

2020 Impact Review



Significant client figures



243

clients were supported
(88 women and 155 children)



229

individual arts therapy
sessions were offered to
children aged 4 – 18 years



176

women and children received
a therapeutic service



45

volunteers

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Our Vision

A community free of family violence.

Our Purpose

Provide safety and enable independence for
women and children affected by family violence.

Our History

Emerge is the only individual specialist family violence,
high security refuge, in the Southern Metropolitan
area that also offers outreach programs to support
women and children experiencing violence.

Established in 1975, it was the second family violence
refuge to open in Victoria.

What We Do

Provide safe and secure accommodation for families
in crisis within refuge and transitional housing, an
outreach program for families at home, and a suite
of therapeutic interventions to build independence
and help heal from trauma.

ACCREDITED 

A year of achievements and challenges

It has been a roller coaster year where we celebrated opening our long-awaited 24/7 refuge and had to grapple with the effects of COVID-19, which has altered how we have worked with the women and children we support, and how we work as staff and volunteers. While challenging, we have been greeted with enormous opportunities to become more flexible and reach more women and children than ever.

A major focus of the last year has been the opening of the refuge to a full house. We have already seen the transformative impact it has made. Due to lockdown, we have only been able to use the communal spaces for a brief three weeks. This involved volunteers setting up a makeshift school for the children. We look forward to COVID-Normal when we can make full use of the space.

At the start of the pandemic Emerge was designated an essential service by the Government. Our outreach team and therapists came to the fore delivering food and care packages to women and art packs to the children living in the community and, at the same time, checking in on them. We pressed ahead with many of our services run virtually, as well as 15-minute face-to-face counselling and art therapy sessions in line with physical distancing guidelines. These include linking volunteers with families for on-line support and using our Fresh Start service to enable women to move from crisis accommodation into private rental accommodation.

Finding new ways of supporting women and children has been crucial as the incidence of family violence has increased during lockdown. According to a survey by the Australian Institute of Criminology revealed that almost one in 10 Australian women in a relationship had experienced domestic violence during the coronavirus crisis, with two-thirds saying the attacks started or became worse during the pandemic. This finding mirrors anecdotal evidence we have from women arriving at our accommodation services more anxious and frightened than ever.

Regardless of the crisis, Emerge has continued to grow its services in response to the need we see. Over the past 12 months we have initiated a Women's Counselling Service in partnership with Swinburne University. Another service Emerge introduced was the Family Support Volunteer Program. We contributed our voice to the Victorian Senate inquiry into homelessness where we set out seven priorities to end homelessness including the need for an improved Safe at Home Program. Currently, the national average of women returning home to violence is up to seven times before finally leaving. This is due to lack of safe and affordable housing. Other priorities included making money available from Victorian Stamp Duty revenue to house one million Victorians by 2029 through a massive expansion of public housing and social housing.

We thank the staff for their passion, commitment and resilience which enables them to undertake the difficult, complex work with women and children made more complicated because of the pandemic. We pay tribute to our many volunteers who work tirelessly to support our staff.

This year we have welcomed a new Board of seven extraordinary women who bring a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to Emerge.

We are inspired by the women and children whom we support. Their courage and determination is inspiring. It's the reason we do the work we do.

Nothing would be possible without government and philanthropic funding, community and corporate donations and partnerships. We thank you and know that with your continued support, we can help more women and children stay safe and live free from family violence.



Paula Westhead
Executive Officer



Nicki Batagol
Chairperson

Providing homes for women and children

Known as the ‘shadow pandemic’, the incidence of family violence has increased over the past year, noticeably during May and June 2020.

Consequently, demand for our crisis and transitional housing has grown steadily. The refuge has only recently opened so these figures focus predominantly on crisis. A noticeable trend, however, has been fewer families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds seeking out our refuge service.

Over the past year:



30 women and **57** children were housed in refuge and crisis accommodation.



23% of children in refuge - infants (0-2 years).



14 women and **24** children were in transitional housing.



75% of the women in refuge were from CALD backgrounds.



35% of women without permanent residency had no income.



100% of women and children were homeless before arriving.



23% of women and children were supported into private housing.



Most common age range for women was between **26** and **35** years.



51 clients were in short term emergency accommodation before coming to Emerge.



Family violence (all presenting) housing crisis and housing affordability, stress and relationship/family breakdown continue to be the highest reasons for seeking refuge, and **100%** said they were unable to return home.

Fresh start funding

When Zara* was about to be evicted from her new home, she was at her wits' end.

One of her children had been put in hospital due to serious illness. As a casual employee, she was unable to work, and therefore be paid, as she juggled between looking after her other school-aged child and being at the hospital. Zara was linked to Emerge's outreach services where she was assisted with a month's rent in advance to enable her to stay in her new home. The money came through the Fresh Start Fund, with thanks to The Funding Network.

The Fresh Start Fund was initiated by Emerge to provide women with the initial bond they need to secure a private rental property. Each fresh start costs \$3,500.

The \$49,000 funding has so far helped seven families, around 7 mums and 16 children, with their rental property expenses, including paying a month's rent in advance, cleaning and taxis to transport families to their new homes. Some families have also received financial counselling as part of fund.



Reaching out to women and children

Emerge is one of the few family violence services in Victoria offering an outreach program to women and children living at home with their perpetrator, or in crisis and transitional housing. The outreach program includes counselling, arts therapy, court and family support.

Over the past year:



156 women and children were supported by outreach 99 of whom were children under 18.



100% of clients went through the court system.



120 children minded in courts.*



Over **130** women and children attended special events during the year.*



2% of clients identified as Aboriginal.



75% of women were from CALD backgrounds.

**numbers reduced from previous years due to COVID-19*



Highlights during the year

Women's Counselling Service

Women's Counselling Service began this year with a student placement through Swinburne University. This program is now ongoing with a qualified counsellor three days a week. The free service is for any woman who is ready to engage in one-on-one counselling to help them heal after family violence. The service extends Emerge's traditional program of providing counselling to women in refuge to those in community.

Family Support Volunteer Program

The Family Support Volunteer Program matches a volunteer with a family to help in any way they can to support women and their children to begin afresh. This includes looking after the children while mum cooks dinner or does the washing, tutoring children, connecting the family with other community supports, enjoying some outdoor activities together or simply just being there. The program fills a much-needed gap for families who have lost touch with their own families since escaping family violence. The face-to-face program has been suspended while in lockdown but continues virtually.

Arts therapy program

Arts therapy program is viewed as cutting edge internationally and in Australia. In the first half of 2020, our arts therapists moved from offering face-to-face therapy to providing tele-practice as a way of remaining in touch. Early signs are that it has the potential to be another way of delivering the vital program. The team also delivered art bags to children in the community in early March. This has enabled our arts therapists and counsellors to remain in touch in a practical way throughout lockdown.

New refuge opens to great applause

Emerge's new 24/7 refuge has been described as a 'lifeline' and 'the best stepping stone' possible by women and children who have experienced its airy, welcoming space since it opened in May 2020.

The new refuge, designed by the award-winning architectural practice Harrison and White, is made up of state of the art one, two and three bedroom units with disability access, a series of communal areas, including a communal kitchen, living room as well as a support hub for women in outreach. It is surrounded by landscaped gardens and a children's playground. Fenced in and with a sophisticated security system, it offers the best of support and security for some of the state's most vulnerable women and children.

What stands the refuge apart from many similar buildings is that it is purpose built. Each area has been designed to have a positive impact on health, recovery and wellbeing. Already, this careful mix of personal and communal areas is proving a win for women needing time away from their children to begin afresh. Teenagers, too, are revelling in their own space free from angry noise.

The refuge is the base for Emmerge's children's and infant's program, which addresses the traumatic effect family violence has on a mother and her child, and helps children to process their experiences and express their feelings through art activities, play and therapeutic conversation.

Healing spaces

Emerge has worked with Samantha Donnelly, a specialist in women's refuge design, and her architect colleague Sophie Dyring, to provide custom built therapy spaces. The rooms are light, painted in calm colours, like greens, blues and cream, and have minimal furnishings. Lighting is sensory based. These new spaces are said to be a first in Victoria, and are crucial to the start of healing physically, mentally and emotionally. A family foundation donated \$15,000 towards these healing spaces.

Sensory garden

Emerge is still calling for donations to fund a sensory garden at the refuge. The garden will form part of the healing centre where mothers can sit quietly and children can play in nature. Gardens are known to reduce stress levels. Donations are needed to turn a space into a garden filled with herbs, edible flowers, and tactile plants.



Thank you to our donors and volunteers

Emerge has been overwhelmed this year by the generosity in time and donations given to its work by volunteers, supporters, companies, philanthropic foundations and the Victorian Government. We thank everyone.

Snapshot of volunteers

Emerge currently has 45 volunteers working across the organisations, clocking up over 1,124 hours during the year. They include 12 volunteers working with families in a variety of ways including tutoring, being language assistants; working in courts looking after children while their mothers finalise legal issues; packing Christmas hampers, carrying out craft work with mothers and children, and helping move into the refuge and Emmerge's new office, as well as helping with graphic design and research. In all, 15 volunteers received 48 hours of training during the year.

Snapshot of business support

Emerge has enjoyed big-hearted support from business throughout the year. We pay tribute to the support from our ongoing relationship with our sponsor **Marco Polo**. We were overwhelmed with the generosity of furniture and soft furnishings that we received from **Temple and Webster**, **Freedom**, and **Domayne**. The furniture has gone into our refuge, intake and counselling rooms for women and children and crisis properties. **Noomi** donated bean bags, bean bag couches and pillows for use in our counselling rooms and at refuge. **Sleepsafe** donated sheet sets and bath towels for refuge and our other properties. Our builder **Total Construction** donated the play equipment at the refuge.

Snapshot of community support

Throughout the year, we have received regular donations from individuals and community organisations which make a major difference to our services and the different entertainment we offer families living in refuge and the community. Special mention goes to **123Read2Me** for donating over 450 children's books plus puzzles and soft toys to us and **StoryCycle**. We thank **Impact** for their ongoing support at Christmas and Mother's Day when they donate bags of love filled with donations of practical and fun supplies including toothpaste, soaps, hand sanitiser and moisturiser. This year, for the first time, women were treated to meals prepared by **Quat Quatta**, the Ripponlea wedding venue.

Other community supporters include: **Next Steps**; **Rotary** and **Lions** clubs and their donations of time and funds; **Good 360**; **The Nappie Collective**; **Period Project**, food packages from **local churches**, **Quilting Group**; **Fareshare**; **St Kilda Mums**; **Aesop** and the **Alannah and Madeline Foundation**.

We are particularly grateful to the anonymous Family Foundation who donated \$15,000 to enable us to provide healing spaces in our refuge and office.



Emerge would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Department of Health and Human Services and Family Safety Victoria.



Health and Human Services

How you can help

Emerge has been helping women and children live free from family violence for over 40 years.

We rely on support from government, philanthropic organisations, businesses and the community to help deliver our vital services, housing and support programs.

By donating or partnering with us you will make a direct impact to helping women and children rebuild their lives after surviving family violence

We thank you for your ongoing support.

Donate

Donations are vital to our ongoing work and allow us to develop innovative therapeutic programs for women and children that fall outside of our government-funded services. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

To donate please visit our website: emergesupport.org.au/support-our-work/donations

Partnerships

Emerge is committed to long-term, mutually-beneficial partnerships with local community groups, philanthropic organisations and businesses who share our vision of ending family violence and assisting women and children to rebuild their lives.

Our major donors and partners enable us to ensure our financial stability and continue to deliver our innovative services.

We can offer a diverse range of activities for businesses to engage with our work. This includes enhancing your profile by aligning with our brand, pro-bono work, helping to build staff motivation through volunteering and fundraising work, workplace giving and more.

Schools and community groups

Community groups, such as Rotary and Lions' groups, church groups, and others also work as volunteers on specific projects. We can come and present at your school or your church, and we welcome clubs willing to assist us.

Workplace Giving

Every pay day, you can help change lives.

Workplace giving is a simple, convenient and tax-effective way to support Emerge, and the women and children we work with. It also provides us with a steady, regular source of income, enabling us to plan.

Volunteer

By becoming a volunteer and supporting Emerge, you will form part of a team working to help women and children have safer, brighter lives, while also gaining a unique and valuable personal experience.

