



women & children's support network

From the Executive Officer

The last year for Emerge has seen more vulnerable women and children than ever access our services, with an increasing number having been living on the street, in tents and emergency accommodation before coming to our refuge.

We applaud women for taking this brave step: it is often more unsafe to leave than to remain in a violent home. They have no money, no family or friends to support them, and face a real risk of being found by their abuser. In fact the women coming to our refuge come from all parts of Victoria - far away from the perpetrator and, sadly, any networks they may have had.

Emerge is a high security refuge service, with access to five crisis properties. We run one of the few outreach programs for women and children who have experienced family violence. Our children's program - funded either through philanthropy or community donations - is viewed as a benchmark for family violence services. Indeed, two Emerge staff have been invited to Rome to speak about our infant therapy program.

Emerge was chosen by the Victorian Government to be among the few family violence refuges offering 24/7 support for women and children. The new Emerge Centre will be accessible for women and children with disabilities.

All of this is good news, even though the reasons for our existence are far from great.

While we are able to support women and children well through our refuge and crisis service, the reality is that finding homes for them once they leave is a growing concern.

The link between family violence and homelessness cannot be stressed enough. As you will read in this newsletter, data from the most recent Census shows that one in 56 Victorians received homelessness assistance, and that in 44% of cases, family violence was the reason. Thirteen per cent of requests for homelessness support involved children aged under 10.

Emerge is working on many fronts to address this issue, and we look forward to sharing our progress with you.

None of this could be done without your financial and in-kind support. I am always astonished by the generosity of people, schools and companies who continually find new ways to support our work. Please keep in touch, and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Paula Westhead
Executive Officer



In this issue

1. From the Executive Officer
2. Supporting women and children through the year
3. More than a refuge
National family violence data released
4. Michelle, volunteer coordinator
Did you know?
5. Marco Polo
Make a donation
6. Talk about a revolution

Supporting women and children through the year

Since April 2017, Emerge has supported 126 women and children with housing, therapy and practical support.

Data collected through the year, ending March 2018, show that:

- 126 women and children received multiple services while in emergency accommodation.
- The average length of support period was 2-14 weeks (37.8%), followed by 14 to 26 weeks (18.9%) with 18.9% supported for 26 to 52 weeks.
- 79.5% of women and children were referred to Emerge by a crisis referral agency.
- 56 clients were in transitional housing (45 of these were children).
- 69% of the women who were supported during this period were not born in Australia. 74% of the women in refuge were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, with immigration highest from Somalia (5.5%) and Sudan (6.9%), as well as Iraq, Thailand, Vietnam, Lebanon Eritrea and Saudi Arabia.
- 5.5% of the women were from an Indigenous background.
- 45 of the clients in refuge were children under the age of 18, with 17 being infants (0-2years).
- 28 of the clients were women, and the most common age range for women was between 30-34 years (18%).
- Family violence (65.8%), housing crisis and housing affordability stress (11.7%), and relationship/family breakdown (8.1%) continue to be the highest reasons for seeking refuge, and 2.7% said they were unable to return home.
- Within a week before presenting 23% of clients were already in short term emergency crisis accommodation and 6.8% were sleeping rough. Of all clients entering the service 76% had not had a permanent address in over a month.
- 36% of clients (including children) were not housed with a perpetrator one week before presenting to Emerge.
- One week before presenting, 34% of women were not in the labour force; with 64.4% receiving no income, 16.4% receiving a parenting payment, and 5.5% Newstart allowance.
- One week before presenting, one child was in preschool, 12 in primary school, and five in secondary school.
- The highest percentage of needs identified was assistance for domestic/family violence, followed by housing, advice/information and advocacy on client behalf.
- The highest percentage of referrals made were for health or medical assistance, child protection, medium term housing, and specialist counselling.

At a glance



74%

of the women in refuge were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds



45

of the clients in refuge were children under the age of 18, with 17 being infants (0-2years)



56

clients were in transitional housing (45 of these were children)



5.5%

of the women were from an Indigenous background

More than a refuge

When a woman escapes family violence, she needs more than a house. That is the view of Jess, who heads up Emerge's refuge and crisis accommodation service.

"When women and children first arrive at the refuge, they are traumatised and often with nothing more than a suitcase of clothes, and a toy for any children with them. Our job is to help them emerge well from violence, provide them with the appropriate support to start again," Jess said.

Emerge runs a high security refuge, five crisis centres and offers an extensive outreach program and children's therapy program. This package includes practical support to assist women accessing legal, financial, and medical services.

"On any one day, an Emerge case worker will help a woman liaise with Centrelink or drive to a job network appointment, contact the Salvation Army for a Family Violence Flexible Support Package, transport a woman to a food bank, chemist, or help her find a new school for her children," Jess said.

"When women and children first arrive at the refuge, they are traumatised and often with nothing more than a suitcase of clothes, and a toy for any children with them."

National family violence data released

The first national snapshot of domestic and family violence has been released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

The data shows that on average, eight women a day enter hospital after assault by a spouse or partner. Intimate partner violence is the highest health 'risk' factor for women aged 25-44, outdoing smoking, alcohol, or obesity.

Their figures echo the data that Emerge puts together of the women and children entering its refuge and crises service: culturally and linguistically diverse women, Indigenous women, young women, pregnant women, women separating from partners, and women experiencing financial hardship, are all more likely to experience family violence.

Seventy-two thousand women, 34,000 children and 9,000 men sought homelessness services due to family violence in 2016 – 17.

"This data is bleak, especially for children and already vulnerable women," EO Paula Westhead said.

"It mirrors our experience here at Emerge where we run one of Victoria's high-security refuge services and an essential outreach program," she added.

The data reveals the strong link between family violence and homelessness. One in 56 Victorians received homelessness assistance, much higher than the national rate (one in 84).



The data shows that in 44% of cases, family violence was the reason. Thirteen per cent of requests for homelessness support involved children aged under 10.

"Many of the women and children stay in our refuge well beyond the six weeks' that our program offers them for a simple reason: there is no affordable housing available and the only other option is private rental which is out of reach for the women we support."

Make a real difference



“Our volunteers can make a real difference in the lives of the women and children who come to Emerge” says the new Volunteer Coordinator, Michelle Lavigne.

“Small acts of support can help to transform lives. It’s rewarding to help these women and children, and there are so many ways volunteers can contribute.”

Michelle is embracing her new role at Emerge where she is creating a volunteer program from scratch. As she notes, “it’s an opportunity to lay a good foundation of support for our programs.”

Michelle comes to Emerge with strong experience in a similar role, running the volunteer program at Ronald McDonald House Monash, where she has seen first-hand the difference volunteers can make for families in need.

“Volunteers are essential, ensuring that the team at Emerge can support the needs of the women and children who seek our help” stresses Michelle.

“We can’t fully support these women and children without the valuable efforts of our volunteers.”

Michelle has experience matching the time and skills the volunteers can contribute to the needs of an organisation, and her focus is finding ways to support the needs of the women and children who come to Emerge.

Michelle invites those interested in volunteering to contact her directly by email volunteers@emergesupport.org.au or telephone 03 8657 8622 with details about how they can help, as well as referees.

All applicants are required to hold a Working with Children accreditation and to undergo a Police Check. The application process involves an interview and reference checks.



Emerge is looking for volunteers who can contribute in the following ways;

- Volunteer Drivers – transporting for medical appointments, general shopping and social support appointments
- Language Assistants
- Volunteer Companions
- Education Volunteers – assisting to tutoring from early learning, junior and secondary schooling
- Fundraising/Event Leaders
- Office Cleaners
- Domestic Helpers – assisting with teaching basic cooking skills, household duties

Did you know?

- Emerge was established in 1975.
- Our refuge takes in women and children from across Victoria.
- We are building a property profile with corporate support and in partnership with providers and Government to support women who are living independently.
- It is the only specialist domestic violence service funded to provide outreach support in Melbourne’s Middle Southern Metropolitan region.
- We have a bold plan to build on our 40-year track record of supporting women and children escaping family violence.
- We are an independent organisation, not affiliated to any church or political party.
- We are a charity with DGR status for donations of \$2 and above.
- Help us in our work to support women and children emerge from family violence and homelessness.

Talking about a revolution

Emerge wants to see a revolution in funding infant and young children's programs run in refuges, according to EO Paula Westhead.

"The number of infants and young children we are seeing is increasing all the time, and with it comes to the crucial need to help them recover from the violence they have either seen or experienced. However, no government funding is offered to run therapy programs for these youngsters" she said.

The call comes just after the release of national figures that show that 13% of requests for homelessness support involved children aged under 10.

Paula Westhead and Emma Hodges, Emerge's children's program therapist, spelled out their concerns in a recent *Parity* article which highlighted that by addressing emotional needs with children as soon as they enter a refuge, children can begin healing.

"Increasing rates of emotional and behavioural issues in children are linked to adversity experienced through family violence, homelessness and abuse," Emma said.

Typically, children are seen as extensions of their mothers who are often traumatised and frightened and not always in a position to address the emotional needs of their children.

"Infants who come to refuge are in crisis – developmental, emotional, relational crisis – and are ready to engage in healing relationships given the opportunity. Infants have enormous capacity to engage in and be active in change therapy, while they motivate change and offer hope to their mothers," Emma said.

Emerge is the only refuge in the South-East to offer infant-led and mother-child bonding therapeutic interventions.

"We can see from our work, the immediate impact of therapy. The refuge as a caregiving environment remains an under-explored intervention, with enormous potential to help children from trauma and model emotional availability in a caregiving relationship."



A picture by a child paints a powerful story.

Despite recognition of the positive long-term benefits of these interventions funding for infant mental health services within refuges is not seen as a priority. Emerge has received small grants to run an adapted version of the Peek-a-Boo Club™ (PABC) developed by Dr Wendy Bunston in conjunction with the Royal Children's Hospital.

The Emerge team - Children's Case Worker, Arts Therapist, Case Manager and Family Therapist - work collaboratively in supporting families addressing the different needs arising from crisis.

This caregiving strategy, which is in place 24 hours, seven days a week, is designed to address the trauma experienced by children and their mothers, and to enable each child's development and increased sense of safety.

"We know that infants and young children have enormous capacity to engage in and be active in change therapy, while they motivate change and offer hope to their mothers. It is time for a revolution."



Contact Us

Tel: 1300 536 330

mail@emergesupport.org.au

www.emergesupport.org.au

facebook.com/emergesupport

ABN: 66 688 254 017