

2021 Impact Review



Significant client figures



280

clients were supported
(88 women and 192 children)



238

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



155

women and children received
a therapeutic service



32

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



From the Executive Officer and Interim Chair

We are delighted to report that Emerge has had a successful year supporting more children than ever before, finding new ways to connect and work, and making the most of every opportunity amongst what has been an incredibly challenged and unprecedented time.

A highlight of the year was to receive full accreditation for the next three years. The Quality Innovation Performance reviewers were impressed with the staff's passion for their work, the breadth and depth of services provided, and the new 24/7 refuge that opened in May 2020.

This achievement, together with a new strategic direction now being discussed, will stand Emerge in good stead into the future.

More women are seeking assistance from family violence services; abuse is worsening with police being called to incidents every six minutes. The reality is that we are in the middle of a family violence pandemic, made worse by COVID-19.

Since opening, the refuge has been operating at full capacity within COVID-19 restrictions. Our crisis and transitional homes are also full, and we continue to work collaboratively with the government and other services to access housing.

This year we secured Victorian government funding to provide support to women without Permanent Residency in the country. This means they have no access to CentreLink, Medicare, and many other services from legal assistance through to school support. Last year we supported five non-PR families, largely with our own money and from community donations.

The demand for all our services has been intense this year. Unfortunately, we have not been able to carry out as much face to face counselling and arts therapy as we would normally. However, a regular distribution of care packages and arts and crafts packs to families in our crisis and transitional housing, has enabled our arts therapy and outreach teams to keep connected. The therapeutic team was able to continue to deliver individual counselling, parenting support as well as therapeutic groups all online via Zoom during all of the Victorian lockdowns which we are immensely proud of.

Funding from Zonta has allowed us to run a Young Empowered Women program for 150 girls and young women across the region to help them identify and prevent family violence. Results have been fed into the Victorian Government's Respectful Relationships project, with Emerge taking a more active role.

Unfortunately, this year we suffered a fire in our newly refurbished office. The damage was intense with furniture and paintwork badly damaged. We look forward to opening soon and to using the counselling spaces for the first time.

We take this opportunity to thank the staff for the passion, commitment and resilience they have shown throughout the year. We pay tribute to our many volunteers who work tirelessly to support our staff, and we look forward to welcoming them back as we gear up for a new year.

We acknowledge the work of our Board, seven extraordinary women who bring a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm to Emerge.

Above all, 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



Deb Goldfinch
Interim Chair

Providing homes for women and children

The last year has seen a steady demand for our housing services whether in refuge or in crisis and transitional housing.

A noticeable trend, however, has been families staying longer, with more children, and an increase in the number of women without a Permanent Visa.

While last year was called the 'silent pandemic,' this year has very much been the 'complex pandemic.' Of the 36 families Emerge supported in crisis accommodation this year, the complexities of their needs have changed on a month to month (or even week to week, day to day) basis. During their time supported by Emerge, a family may be subpoenaed to Family Court, discover multiple debts taken out in their name, have a child diagnosed with a disability - which can all add increased stressors to their mental health increasing challenges in other areas of their recovery. Over 88% of our families presented with either medium or high needs during their time with Emerge.

The other trend has been the number of children coming into refuge, crisis and transitional accommodation. Last year, Emerge supported 89 children in crisis and transitional accommodation, an increase of over 185% increase on children supported by the service in the previous year.

With the three bedroom units at the refuge site accommodating up to six children per unit, the referrals received by Emerge are for much larger families than could be accommodated previously; in refuge over 60% of children have been aged between three and eight years' old were accommodated.

Of the clients that exited crisis accommodation last year, only 18% managed to secure private rental accommodation, with over 64% relying on crisis or supported accommodation options to transition out of refuge.

Over the past year:



36 women and **89** children were housed in refuge and crisis accommodation.



9% of children in refuge were infants (0-2 years).



13 women and **18** children were in transitional housing.



86% of the women in refuge were from CALD backgrounds.



22% of the women supported arrived in refuge without permanent residency had no income.



100% of women and children were homeless before arriving.



18% of women and children were supported into private housing.



Most common age range for women was between **30** and **38** years.



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.



Image: Mi's children recently enjoyed a trip to Bounce.

Life is better for Mi

Mi came to Australia from Vietnam on a student visa, fell in love and married. Her partner turned violent soon after the marriage, and she fled with her family.

Mi found accommodation at Emerge's refuge where she was supported financially by the organisation. All her expenses and living costs were covered from groceries to haircuts, Myki cards to translating documents, medical bills and legal bills.

After three years of being with Emerge, Mi has moved into an Office of Housing home and has obtained permanent residency in Australia.

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.

Emerge's outreach program reached 66 new families including 89 children over the past year, highlighting the growing demand for its services and support.

In all, case workers and the arts therapy team provided a range of help and counselling to 155 clients. The majority of women and children sought assistance for Emerge's services because of family violence (53.8%), family breakdown (4.9%) and mental health issues (3.1%).

Emerge also saw more children, from infants to teenagers, over the past year, each requiring personalised support, their own safety plan and arts therapy sessions. This increase in children has resulted in Emerge putting on an extra children's case manager as well as employing a psychologist within the service.

The support has included safety planning, dedicated case management, financial counselling and therapeutic support to women and children in crisis accommodation and in the community.

Over the past year:



66 new families, including **89** children were supported last year by outreach



155 clients were supported through program assessment, individual arts therapy, and counselling



22 women were supported with individual counselling



23 women were assisted with parenting support



37 women were counselled through the women's group



71% of families were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds



4% of outreach clients identified as being from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.



Working with children

In Australia, one child in four witnesses family violence.

One of the pillars of Emerge's work is its children's services. Over the past year, Emerge has supported 89 children in crisis refuge and transitional accommodation. This is an 185% increase on children supported by the service in the previous year.

Emerge staff have worked throughout the year to support the recovery of all children including liaising with child care centres, schools and enhanced maternal child health nurses as well as running therapeutic and health groups on site.

These include **Safe Nest**, **Make Your Mark**, and arts therapy programs such as **Little Sparkz**. Every child has their own safety plan.

Highlights of the year

Campaigning for young children

Young children are largely invisible in family violence policy, even though recent crime statistics reveal that one in 50 children witnessed a family violence incident that was attended by police. Emerge has highlighted the gap in submissions and discussions with politicians, philanthropic trusts, and its supporters.

Creating a play space

One of the main features of the refuge's outside space is a play space for children of all ages, from young tots to teenagers. The playground has been used as often as possible during the past year. A specific COVID-19 safety plan was developed for the area.

Over the past year, Emerge has supported 89 children in our crisis accommodation program, and 84 children in our therapeutic and outreach programs:



20 children aged between 0 -2

59 children aged between 3 and 5

— 45 children aged between 6 and 8

— 28 children aged between 9 and 11

— 13 children aged between 12 and 14

— 8 teenagers aged between 15 and 17.



Restoring confidence through art

Our 'Arts For Change' programs are essential in assisting women and children 'emerge' from the trauma of surviving family violence and helping them to begin building self-confidence and improve their emotional and physical wellbeing.

Emerge currently has 32 volunteers working across the organisation, 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 Emerge's new office, as well as helping with graphic design and research.

The past year has seen Emerge's arts therapy services as busy as past years despite the pandemic. The arts therapy team began the process of transitioning the arts therapy program to tele-practice in the first half of 2020, and has continued it successfully throughout the past year.

The team has delivered arts therapy in several ways including one-on-one virtual and physical sessions with children, group zoom sessions designed especially for keeping mothers connected, as well as delivering art bags to the women and children in outreach homes.

Funding for our arts therapy program comes from philanthropic trusts and community donations.

Working one on one with Oscar

A typical eight-year-old, Oscar is busy, never sits still, and is always looking for something to do. On the surface, it would be difficult to believe that Oscar has experienced trauma which means he finds it hard to concentrate and trust people.

Through Emerge's arts therapy, Oscar has learnt how to regulate his feelings so he is now able to better manage them and not be overwhelmed as often as in the past. Oscar has met with his arts therapist each week to draw, make models or paint. Many of the therapies that the art therapist would use have been adapted to keep the pair safe. These include wearing a mask and keeping a safe distance. At the end of the hour-long session, Oscar works with his therapist to sanitise the crayons, paints, figurines and the clay they have used, preparing it to be used again during the next week.

Over the past year, Emerge's arts therapy services have supported:



45 children in 119 arts therapy sessions



42 mothers and children in 48 arts therapy sessions



22 children in Little Sparkz sessions



14 children in Open Studio sessions



Research in action

Over one million Australian children are exposed to family violence each year, affecting mental and physical health, social relationships and learning.



Researching new ways to help young people engage better with others is a priority for Emerge. Despite lockdown, and albeit patchily, Emerge continued its two research programs **Make your Mark** and **Safe Nest** throughout the year.

Make Your Mark is a creative arts therapy program that provides a safe space for children, aged between five and seven, who have experienced family violence or a family breakdown.

Run in collaboration with La Trobe University, the research is investigating how the use of the social robot, Matilda, can improve social engagement and learning outcomes for the children.

Matilda reads and recites text, dances and plays music. She can be programmed to tune into individual children, motivating them to better engage with others and help to modify their behaviour.

The research hopes to show that Matilda, together with arts therapy, makes a difference in helping children who have experienced family violence regulate their feelings and behaviour.

Safe Nest is a trial to evaluate the impact family violence has on the mother and child relationship. The families have been prioritised because they are homeless – they are either in refuge or living in transition homes.

It is being run by Emerge senior art therapists together with researchers from Swinburne University of Technology and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

The aim of the program is to support infants' mental health and to assist their mums strengthen their bond, for young children to grow in confidence through play and making friends, and for mums, it is about building confidence as a mother, understand what their child is communicating, and being able to respond to their child's needs.

While many clinicians and researchers have focused on better understanding the separate short and long term effects of family violence on women and children, relatively few studies have examined its specific impact on the mother-child relationship.

The research findings will include the impact on maternal wellbeing and trauma symptoms, including improvements, or not, in mother-infant relationships.

Emerge anticipates that the results from this pilot study will have national significance and that, if proven to be effective, the program could be expanded to a range of other community based organisations accessed by women and children affected by family violence.

The research has been made possible thanks to the legacy of the Luke Batty Foundation. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) selected the project for funding.

“Because the robot is patient and non-judgemental – as well as being interactive – they have been able to form a bond with it.”

– Arts therapist

Lending our voice

Emerge has collaborated with other leading family violence and homelessness services throughout the year to push for more housing, funding and support services for women and children either in violent relationships or who have escaped violence.

In its submission to the **Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor**, Emerge applauded initiatives such as the establishment of Operation Ribbon in Victoria which focused on contacting high-risk perpetrators in efforts to reduce the incidence of family violence during lockdown, and the newly announced funding to keep women and their families at home while their perpetrators are provided with housing.

In all, Emerge made eleven recommendations ranging from fully funding specialised services that improve women's safety to more investment to ensure Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women and children understand the dangers of the virus and the impact it may have on their lives, and ensuring that vacant rental properties are made available to women and children and rent is paid for by the government.

The organisation also welcomed the ongoing commitment from the Victorian government to address family violence.

The most recent State Budget set aside an overall investment of \$354 million. This included funding for support services for survivors of \$49 million over four years.

While Emerge was pleased to see state-wide expansion of therapeutic services for adolescents who use violence in the home, it will continue to push for concurrent investment in the development of a state-wide coordinated crisis response to adolescent family violence. It will also continue to urge for specific funding for young children – babies to primary school children.

Emerge joined the national **#Everybodyshome** campaign, which is calling on the Federal government to reset the tax system to make it fairer for all Australians wanting to buy a home, to develop and implement a national housing strategy, to develop a plan to end homelessness by 2030 and a better deal for renters.

The organisation was one of the organising partners in the annual **Walk Against Family Violence** in 2020. The WAFV was launched in 2008 by a group of individuals and community groups passionate about raising awareness of family violence and its impact on society.



Thank you to our supporters, funders and donors

The past year, Emerge has had one of its most successful years with generous financial funding coming from the corporate and community sectors, as well as philanthropy. We thank everyone for their contributions. It makes a massive difference.

Annual tax appeal

A generous donation from **Marcopolo Property**, our corporate supporter, together with two anonymous donations has enabled Emerge to purchase a Toyota RAV 4.

The new car replaces one which was no longer fit for purpose. It will help Emerge to move families from refuge into their new homes, deliver food and other essential items to families living in crises homes, and to take women and children to therapy sessions, the law courts, doctors and other services which they otherwise would find it hard to reach.

Snapshot of corporate support

Built, one of Australia's largest private construction groups, has assisted Emerge during the year. Its first donation was Christmas hampers for the families and during the year has offered additional vouchers for women and children.

Next Steps Australia has supplied starter packs of new linen for women and children moving into crisis, transitional or private rental housing. The starter kits, provided to each family as they leave the refuge, alleviate some of that financial pressure allowing us to apply our financial resources to our services."

Other corporate donations have come from **Good 360**, **Natio** and **Aurora Cleaning Supplies**. The **Betsy H Group** donated vouchers for women and children, as well as 53 individually wrapped gift bags, many for teenagers which was amazing and much needed.

Snapshot of philanthropic support

VicHealth has supported Emerge with a \$14,800 Reimagining Health grant to develop a program of weekly exercise and movement for mothers and children staying in 24/7 refuge. Activities have varied weekly and have included dance, soccer drills and 'one minute to win' challenges.

The impact on children and their mothers has been remarkable over the year. The women have moved from cautiously overseeing their children from a distance to joining in and having fun, while the children have gained confidence to play with other children.

Emerge was one of 15 community organisations to receive funding from **StreetSmart** to be spent on the mental and physical wellbeing of staff. The SmartCare program deliberately focused on frontline essential workers.

Snapshot of community support

The **Mordialloc Rotary** and **Mordialloc Men's Shed** have continued their partnership with Emerge. During breaks between lockdown, they have worked on the creation of a sensory garden, planting a shade tree and other plants in the playground and place seating around the shade tree.

Other community groups who have supported Emerge during the year include Impact, rotary groups, church groups, school groups and small businesses.

Our volunteers

Over the past year Emerge has had 32 volunteers actively working across the organisation, clocking up over 1,124 hours. They include volunteers working with families in a variety of ways including tutoring, being language assistants; packing Christmas hampers, and carrying out craft work with mothers and children.

A new tailored volunteer strategy is now being developed to match volunteer skills with Emerge's needs.



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.

Emerge would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Family Safety Victoria.



Families,
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