



Coalition for Women's Refuges

# Case Study

## A Refugee Worker's Perspective on the Going Home Staying Home Reforms

The intake criteria at my refuge changed following the Going Home Staying Home (GHS) reforms. Before the reforms, the refuge was for women with children that were escaping domestic violence. Following the reforms, any single woman or women with children, homeless for any given reason(s), were eligible to stay at the refuge. The following are some of the issues that arose at my refuge.

The service accepted single women with mental health issues, which was inappropriate as they were living communally with children. On one occasion there was an incident in which a woman at the refuge, who had a mental health diagnosis, became highly aggressive. I (the only staff member present) had to lock myself into my office and call the police, who removed the woman from the premises. At the time 3 small children were in the refuge and were visibly scared by what had happened.

Because some of the families at the refuge were not escaping domestic violence, male partners would come into the refuge to pick them up/drop them off. This was inappropriate in terms of those women residing at the refuge due to domestic violence, as the space should have been women-only.

Families escaping domestic violence still resided at the refuge but because the service did not have a domestic violence focus, the safety of the families escaping domestic violence was not a priority. For example, when families arrived, their safety was not assessed by staff (e.g. turning off location settings on phones, finding out about AVOs, contact with father etc). In my conversations with clients, it became apparent that their caseworkers were not having any discussions with their clients about domestic violence. Clients would drop their children at their ex-partner's house on the weekends, and staff were either unaware of this, or were but had not discussed safety with the women.

Due to the reforms, the organisation I worked for changed their staffing structure in order to provide the service with reduced funding. This meant caseworkers worked across at least three refuges and transitional housing, and had approximately 15 clients. This meant that high-need clients were not receiving adequate support. One family did not see a caseworker for three weeks after arriving at the refuge. Clients were frequently highly anxious about their situation, because no staff were supporting them with thinking about 'where to next'. It also meant that many clients stayed at the refuge longer than 3 months, because the caseworkers were not able to support clients into long-term accommodation due to their high workloads. Some clients were case managing each other due to the lack of support they were receiving. This was highly inappropriate given the trauma background that all clients had.

