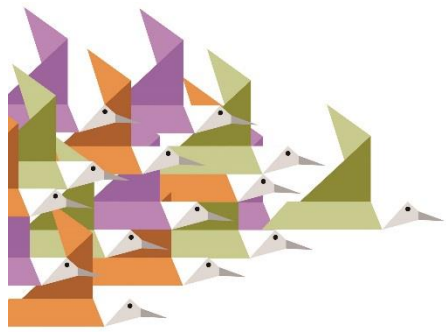National mapping & meta-evaluation outlining
key features of effective "safe at home" programs
that enhance safety and prevent homelessness

Presenter: **Assoc Prof Jan Breckenridge**
University of New South Wales
Facilitator: **Jodie Sloan**
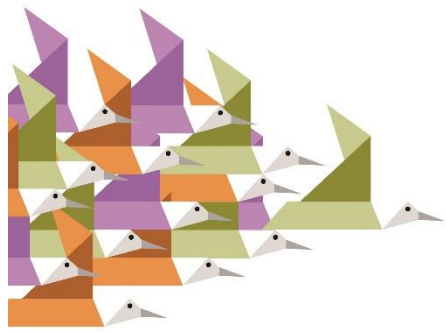Victim Support Service South Australia

'Safe at Home'

ANROWS Project 3.1: 'National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective 'safe at home' programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness'

- Associate Professor Jan Breckenridge, Convener Social Inquiry Cluster, School of Social Sciences and Co-convenor, Gendered Violence Research Network, University of New South Wales

- Professor Donna Chung, Head of Social Work, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University

- Dr Angela Spinney, Research Fellow/Lecturer, Swinburne Institute of Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology

- Dr Carole Zufferey, Lecturer in Social Work, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia

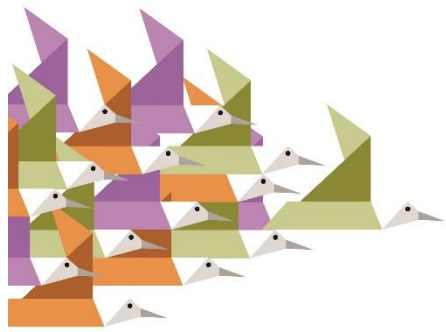UNSW AUSTRALIA | Gendered Violence Research Network

ANROWS Project 3.1

Three distinct activities:

1. State of Knowledge Report – 4 conceptual pillars

2. National Mapping of Safe at Home responses by jurisdiction

3. Meta-evaluation of existing Australian Safe at Home evaluations

The meta-evaluation:

*   examines the important program characteristics, outcome domains and research methods in evaluations of Australian Safe at Home programs

*   considers evidence of the effectiveness of Safe at Home programs

*   establishes a national, and potentially international, benchmark for future evaluations and responses in this field

*   provides future directions for policy makers, practitioners and researchers
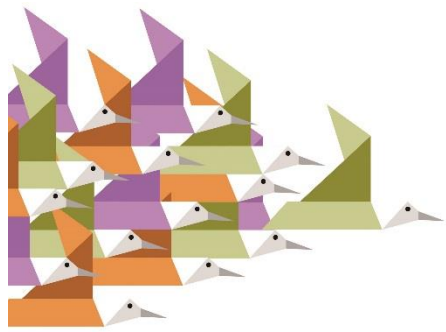
What is a Safe at Home response?

Safe at Home responses may be broadly defined as *programs, interventions and strategies which have a specifically funded, designated domestic and family violence focus*, and which aim to:

- prevent women who have left a violent relationship from entering or remaining longer than necessary in specialist homelessness services or supported accommodation

- provide ongoing assessment of risk & support women and children to remain safely in their home or in other independent housing of their choice at relationship end

- offer a criminal justice focus on women's safety, including proactive policing, assistance with AVOs (and exclusion provisions), court support

- assess and reduce the risk of the perpetrator using further violence and abuse towards their ex-partner and children, including safety alarms & safety upgrades to the property
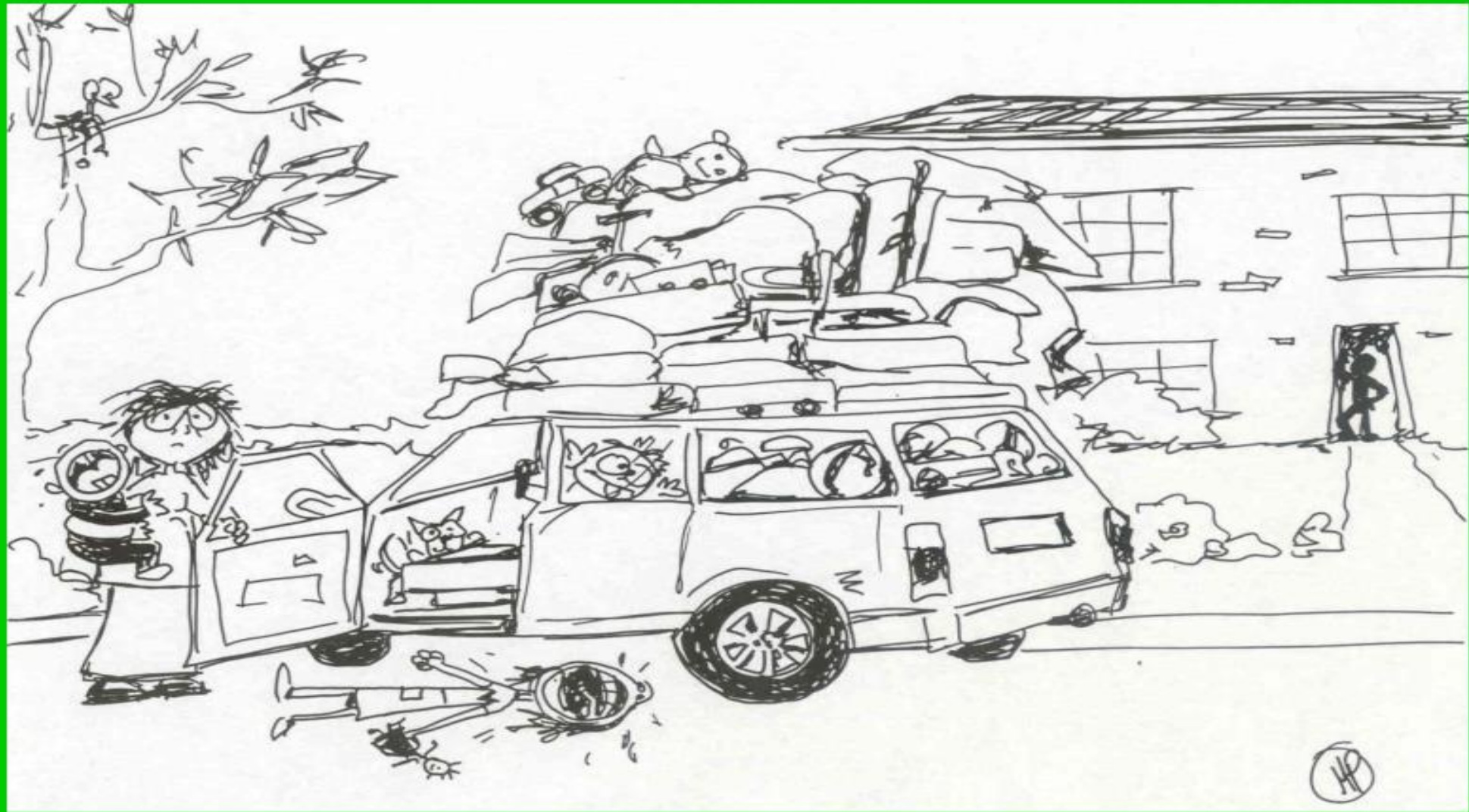
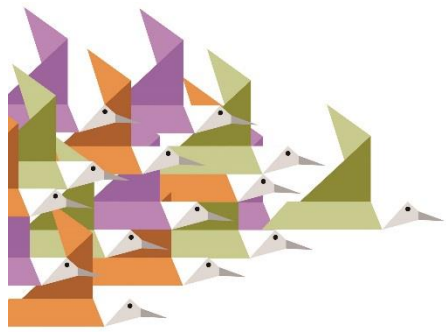# Philosophical underpinnings of Safe at Home responses

Safe at Home responses explicitly recognise that it is a <u>socially just</u> consequence for the perpetrator of violence to leave the family home

- Assumption that women leave the family home when leaving the violent perpetrator which has meant that DFV remains a leading reason for homelessness among women and children in Australia

- In 2013-14, **84,774** adults and children (**33 percent of all clients**) identified DFV as their main reason for seeking Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) assistance (AIHW, 2014)

- Recognition that some women when trying to escape a violent partner have nowhere suitable to go, and when women do escape they are often faced with homelessness and transience: activist claims – **DFV victims do *have* a home, they just cannot live in it**

- SHS which include refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation were able to offer support to only **44 percent** of those who had sought assistance (AIHW, 2014)

Why should I leave with my kids, and let him stay,
when he's committed the crime?
I'm the victim, it would be a lot easier for him to go.

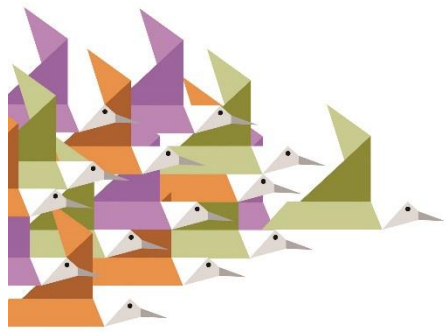# *Philosophical underpinnings of Safe at Home responses*

Safe at Home strategies and programs accept that the perpetrator is <u>solely accountable</u> for their violence and controlling behaviours, suggesting that their partners and children are not made homeless, or displaced from families, friends and schools

Safe at Home responses hold perpetrators accountable and require the support of various criminal justice interventions and strategies, such as:

1. civil and criminal remedies – protection orders and ouster/exclusion orders are crucial and require the Courts to act in order to effectively manage on-going perpetrator violence

2. proactive policing of breaches and further education of police

3. ongoing monitoring of perpetrator risk which can be shared across agencies and even jurisdictions – sharing perpetrator risk assessment can be helpful to agencies working with victims
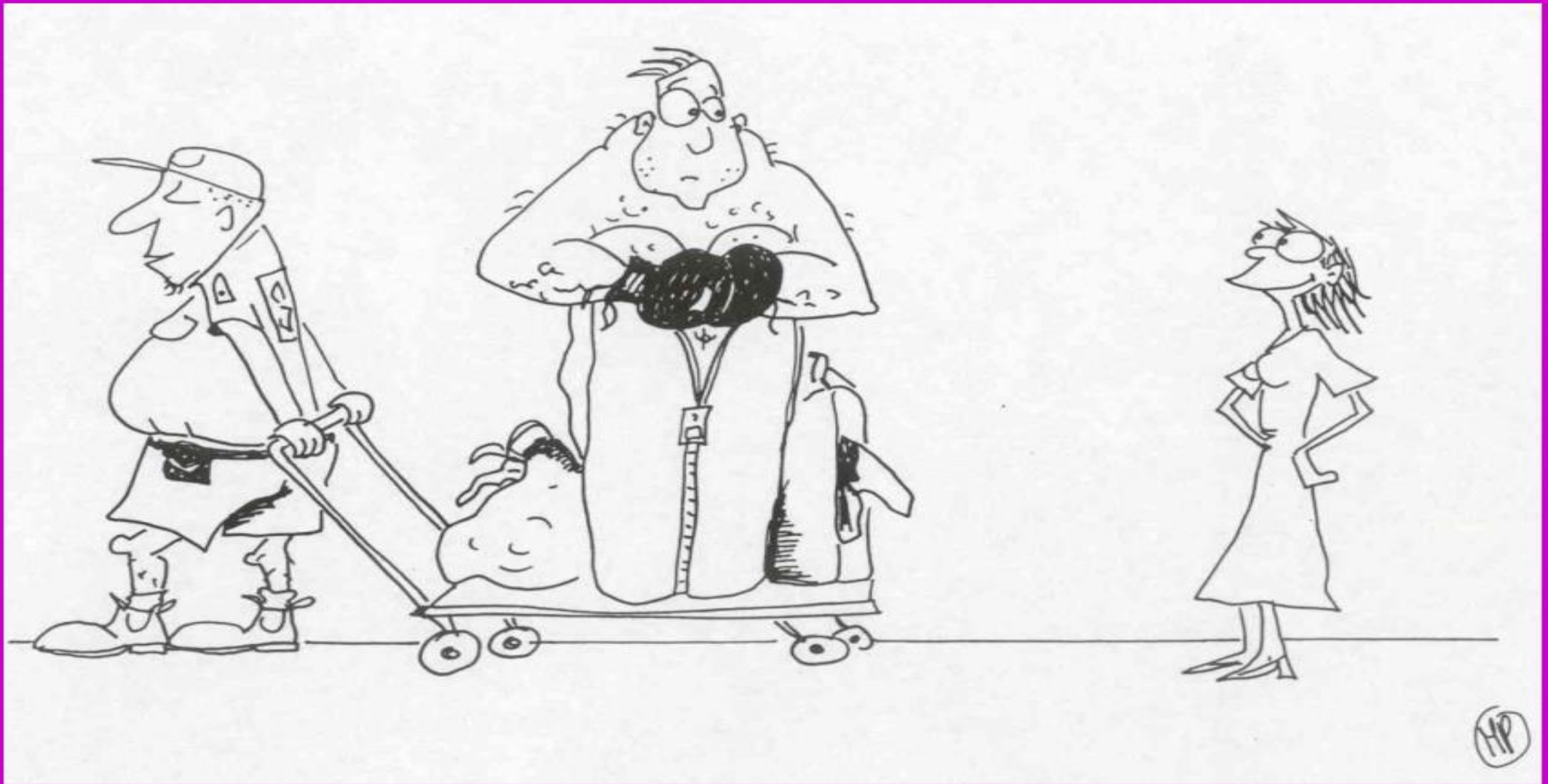
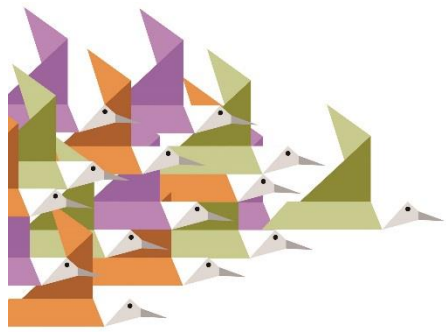Take him away officer, there's no room in my home for violence.

State of 'Our' Knowledge

Very little in peer reviewed literature that is specifically identified as 'Safe at Home'; more in grey literature such as government reports and evaluations
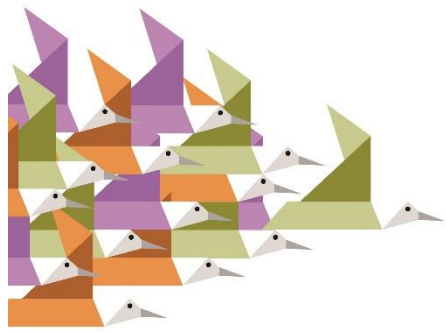
1. A **criminal justice focus** on maximising safety utilising a combination of legal, judicial, policing and home security provisions to exclude the perpetrator from the home and protect victims from post separation violence

2. A **coordinated or integrated intervention response** involving partnerships between government departments, sectors or local services

3. Safe at Home as a **homelessness prevention strategy** which includes ensuring women are informed about their housing options before the time of crisis, at separation and provides support for women to maintain their housing afterwards

4. Recognition of the importance of enhancing women's **economic security**
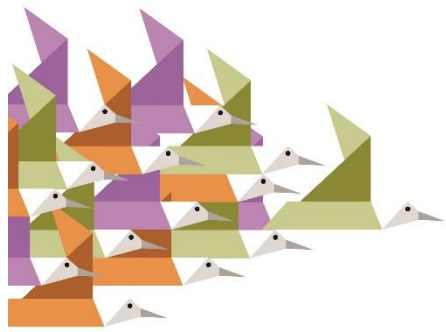
Process of a Meta-evaluation

- A meta-evaluation is a systematic assessment or over-arching evaluation of identified program evaluations, evaluation systems or specific evaluation tools in a clearly defined area of intervention – in this case, Safe at Home response evaluations

- Meta-evaluations ensure that the evidence is sufficiently credible for consideration when planning program improvements, and to make recommendations to enhance the quality of future evaluations

- Current meta-evaluation implements a synthesis meta-evaluation approach allowing researchers to draw different forms of evaluation together on a specific topic

- Purpose of a systematic process for a synthesis meta-evaluation of data from diverse methodological foundations is to give confidence to policy-makers and service providers to act on its findings
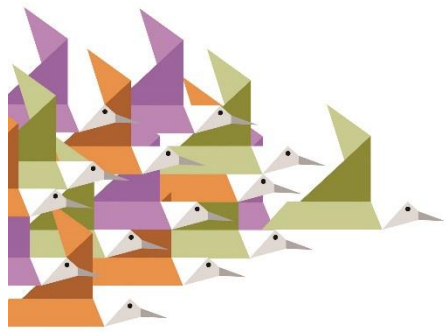
Safe at Home Meta-evaluation

- Total of 52 evaluations were identified for potential inclusion, reduced to 20 after applying the inclusion criteria

- Comprehensive summary of each evaluation was completed using a meta-evaluation matrix, and the quality and relevance of evaluations were assessed using criteria adapted from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist

- While 20 separate evaluations were analysed for this meta-evaluation, these involved only 12 different Safe at Home responses, including evaluations of both the pilot and the more established response, as well as evaluations of the same response implemented in different geographic areas

- Of these 12 responses, 6 were assessed by the team as Safe at Home programs, 4 of the evaluations were of Safe at Home policy/legislative frameworks, and the remaining 2 response strategies no longer receive funding
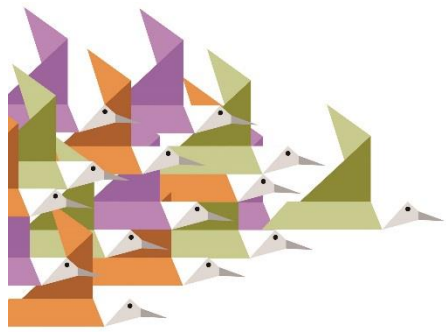
How robust were the evaluations?

- While the analytic methods used in each evaluation were not always described in detail, most evaluations did not make claims beyond what the data allowed

- Relatively high proportion of evaluations conducted internally suggests that many Safe at Home programs rely on internal review as the primary means of enhancing their practice – this means few of the evaluations reported peer review processes and ethics reviews

- Majority of evaluations depended on qualitative and/or monitoring data with only a few implementing outcome scales and measures

- Most evaluations collected data from multiple sources and included primary data analysis as well as secondary data analysis (e.g. monitoring data, case files and program documentation)
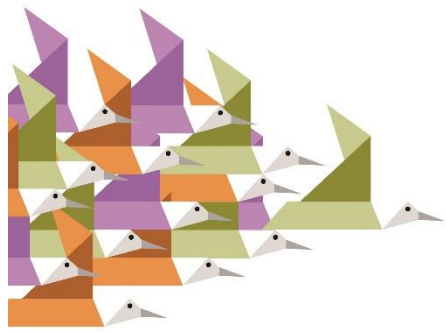
Definitions do matter

- Almost all evaluations collected qualitative data via interviews or focus groups, which provides a rich description of interventions and perceptions around why a particular intervention was experienced as helpful

- Practitioners are able to glean insights about particular strategies and interventions from the perspective of clients and other practitioners

- However, the meta-evaluation showed that there is no shared agreement of what constitutes a Safe at Home program or initiative

- Very few of the evaluations attempted to define the meaning of Safe at Home, and the purpose and aims of the evaluations differed across jurisdictions

- This means that identifying what is "good" practice from the included Safe at Home evaluations was not straightforward and can be highly contested
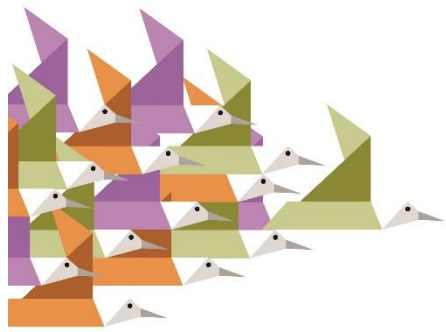
Messages for Policy Makers

- Council of Australian Governments (COAG)/ANROWS should lead a national conversation focusing on developing a shared cross-jurisdictional understanding and definition of "safe at home"

- Each jurisdiction needs to encourage a "culture of evaluation" at both the sector and organisational levels to ensure that evaluation is a priority for all Safe at Home interventions

- A shared Safe at Home evaluation framework or strategy should be developed to ensure that evaluations collect standard data and address core questions, thereby building a national evidence base

- It is critical that exclusion clauses or ouster orders are consistently granted by magistrates in protection orders across jurisdictions
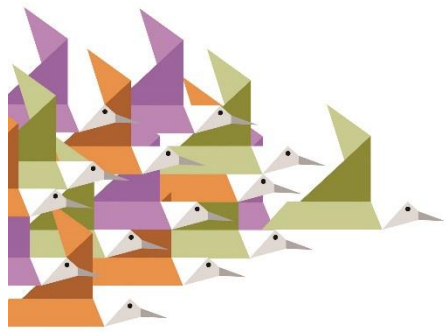
Messages for Policy Makers

- Residential tenancy laws across all jurisdictions should **permit locks to be changed and for a victim of domestic violence to more easily become the sole name on ongoing tenancy agreements** where they were previously an occupant and the perpetrator is a tenant

- Presently both a protection order and an application to the equivalent state tribunal are required which can be a lengthy and onerous process for women to pursue

- As a key strategy of Safe at Home responses, **brokerage** amounts should be increased and the use strengthened by allowing for more flexible use of funds

- Flexible brokerage would enable tailored and targeted practical support for victims, which – alongside safety upgrades to properties – can have long-term benefits in sustaining a tenancy and/or a safe return to employment
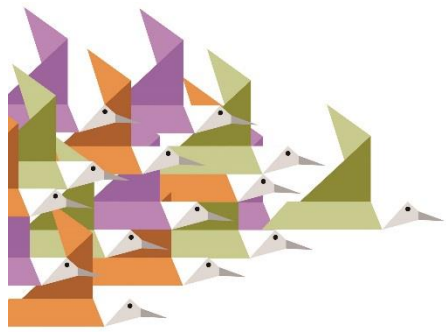
Messages for Practitioners

- Organisations and funding bodies should facilitate a "culture of inquiry" – e.g. through supervision, external consultation, conferences and peer support to take advantage of existing research to assist its translation into practice

- Where appropriate, the implementation of a dynamic risk assessment process which captures changes to women's circumstances and the assessed risk should be shared across agencies, particularly where other agencies have information about the risk of the perpetrator

- It is important that safety planning and case management for Safe at Home clients go beyond a focus on housing needs by addressing other effects of DFV

- To promote sustainable safety and economic security, it is critical that Safe at Home responses are offered in conjunction with longer-term case management and support
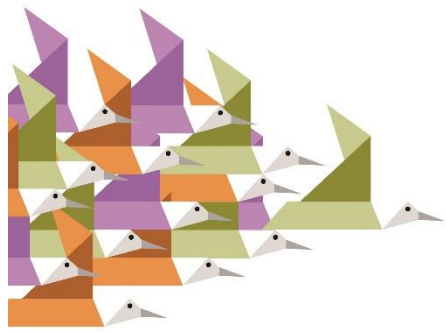
Messages for Researchers

- Safe at Home evaluations should be adequately funded and resourced, externally evaluated where feasible, and be subject to some form of peer or ethical review process

- Future evaluation should consider when a Safe at Home response is not safe, and what factors or circumstances suggest that it may not be a viable option for some women and why some women stay in their accommodation despite an assessed lack of safety

- Further research is required to examine the circumstances in which Safe at Home responses are most useful and for which population groups

- Greater understanding is needed of how safety alarms can be optimally implemented to best support women who are at high risk of violence or potential lethality

Last considerations

- The meta-evaluation highlighted the diverse approaches and strategies implemented

- While it is possible to identify key elements, there is no single model of Safe at Home that operates across jurisdictions

- The jurisdictional policy framework appears to drives the type of the Safe at Home response

- In the evaluations and program mapping, ***maximising women's safety*** and ***homelessness prevention*** were universally noted, and one or the other was reflected as the predominant pillar in the evaluated Safe at Home responses, as follows:
  1. Integrated criminal justice strategies focusing on safety by managing perpetrator risk via protection orders and ouster/exclusion provisions, proactive policing, safety alarms
  2. Safe at Home programs focusing explicitly on women staying in accommodation with or without protection orders and ouster/exclusion provisions to address safety concerns
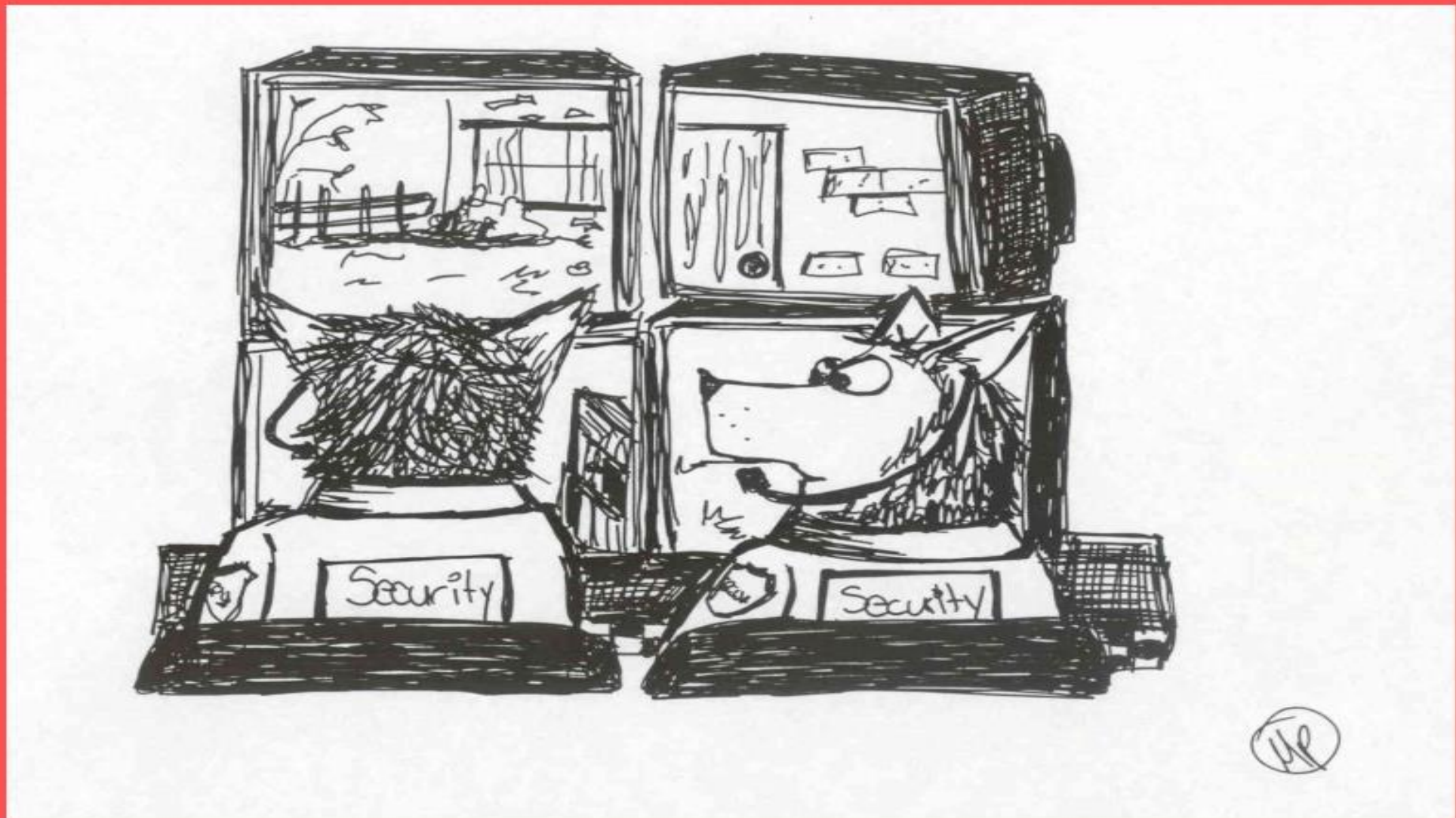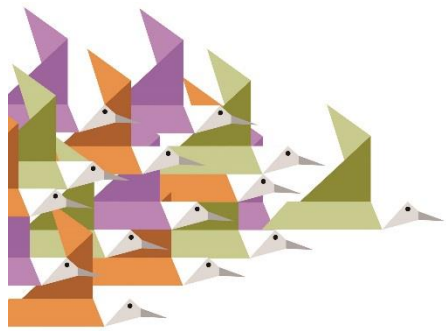
Safe at Home Responses

Integrated criminal justice strategies focusing on safety by managing perpetrator risk via protection orders and/or exclusion provisions

- Women's safety is the primary focus and is addressed by managing perpetrator risk and potentially excluding the perpetrator from the home by using AVOs, exclusion provisions

- Other identified integrated criminal justice strategies include proactive policing, court support, safety alarms and security upgrade. These strategies may be understood as contributing to crime prevention and ensuring perpetrator accountability

- Maintaining independent housing may or may not be an explicit goal

- Not all of these strategies are exclusively Safe at Home and may be used by any woman leaving DFV, or any person who is at risk of violence perpetrated by another person

My German Shepherds help me feel safe at home;
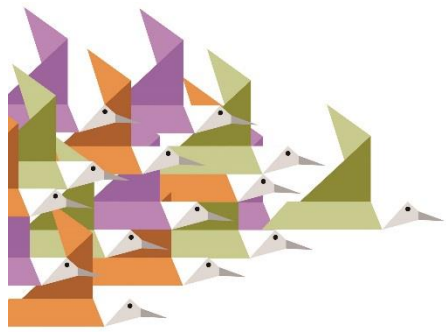they always let me know if someone's coming!

Stay at Home Responses

Programs focusing explicitly on women staying in accommodation with or without protection orders and ouster/exclusion provisions to address safety concerns

- These programs are housing-focused, but do not necessarily have a narrow definition of housing needs

- Responses are mostly offered over a longer period of time, and frequently provide case management and wrap-around services as maintaining independent housing is not achieved quickly

- These programs focus on women and their children and usually provide case-management to assess risk, manage safety planning and consider women's needs over a longer period of time

- There is a tendency for these responses to be called "*stay* at home" schemes which reflects the primary aim of remaining in independent accommodation

Conclusions

- Safe at Home responses are a socially just and fair response for women and children in circumstances who are able to make this decision

- Legislation, legal and judicial practices, practical and emotional support services, affordability issues, and integrated DFV programs can all influence women's decisions and assist women after leaving DFV as well as prevent women returning

- They are <u>not</u> a universal option as the state cannot guarantee to stop men using violence against women and children, but should be seen as alternative choice for women given that SHS which include refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation were able to offer support to only 44 percent of those who had sought assistance

- Further research is required to understand how and why women make the decision to stay despite ongoing violence and the extent to which Safe at Home approaches work with different cohorts of women