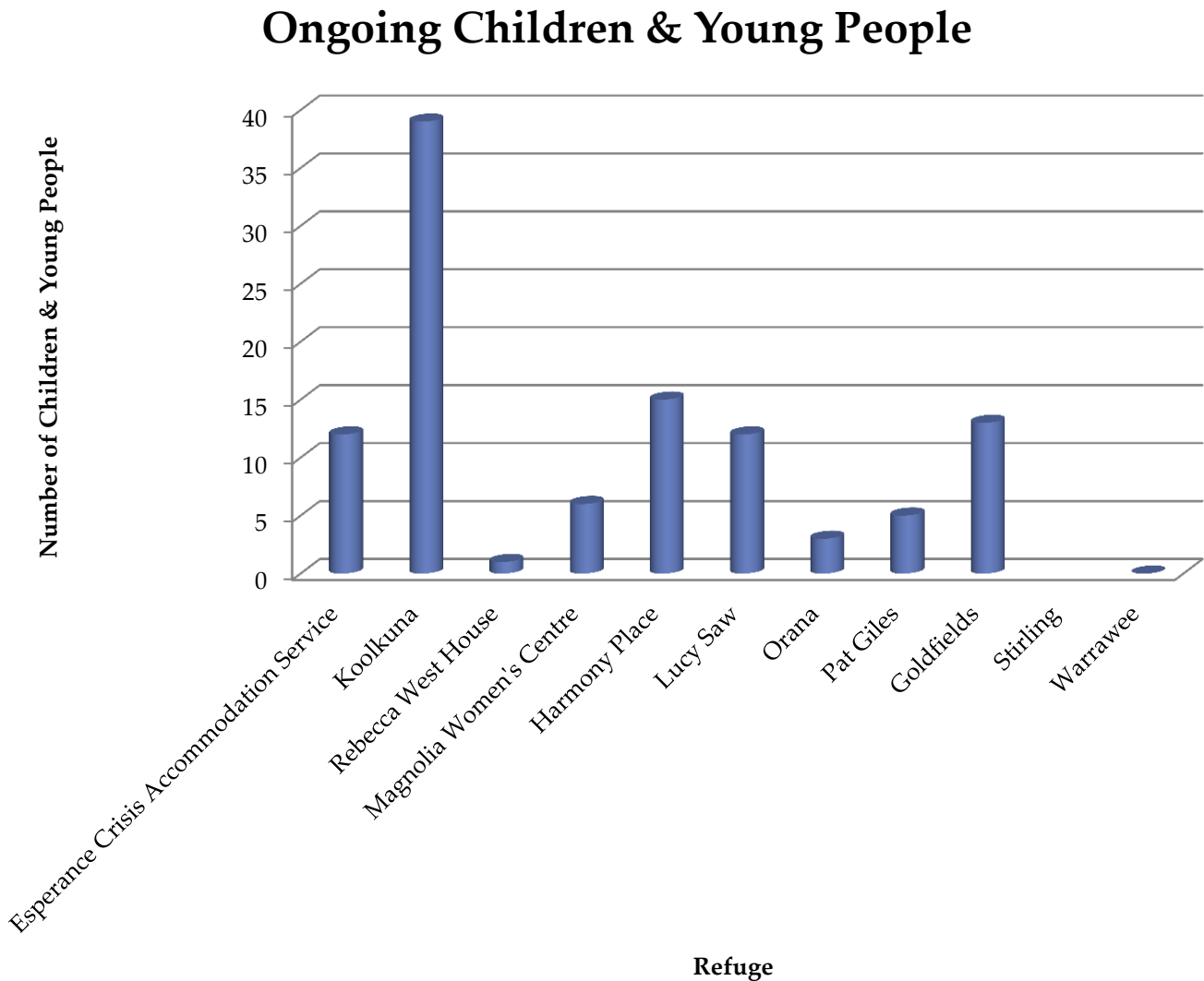


Figure 3. *The number of ongoing children and young people in refuge*

Note: Stirling did not provide any information.





The Average Length of Stay in Refuge

Refuge services have differing models of care. Some only take short-stay clients for up to three months at a maximum, while others take on more long term clients for longer than three months. Harmony Place has the longest average length of client's staying accommodated (120 days), followed by Orana (92.7 days). The overall average length of stay was 39 days.

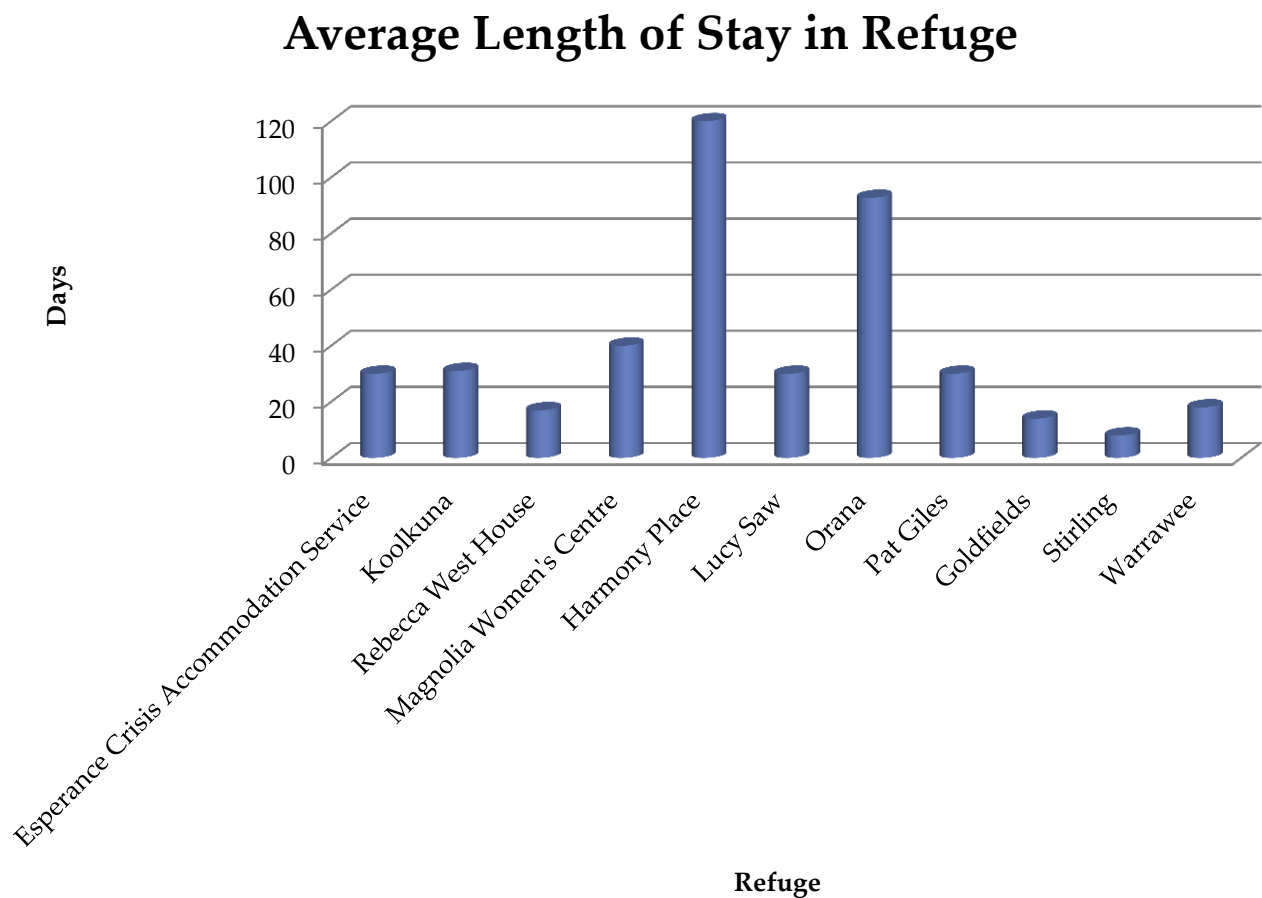


Figure 4. *The average length of stay in refuge*

The Range of Days Spent in Refuge

Each refuge has policies around how long clients can be accommodated for. Usually, women and their children might only stay one night in refuge to escape violence. After the first night they may decide to return to their homes or seek alternate accommodation with relatives etc. Seven out of the eleven refuges that responded to this question supported clients for only one night. The highest minimum was seen at both Koolkuna and Orana with a minimum stay of 14 days for women and their children. The highest maximum was seen at Harmony Place (180 days), followed by Stirling (153 days).

Table 4. Range of days spent in refuge

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>range of days</i>
Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service	1 to 30
Koolkuna	14 to 42
Rebecca West House	2 to 91
Magnolia Women's Centre	1 to 86
Harmony Place	1 to 180
Lucy Saw	2 to 151
Orana	14 to 98
Pat Giles	1 to 90
Goldfields	1 to 21
Stirling	1 to 153
Warrawee	1 to 28



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 in refuge services, and actually, the main clients.

The greatest ratio between children and young people per mother/carer was 4:1 at the Magnolia ‘Women’s’ Centre. This was followed by 3 children and young people for every mother/carer at the Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service, and 2.3 and 2.2 at Orana and Stirling, respectively.

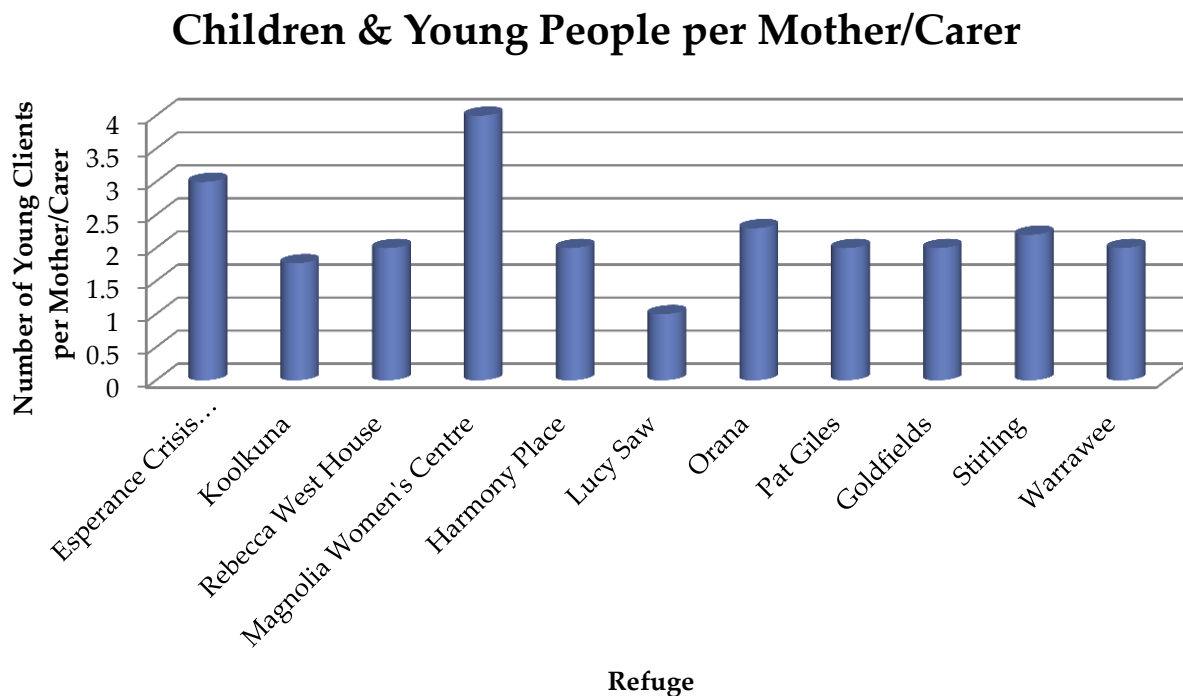


Figure 5. *The average ratio of children to mothers in refuge was greater than 2:1*

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.

Schooling

Of the 523 children and young people seeking refuge at the ten surveyed refuges, a total of 251 were supported by the refuge staff to become linked into schooling. This may have involved supporting them at their existing schools, helping them to settle into a new school, communicating with the school to speak about the perpetrator and any violence restraining order in place etc.

Of the total number of children and young people in refuge during the period, 51% had access to schooling. This could be because some children and young people only stay for very short amounts of time and are not in school while they are seeking refuge.

Children & Young People linked to Schooling while in Refuge

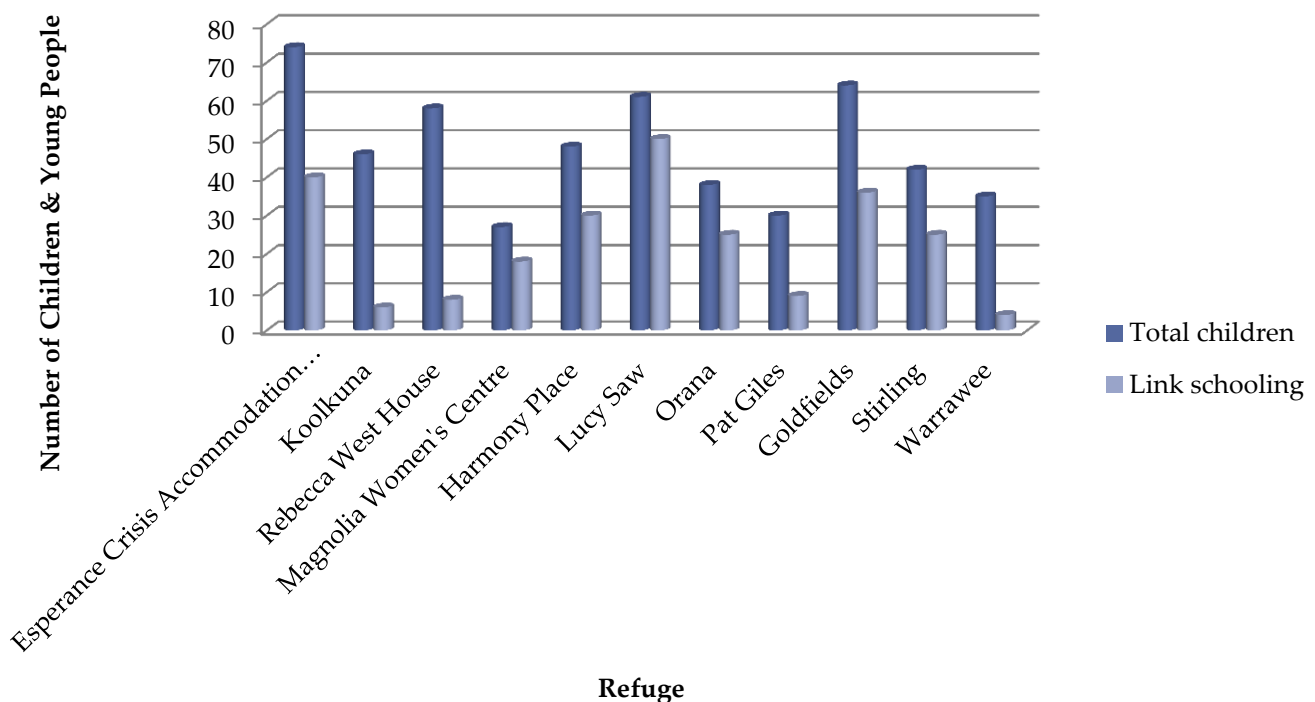


Figure 6. Children & young people linked to schooling while in refuge

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.

Of the total number of children and young people in refuge during the period, 38% were known to have access to healthcare.

Children & Young People linked to Healthcare while in Refuge

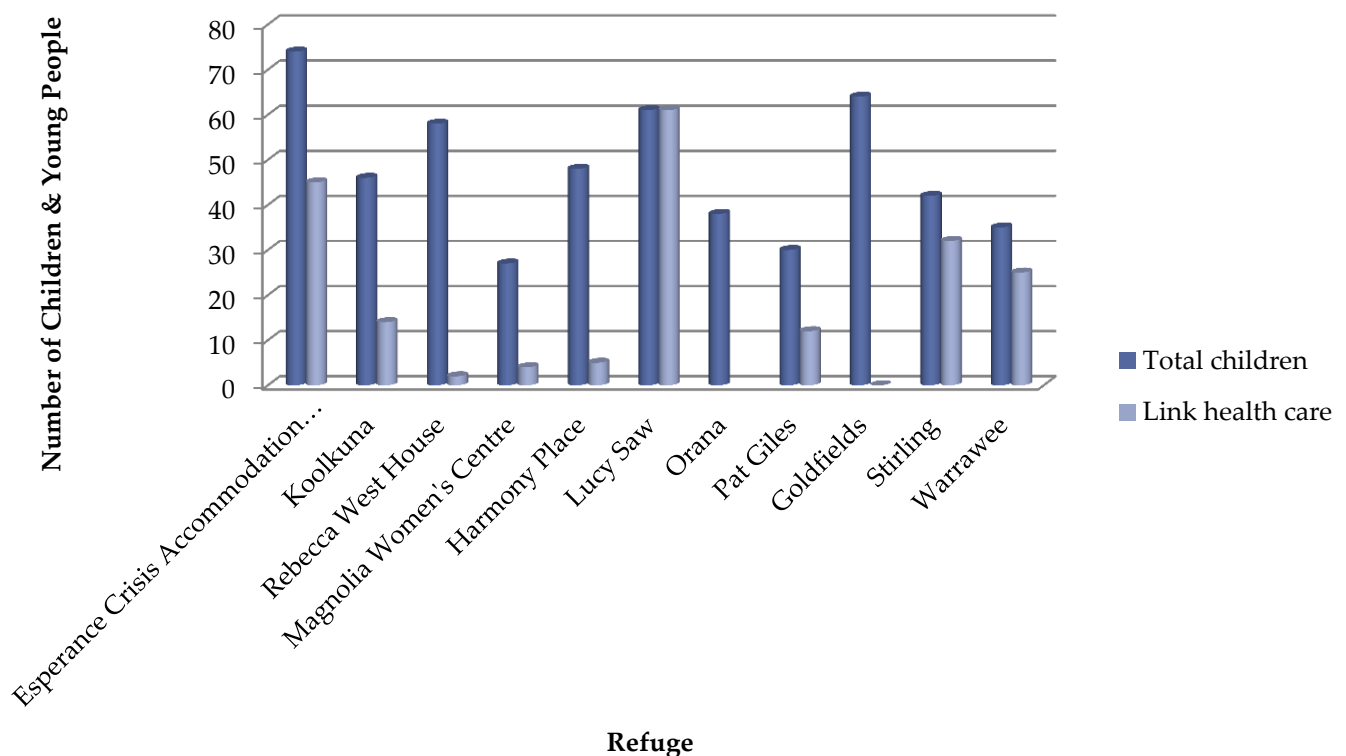


Figure 7. Children & young people linked to healthcare while in refuge

Note: No data was provided by Orana, where Goldfields had zero.



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.

There were several types of support that could have been chosen per client. The most common type of support was "General" support. This predominantly means ensuring that children's and young people's basic needs are met. Court/justice support was the type of support least provided to clients (only 5.5%).

Table 5. Children & young people linked to other types of support

<i>Type of Support</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>Percentage of total support</i>
General	397	32%
Family	199	16%
Recreation	243	19%
Education	158	12.5%
Health	163	13%
Court/Justice	69	5.5%
Other ~	24	2%
Totals	1253	100%

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

Aboriginal Children & Young People

Aboriginal children and young people consistently 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 (ABS, 2007). However, the number of Aboriginal children and young people in the crisis accommodation services that participated in the study made up 42% of all young clients. It is important to note however, that if Orana had sent in their data on this question, there is a possibility that it would be higher. If the regional/rural/remote refuges sent in their data, it is assumed it would be greater still.

Comparison of Aboriginal Children & Young People to the Overall Total

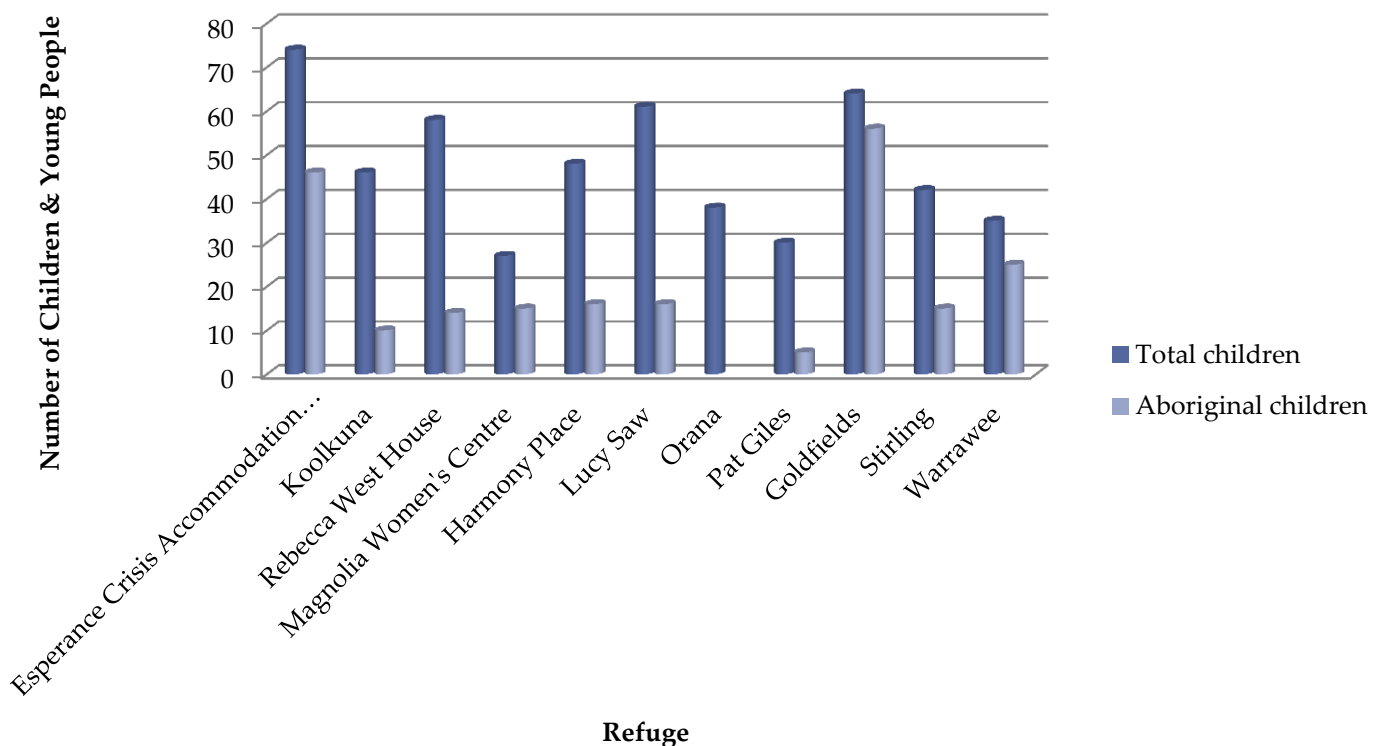


Figure 8. The total number of Aboriginal children and young people in refuge comprised 42% of the overall total number of young clients

Note: No data was provided by Orana.

Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) Children & Young People

In the six month period there was a total of 127 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, 24% were from CaLD backgrounds.

The refuge that had the greatest number of CaLD clients was the Warrawee (29), followed by Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service (28), Harmony Place (16) and Koolkuna (14).

The refuge to have the least number of CaLD clients was Magnolia Women's Centre in Northam (0) and Kalgoorlie (4). Both refuges with the least amount of CaLD clients were from regional/remote/rural locations.

Comparison of CaLD Children and Young People to the Overall Total

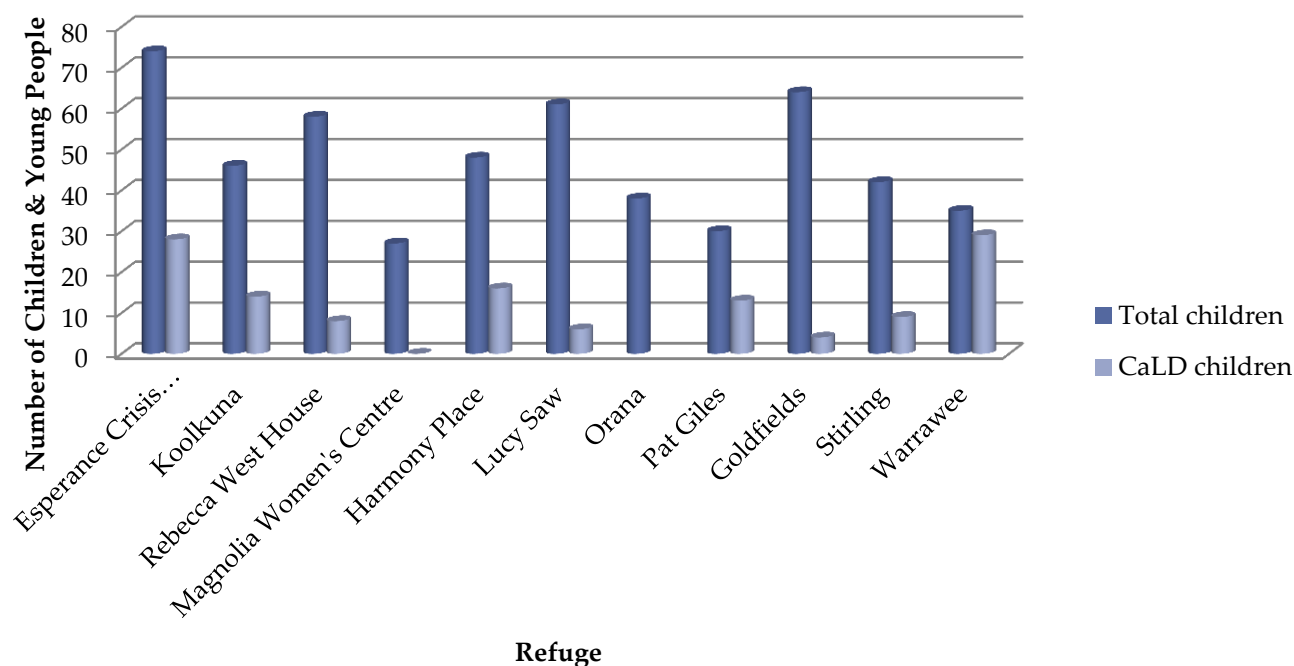


Figure 7. CaLD children and young people comprised of 20% of the total amount of young clients in refuge

Children & Young People with a Disability

In the refuges during the six month period, a total of 18 children and young people (or 3.5% of the total amount of children and young people) were identified as having some form of disability. The amount of children and young people that had a physical, intellectual or medical disability was 18, and some other form of disability was 29. Lucy Saw had the most clients with a physical, intellectual or medical disability (7), while Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service had children and young people with some form of disability that was identified as a learning difficulty (28).

This data might seem higher at the Lucy Saw Centre and at the Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service because the Child Advocates there are referring the children out to specialists who can identify these disabilities, or because they consider learning difficulties to be a disabling factor in child development (which it absolutely is) where others might not have thought to include this in the data.

Children & Young People in Refuge with a Physical, Intellectual or Medical Disability

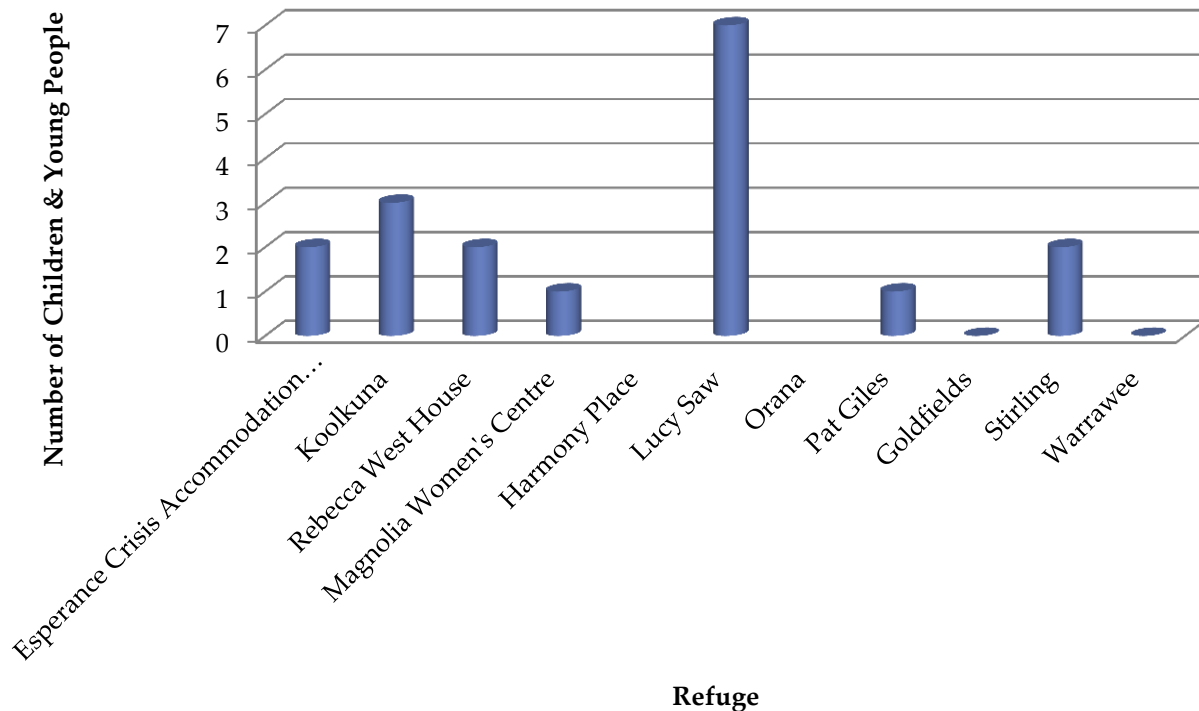


Figure 8. *The amount of young clients with a disability*

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. No data was provided by Harmony Place or Orana.

Household Structure prior to Living in Refuge & Source of Referrals

Household structure

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 (138), followed by their mother and her partner (either husband, boyfriend or girlfriend) (131), followed by their extended family (32). Respondents who were not sure about household structure and living arrangements at the time of the survey answered 'unknown' (1).

Table 6. Household structure type before entering the refuge

<i>Household type</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
Couple with children	131
Extended family	32
Single female with children	138
Unknown	1
Total	302

Source of Referrals

The majority of young clients are referred to refuges by their mother (129), followed by referrals by "other" (84), the Police (64), the Department for Child Protection & Family Support (52), and a National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) service (14).

Table 7. Source of referrals into refuge

<i>Children referred from..</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
Mother (self-referral)	129
NAHA Service	14
DCPFS	52
Police	64
Unknown	1
Other*	84
Total	344

* "Other" includes Centrelink, Employment services, Family and friends, Pat Giles referrals, Safe at Home, Crisis Care, Churches, School Nurses, Families, Friends that have used the refuge, Multicultural Women's Advocacy Centre other NGOs (13), mental health (3), hospital (3), Entry Point, another Refuge, DV Helpline, Uniting Care West.

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 access crisis accommodation.

Pat Giles had two full time workers (2.0FTE) to work with the children and young people. Koolkuna, Rebecca West House, Magnolia Women's Centre, Harmony Place and Orana only had one FTE (Koolkuna shares 0.5FTE between two child-specific staff members per week). The rest of the refuges had less than 1.0FTE, with the majority of them regional/rural/remote refuges that see the most amount of clients.

Table 8. FTE of child-specific staff

<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Child-specific worker's FTE</i>
Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service	0.8
Koolkuna	1
Rebecca West House	1
Magnolia Women's Centre	1
Harmony Place	1
Lucy Saw	0.6
Orana	1
Pat Giles	2
Goldfields	0.8
Stirling	0.45
Warrawee	0.5
Average	0.92

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

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, Esperance had the most amount of young clients (74), and only had one child-specific staff member working not even a full time position (0.8 FTE; expressed as 8 on the graph). The Goldfields had the second greatest number of young clients (64) with the same FTE as Esperance (0.8FTE).

It is very clear that Pat Giles has the best child to Child Advocate ratio. Pat Giles had 30 clients during the period (49 was the average per refuge in this period) with two full time child-specific staff members 2.0FTE.

Comparing Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to Client Intake

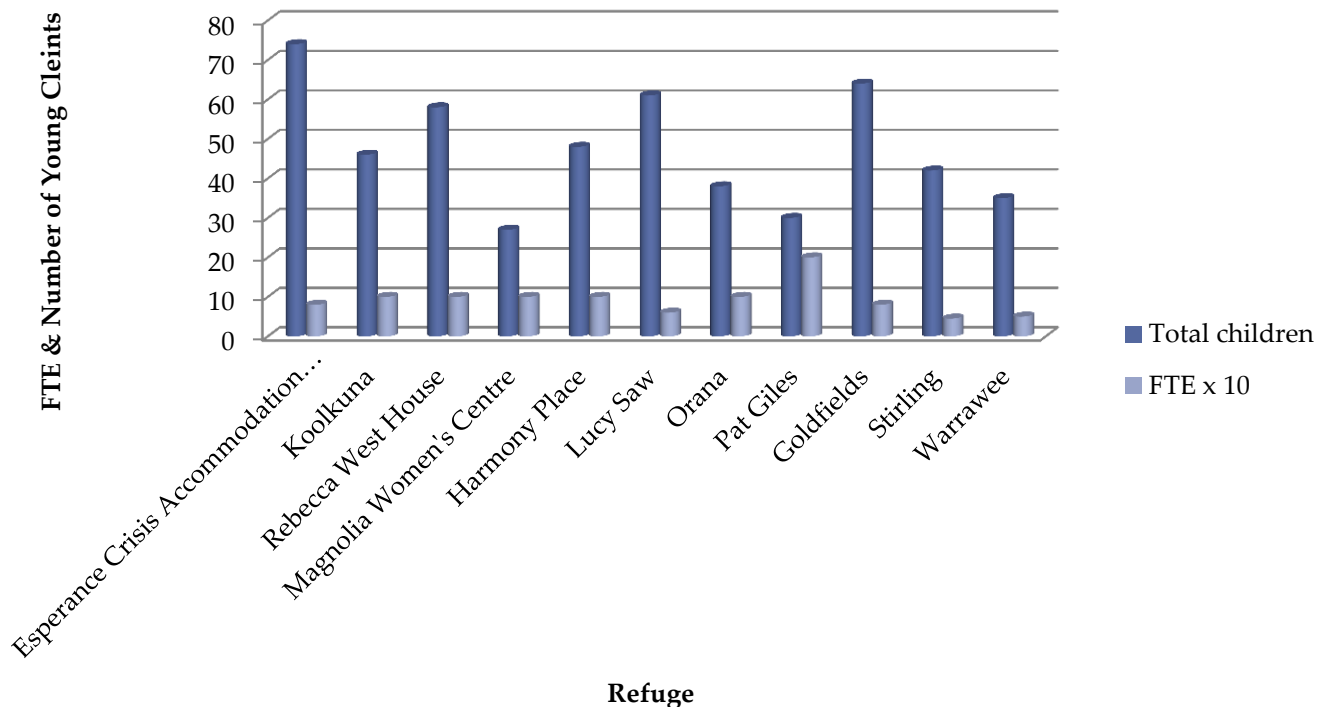


Figure 9. The amount of young clients in refuge over the six month period compared to the FTE of the child-specific staff member

Comparing Regional/Remote and Metropolitan FTE and number of young clients

The average FTE for child advocate staff in regional/remote refuges is 0.8FTE (less than one full time child-specific staff member to work with children and young people escaping violence and accessing the refuge service per week). The average for the metropolitan areas was 0.99FTE (just under one child-specific refuge staff member per week). The average number of children and young people accessing a refuge service in a regional/remote location was 56.5. The average for the metropolitan refuges was 42.4 children and young people per refuge in the study period.

Regional/remote refuges see more young clients and have less working hours to support them. While this is the case, the average metropolitan FTE is still not satisfactory, meaning that the regional/remote FTE is highly unsatisfactory. Even worse still is the amount of regional/remote refuges that have young clients but have no child specific- staff member/s (see Table 2 for these refuges). All refuges still need another child-specific worker. It is hoped that in the near future all refuges will be able to follow the Patricia Giles Centre in having an FTE of 2.0.

Averages of Regional/Remote vs. Metro FTE and amount of Children & Young People as clients in Refuge Services

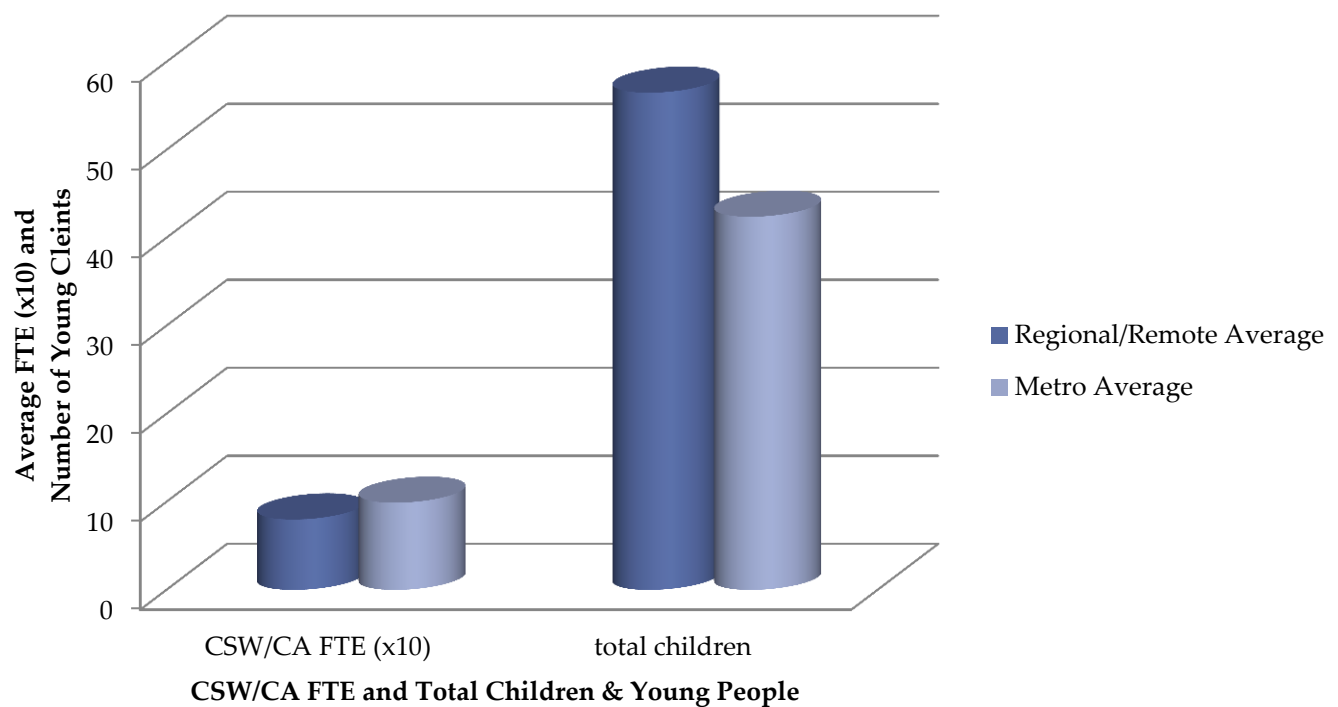


Figure 10. Comparing the average Regional/Remote Child Advocate FTE to the average Metropolitan and then assessing the average number of children and young people Child Advocates work with in their refuges over the study period.

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 respondents to the survey were asked:

"Do children/young people ever give you the impression that you and your refuge has provided them with a safe and supportive environment? How so?"

"Children and young people generally had a positive view staying at Refuge. This is mainly to feeling safe and in a supportive environment, having a good relationship with the child support worker and the other support worker."

One of the things that helped them to settle in was providing them with a bubby bags that contained items just for them (e.g., pj, toys, toiletries). They seemed settle and happy being at the refuge." – **Esperance**

"Yes the children do give an impression with a safe and supportive environment as we watch them recover from the trauma they have experienced. They slowly come out of themselves through counselling, the children's programs that are run, and our friendly and caring atmosphere." – **Koolkuna**

"Children appear more calm and relaxed. Behaviour improves once children feel safe. Interaction with other children improves, less aggression. Children become more extrovert and outgoing once settled. More smiles from the kids once trust is gained." – **Magnolia**

"A child has come to me and stated that he felt safe and did not want to leave he wanted to start school and stay. Most of the children come into my office and chat and they feel comfortable in the environment." – **Stirling**

"I feel that children in the Refuge have given the impression that they now feel safe in the Refuge by a decrease in bedwetting, communication development, and increased confidence. A teenager who was previously living at Warrawee also gave me the this impression through her drawings. I also got this impression from a child who had just arrived at the Refuge and was given a buddy bag, then attended a playgroup session. The child asked me if I was an angel." – **Warrawee**

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Appendix

Survey Respondents

Perth Metropolitan

1	Orana House	<i>Bayswater</i>
2	Stirling Women's Centre	<i>Stirling</i>
3	Rebecca West House	<i>Ridgewood</i>
4	Koolkuna	<i>Midland</i>
5	Patricia Giles Centre	<i>Joondalup</i>
6	Harmony Place	<i>Highgate</i>
7	Warrawee	<i>Fremantle</i>

Regional/Remote

8	Lucy Saw Centre	<i>Rockingham</i>
9	Waminda House	<i>Northam</i>
10	Goldfields Women's Refuge	<i>Kalgoorlie</i>
11	Esperance Crisis Accommodation Service	<i>Esperance</i>



Women's Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services (WA)



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