

2015 PLAY YOUR PART AWARDS FOR INSPIRING PREVENTION INITIATIVES AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

To: Canberra Fathers and Childrens Service (CanFaCS)

For: Dad's Place

'Dad's Place' provides homeless fathers with a controlled, safe, homely environment, to spend quality access time with their children, which strengthens family connections, during a time of emotional stress from separation.

Canberra Fathers and Childrens Service (CanFaCS) manages a number of houses around Canberra, supporting homeless fathers and their children. One of those houses is used for the 'Dad's Place' initiative.

For children to participate in the Dad's Place initiative the consent of their mother/guardian must be given, with the initiative operating in consultation with the mother or guardian and the relevant legal and judicial institutions, as some of the fathers are homeless as a result of their use of domestic violence.

All of the fathers have an appointed family worker (case worker) and the fathers are required to enter into dedicated case management procedures and protocols.

Each father is given a welcome pack with bedding, towels and toiletries suitable for the family's needs. Before each access visit, the father will make up the beds, hang familiar pictures on the walls, and place familiar toys in the children's bedrooms.

Family workers provide support to the fathers to ensure that they can meet their children's needs whilst in their care, including domestic and cooking skills and the means to provide treats for their children, such as pizza and vouchers.

From January to June 2015, 6 fathers and 13 children have used Dad's Place on a regular basis. One of the fathers is an Indigenous man who became separated from his family just before Christmas. He was then sleeping in his car and couch surfing with friends, impacting his mental health and he was unable to maintain his custody arrangements.

With the support of 'Dad's Place' he was able to re-engage with his children and resumed his 50% custody of them. He received medical treatment including regular visits with a psychologist, his family was given supported accommodation and he became employed part-time. After the first overnight visit with his children, the father said that they did not want to leave, and could not wait to come back.

"I don't know where I would be without the support of CanFaCS and the use of Dad's Place. Also the whole case management process was a very positive experience for me," said the father.

Research with CanFaCS in 2014 showed that engaging fathers in their 'father identity' was motivating for men to address their issues, especially when provided with support.

According to Michael Costigan, manager of CanFaCS, 'Dad's Place' provides children with an image of their father that is more positive than if they were to simply have a few hours with dad in a park or at McDonalds. Children also feel safer and more comfortable in a home environment.

Mr Costigan said that what I am most proud of – apart from the service offered by Dad's Place – is the way in which the caseworkers help their clients without judgement. The 'client' is the 'relationship' – the relationship between the fathers and their children is the focus.

"There is the all-too-oft sentiment that, because of the violence that has been perpetrated, "those guys don't deserve it," said Mr Costigan.

"The smiles on the faces of fathers and their children who participate in the Dad's Place initiative are something to be very proud of."