



emerge

women and children's
support network

IMPACT REVIEW

2023

CONTENTS

2023 in review _____	3
Our new strategic plan _____	6
Our services in 2023 _____	8
Therapeutic support _____	10
Our clients _____	12
Grants, donors and partnerships ____	14
Support our work _____	16

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Emerge Women and Children's Support Network acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands where we live, work and gather. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge that sovereignty of these lands was never ceded.

We acknowledge the strength, pride, advocacy and endurance of First Nations peoples.

We recognise that the impacts of colonisation, systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma endure.

We recognise and honour the deep and enduring connection that First Nations people have to land, waterways and culture. This always was and always will be First Nations land.

2023 IN REVIEW

On behalf of the Board and the CEO, we are pleased to present our 2023 Impact Review. This year, we have taken significant steps toward achieving our vision of disrupting the cycle of family violence. The year 2023 marks the first full year of Claire in her role as CEO and in the third quarter of the year, Jane commenced as Acting Board Chair.

It has been a transformative, often challenging and deeply impactful year for Emerge Women and Children's Support Network. We have continued to help families navigate escaping family violence, providing safe refuge, housing, comprehensive case management and support to women and children in crisis. We have welcomed more infants, children and women than ever into our therapeutic practice – our evidence-based programs supporting recovery from trauma toward autonomy and healing. We have been humbled and invigorated by our organisation's dynamic, compassionate workplace and the crucial services it provides.

Family violence remains a critical issue in our community, and we are seeing more families than ever come to our organisation seeking safety, support and recovery. As a result of the cost-of-living crisis and a lack of affordable housing, our clients are needing our holistic support for longer periods. We continue to advocate for more housing options for our clients as they face an increasing bottleneck after crisis support. Housing is a human right and a critical part of facilitating the safe recovery of victim-survivors.

We are seeing social and economic barriers add to the intersectional disadvantage of women and children with a disability, First Nations people, clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and older women who are victim-survivors of family violence. Increasingly, our clients experience the compounding impact of discrimination, racism and barriers to healthcare as they navigate the family violence system. We are proud to deliver culturally safe, inclusive services and strive to hear and walk alongside our clients.

We learn a great deal and improve as an organisation when we listen to what victim-survivors say they want and need. We have embedded these practices across our work and within our refreshed organisational values. As a result, our clients report excellent outcomes across their journey with Emerge Women and Children's Support Network. As one woman shared with her group, being part of the our community felt like coming home.

We have worked to continuously review and improve our operations, strengthening our systems, practice and processes to ensure they are not just compliant but efficient, model best practice and ensure that we are using our resources thoughtfully, sustainably and to make the biggest impact we can.

Vitally, we have invested in our staff, the backbone of Emerge Women and Children's Support Network. Our organisation has cemented itself as an employer of choice, with generous professional development, sector-leading entitlements, parental leave and additional annual leave. We know that the success of our staff is the success of the families that we exist to support.

We have delivered a visionary new Strategic Plan that positions us across the next three years to increase our impact while remaining sustainable in an uncertain economic and funding environment. We have strengthened our governance by improving our risk oversight, updating our governance policies, improving document security and ensuring that our Board renewal and appointment processes meet best practice standards.

In addition to our core work, we are investing in innovation to address key issues for our community including the rising challenge of teenagers using violence; lack of consistent monitoring and evaluation in direct service delivery; and the isolating and often frightening experience of entering crisis accommodation for the thousands of children who do so each year in Australia. Our organisation has a crucial role to play in not only responding to family violence when it happens, but also supporting victim-survivors to recover and working to prevent it from occurring again.

We have been touched and are deeply grateful for the generosity of our supporters, volunteers and donors this year. We have been able to improve the facilities at our secure refuge, provide life-changing programs and therapeutic support to more women and children, and ensure that women and children have everything – from school uniforms and books to linen and refrigerators – they need to start their lives again in a safe home.

Our volunteers have provided remarkable and generous assistance, from advising on family law matters, providing English lessons and reviewing resumes to transporting women to inspections and tutoring children so they can catch up at school. We are incredibly thankful for their time and compassion.

We are indebted to our donors, volunteers, and supporters. We express our gratitude for the ongoing support of our major funding bodies and ongoing partners, particularly the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Kingston Council; Rotary International; Regenerate; Sisters of Charity; Petherd Tarax Charitable Trust; Ashfords Accountants and Advisor;

Bayside Community Emergency Relief – and many others, listed in full at the end of this review. Without you, we would not be able to deliver our work and the remarkable outcomes we continue to achieve with our clients and the community.

Our compassionate, skilled and dedicated workforce are at the core of what we do. Our heartfelt thanks to all of our staff who continue to come to work with dedication, rigour and deep care and to our leadership team who provide exceptional guidance and support to our teams.

Our Board members are adept, incredibly generous and have navigated us thoughtfully through an often challenging year. We thank them for their astute guidance and wisdom. We would like to also thank Sarah Ferguson, Jenny Stillwell and Nerida Wallace for their expertise and invaluable contributions to the governance and strategic direction of the organisation.

We welcomed Claire Murphy and Hillier Deniz to the Board this year. Claire has extensive experience in the public health sector and brings deep expertise in clinical governance. Hillier is a qualified chartered accountant with strong experience in financial management, audit and accounting.

During the course of the year, we also farewelled three of the original Directors appointed by the previous Board in 2019, and thank them for their outstanding contribution to Emerge Women and Children's Support Network and the Board.

FY2023 was a successful year of transition for our organisation, with the setting of a new strategic direction and the continuous improvement of our governance practices. As we look to the future, we remain committed to breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring that everyone is safe in their communities and at home. Each day at Emerge Women and Children's Support Network shows us the extraordinary depth of human kindness and resilience. It is a privilege to be a part of this workplace.

Jane Stuchberry
Board Chair

Claire Marshall
Chief Executive Officer



Over the last year, we have continued to help families navigate escaping family violence, providing safe refuge, housing, comprehensive case management and support to women and children in crisis.

OUR NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2023, we were delighted to present the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan for Emerge Women and Children's Support Network. The Strategic Plan positions us to continue to achieve our transformative work with families affected by family violence and increase our sustainability, growth and impact.

Our Strategic Plan cements our commitment to being leaders, voices, advocates and innovators to drive the change we need to see across the system.

Our work is only achievable with the compassion, calibre and commitment of our staff and leadership team. They represent the values and strength of our organisation every day. Our Strategic Plan reflects our dedication and investment in their continuing development and support.

OUR PURPOSE

We provide support to people who have experienced family violence toward safety, autonomy and healing and to rebuild their lives.

OUR VISION

Emerge Women and Children's Support Network drives innovative practice that disrupts the cycles of family violence

OUR GOALS

GOAL 1

Driving a sustainable organisation that is positioned to grow and impact change.

GOAL 2

Supporting our staff and retaining a highly skilled workforce to achieve the best outcomes for our clients.

GOAL 3

Continuing to ensure best-practice, holistic, comprehensive and tailored support for our clients.

GOAL 4

Working as leaders to advocate, influence and drive system change for victim-survivors.

OUR VALUES

Collaboration • Respect
Courage • Creativity
Inclusivity • Impact • Kindness

OUR SERVICES IN 2023

OUR SERVICES

We provide leading, evidence-based practice to our clients through integrated service delivery. The way we do our work supports and empowers victim-survivors to recover from the often-devastating impact of family violence and safely rebuild their lives.



Crisis support and accommodation
at a safe, secure refuge
and in crisis housing



Case management
for victim-survivors
providing strength
based intensive support,
including risk assessment,
safety planning, referrals
and advocacy



Transitional housing
providing accommodation
in the community after
refuge



Specialised outreach,
including safety
planning and support
with specialised case
managers who work
with children



Therapeutic support
to assist recovery from
trauma, including arts
therapy, play therapy,
infant wellbeing and
dyadic therapy



Volunteer support
to assist victim-survivors
to rebuild their lives and
create social connections

In 2023 we delivered

667

therapeutic sessions
for our clients

During the year

100%

of refuge families
received therapeutic
support



We delivered

124

group therapy
sessions for women,
children and families



We delivered

591

individual
sessions

76

Dyadic
sessions

“ We provide a wide range of therapeutic services to infants, toddlers, primary school-age children, teenagers and women in the community, with our clients accessing evidence-based support and achieving transformative outcomes. **”**



THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT

REFUGE-BASED THERAPIST

This is the first full year we have had a dedicated therapist based at our refuge. The refuge-based therapist has worked collaboratively with case managers to support a holistic and wrap-around service for families, to ensure they are prioritised and offered an appropriate and timely therapeutic response. In 2023, 100 per cent of refuge families received a therapeutic response.

GROUP PROGRAMS

We offered a wide range of therapeutic groups this year, both for women and children in the community and those staying in our refuge. We continued offering Peek-a-Boo Club™, our group for mothers and their infants; Little Sparkz, our school holiday program for primary-school-aged children; and Women Thriving, our women's art therapy group. We also introduced a new group for teenagers, Creative Lab, after identifying a gap in services for this age group.

We also offered two groups at refuge, PlaySpace and Artspace, to offer a safe space for families in refuge to come together, express themselves and connect through play and art-making.

RESEARCH

We are increasing our emphasis on research into prevention and early intervention, particularly in relation to therapeutic responses to trauma and the effectiveness of our programs. This includes research into the drivers and impacts of trauma in children, the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions, and the medium- and long-term outcomes of targeted therapeutic support.

SAFE NEST GROUP EVALUATION REPORT

Another highlight from our therapeutic team was the delivery of an evaluation report by one of our research partners, Swinburne University, detailing the impact of the Safe Nest Group (SNG) pilot project.

SNG was a six-week therapeutic group facilitated by Emerge Women and Children's Support Network therapists for women and their infants (aged 0-3 years) who have recently experienced family violence and who are currently living in refuge or other stable residential housing. We developed the program jointly with Swinburne, adapted from the Peek-a-Boo Club™.

The findings were positive, with women participating in SNG reporting that their mental health had improved and that the program helped them better understand the needs of their children, and to better appreciate the importance of play and engagement. The results also found the group provided many women with a sense of security and safety to start to share their experiences of family violence, to connect with others and to experience a sense of autonomy. The reported benefits for child participants included greater capacity for regulation and a positive response to the structure and routine of the group.

It is exciting to be able to use this evidence to support and inform our work with mothers/caregivers and their infants and young children moving forward.

PREVENTING TEEN VIOLENCE

The sector, the justice system and research across Australia is showing a troubling increase in teenagers who use family violence. Data and literature emphasise a critical need for programs to focus on prevention and early intervention before adolescent family violence occurs.

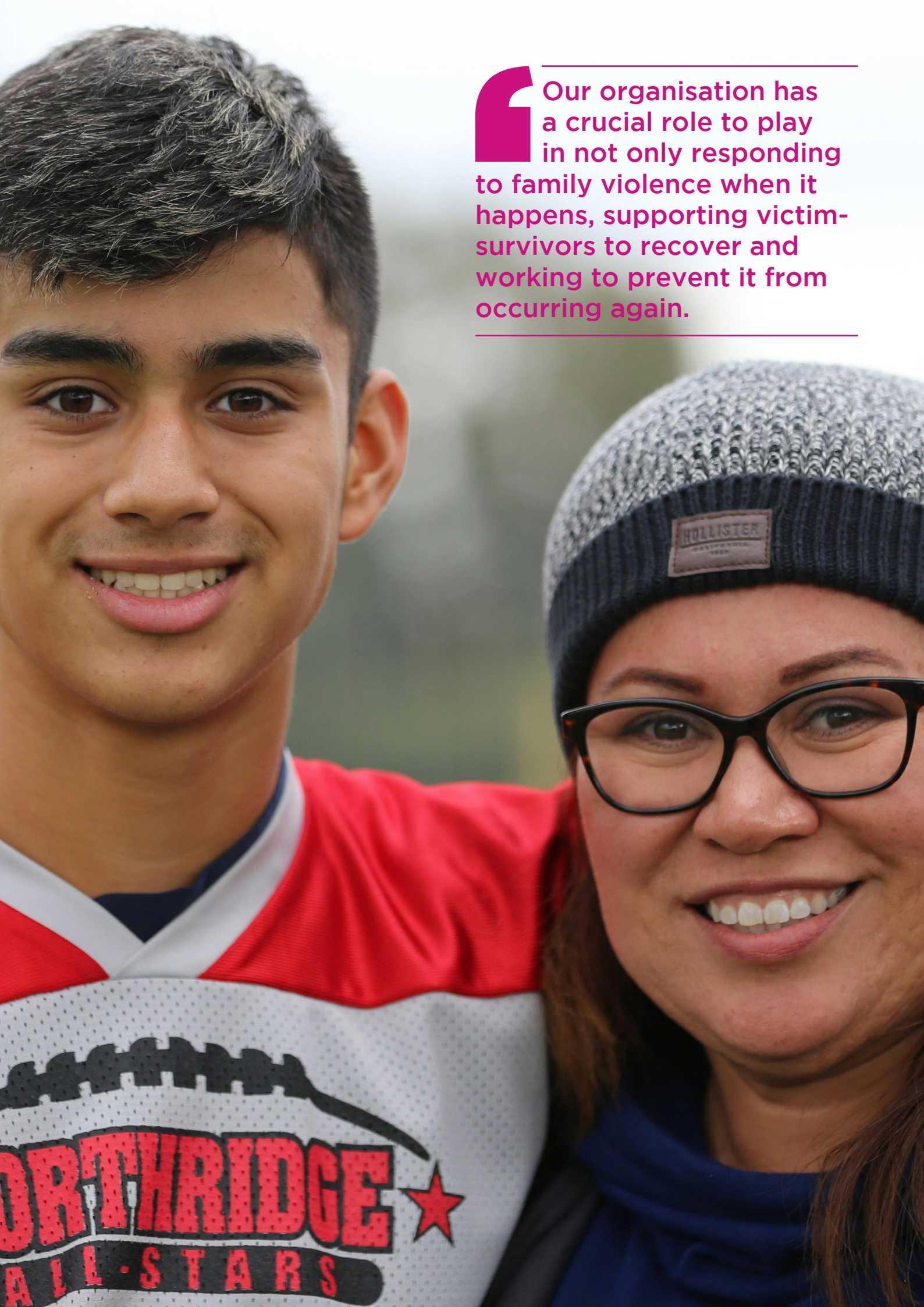
The research shows us that almost all teenagers who use violence experienced family violence as children, and only receive service system intervention once the legal system has intervened. Practitioners surveyed by ANROWS in 2020 said that ‘any service support or legal intervention that responds specifically to adolescent family violence is “coming 10 years too late”’. We see a critical role for specialist response services to do more to prevent the cycle of violence, and are leading the change to create a world-first therapeutic program for primary-school-age children who are at high risk of becoming teenagers who use violence.

Our pilot is creating an early-intervention therapeutic program specifically identifying and targeting the early behavioural and parent-child relationship factors that research shows means that a young child is at higher risk of becoming a teenager who uses violence. All pilot participants will be

victim-survivors of family violence who have either witnessed and/or experienced family violence. Critically, the program will include interventions that support both children at risk and their parent to support pro-social behaviour, positive parenting and other evidence-based behavioural and relational changes.

We will rigorously evaluate our pilot to add to the evidence base and demonstrate that early intervention is critical to intervene before teenagers use violence. Our research will analyse how an investment in early-intervention program utilising play and art therapy and dyadic support, alongside existing therapeutic support and strength-based case management, is effective in addressing trauma and preventing the onset of at-risk behaviours associated with adolescent violence.

Our program and research aims to establish a global evidence base for early-intervention programs to prevent the cycle of family violence and support victim-survivors of family violence in their early recovery.



F Our organisation has a crucial role to play in not only responding to family violence when it happens, supporting victim-survivors to recover and working to prevent it from occurring again.



SAFE REFUGE

At the heart of our safe refuge is a holistic approach to client support and case management and a specialist focus on children as victim-survivors in their own right. In 2023, our refuge welcomed record numbers of new families.

Our team worked intensively to provide wrap-around support for these families, and we were pleased to see many clients transition into long-term housing, secure ongoing employment and start at new schools. During the year, we also farewelled some long-term clients whom we had been supporting for a number of years.

As we exited the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have worked to increase the services and programs we deliver in refuge. In 2023, we hosted weekly yoga sessions with a volunteer instructor and ran pet therapy most weeks. Art Space, our informal drop-in art studio, provided an important creative outlet for clients, with support from an onsite art therapist and a student teacher.

For our younger clients, the weekends were also full, with weekly baking and play time on Saturdays, and movies and popcorn in the teens area every Sunday.

We observed a range of special occasions throughout the year, such as hosting a barbecue to mark the AFL Grand Final, organising a well-received Easter egg hunt and hosting picnics in the outdoor area.

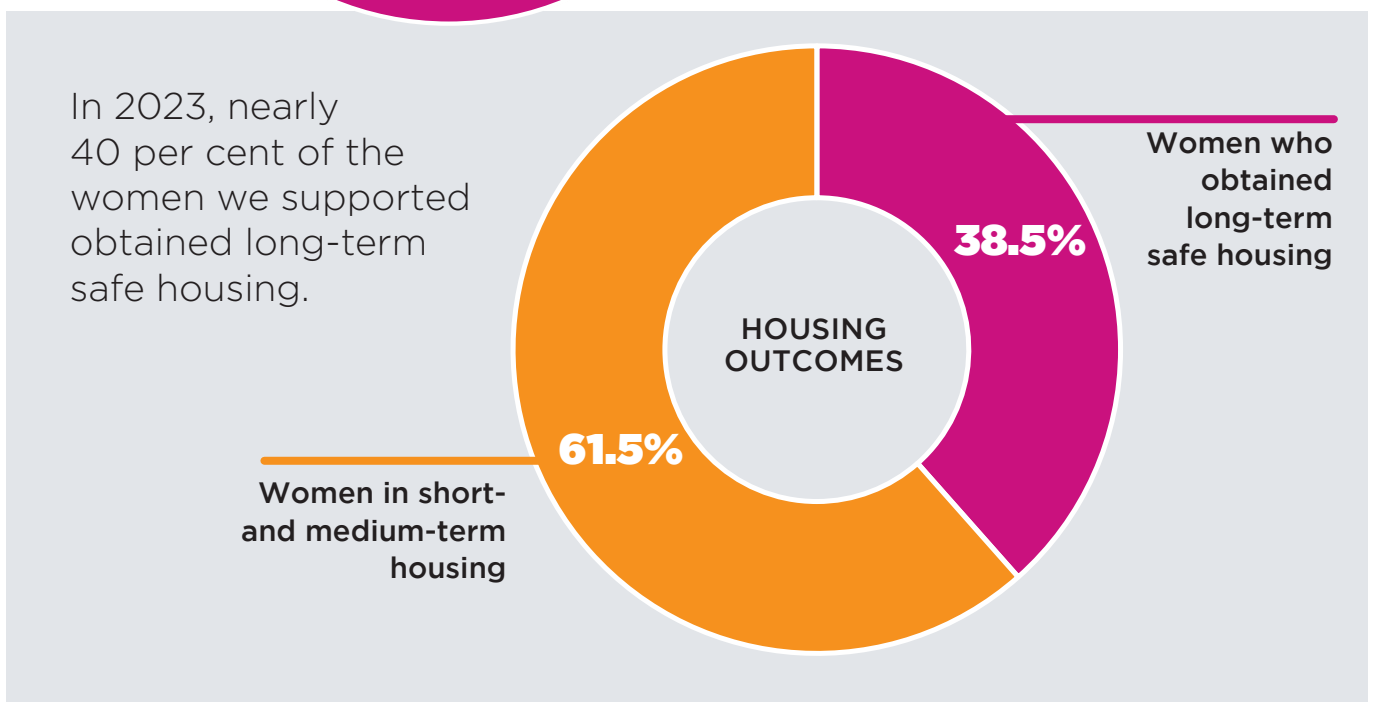
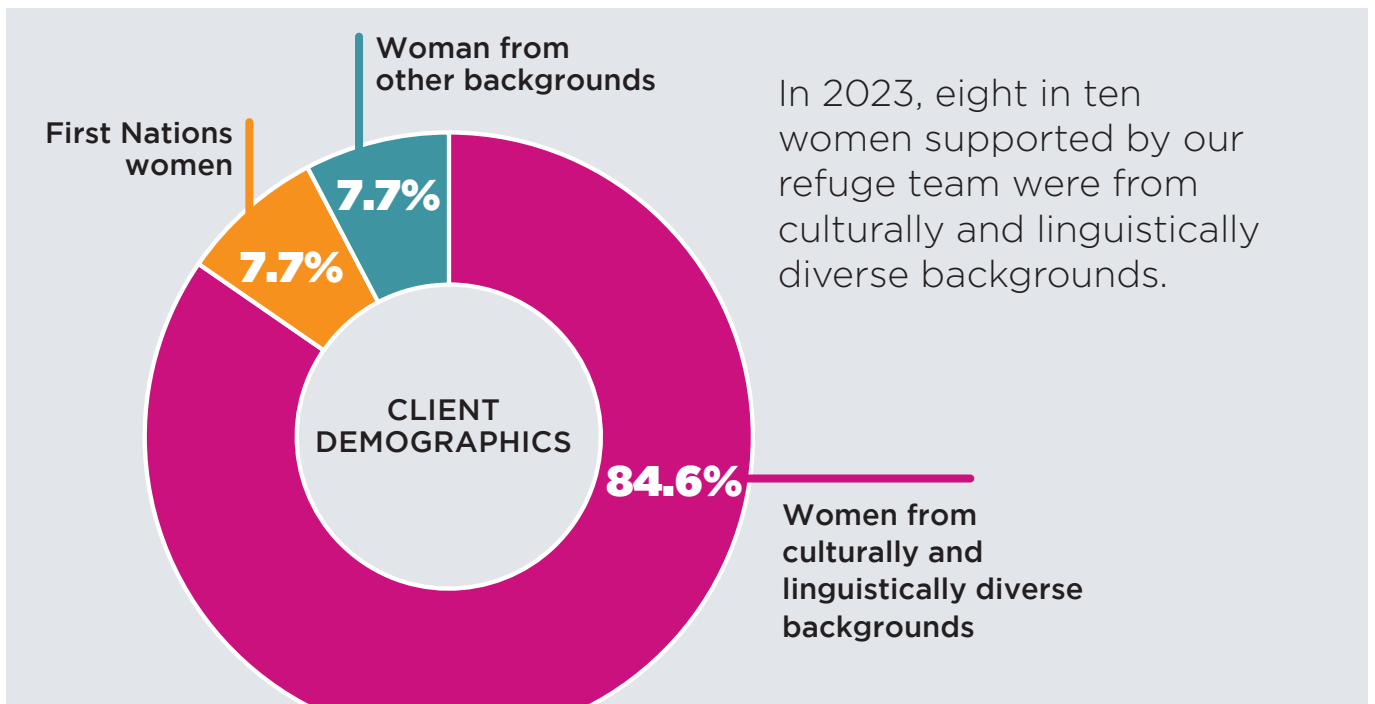
We were incredibly grateful for the donations we received for refuge this year – such as a huge range of sports equipment including a professional table tennis table from Bayside Community Emergency Relief, as well as an electric barbecue from Rotary. As a result we are seeing the families spend more time outdoors and connecting with each other.

It's not only helping build connections and reduce isolation; it is also assisting with their recovery journey.

We are all thrilled to see the core and cluster model working for our clients – while each family has their own private independent unit, we were pleased to see increasing use of the communal space, due in part to the various activities on offer. It's not only helping build connections and reduce isolation; it is also assisting with their recovery journey.

OUR CLIENTS

We use client-centred, strengths-based approaches to break the cycle of family violence so that victim-survivors are empowered, resourced, and supported to return safely to the community.



OUR IMPACT: A VICTIM-SURVIVOR STORY

Just over three years ago, Kalina arrived in Australia from Poland as a 'mail order bride'. She was 20 years old and did not know anyone or speak any English.

Kalina came to Emerge Women and Children's Support Network with her three-year-old daughter Sofia, to escape family violence and seek accommodation at the refuge.

Kalina told practitioners at the refuge about her life in Australia, how her husband stopped her from engaging in any activities that would give her independence. She rarely left the house, could not go to the shops or travel anywhere by herself, and had no access to money. Kalina was isolated and traumatised by physical and psychological violence.

Kalina had little understanding of her rights in Australia. She did not have permanent residency, and she was afraid that her husband would take her daughter away if she tried to leave him. Her worst fear was that she would be forced to return to Poland without Sofia.

Our practitioners started gently initiating supports for Kalina and her daughter. They started with helping Kalina go to the shops and buy food. She became more independent and was soon using public transport to go shopping by herself.

The team at the refuge also supported Kalina to seek a family violence intervention order and apply for permanent residency and a special benefit allowance. A volunteer provided English tutoring for Kalina until she felt confident enough to join a local English language course.

Practitioners also assisted Kalina to enrol Sofia in kindergarten. While Kalina and her daughter had a warm and loving relationship, Sofia had some insecurity and separation anxiety. Kalina and Sofia were referred to our Therapeutic team where they received individual and group therapy.



Much of the work our team did with Kalina focused on providing emotional support, building her self-esteem and equipping her with knowledge of her rights and how Australian justice and social support systems work.

Over many months, Kalina and Sofia transitioned from the refuge into one of our crisis accommodation properties and then into a transitional housing property. Practitioners worked with Kalina to apply for a permanent social housing property. Kalina and Sofia now live in permanent housing which was furnished with the assistance of local material aid services.

Kalina has secured permanent residency, has custody of Sofia and receives a Centrelink income. She continues to attend an art therapy group at Emerge Women and Children's Support Network.

She told staff who supported her that she feels more confident and independent. She has made friends through childcare and attending local groups. In the future, Kalina hopes to gain a qualification in science.

GRANTS, DONORS AND PARTNERSHIPS

We are deeply grateful for the many different donors and fundraisers who are all committed to ending family violence and creating better futures for families by supporting Emerge. Every little contribution has meant one of our clients has had a better opportunity to rebuild their lives.

We are amazed by the commitment and compassion of our donors who have supported our work in an impressive range of ways – from a young primary school student creating a business selling bags with proceeds donated to Emerge Women and Children’s Support Network, high school student bake sales, rural pub fundraisers and a women’s golf club raffle and event day for the second year running. We couldn’t be more thankful for such a diverse range of people donating to us.

Organisations such as Regenerate have provided high quality bedding and personal items to create a homely, warm welcome to those arriving at our refuge and Rotary clubs in Bently and Mordialloc have built outdoor refuge furniture, a BBQ and provided essential funds to run our kids pet therapy program.

Brand new clothes, toiletries, toys and essential shopping vouchers have been so kindly donated by Bayside Emergency Community Relief who are always happy to assist us when gaps arise in our client needs.

 **We feel the community’s support behind us as we move into 2024.**

Emerge Women and Children’s Support Network will continue to foster these special relationships and the good will of so many people in our community.

We feel the communities support behind us as we move into 2024. Emerge Women and Children’s Support Network will continue to foster these special relationships and the good will of so many people in our community, whose donations help us to continue our specialised, wrap around services to families that have experienced family violence.

WE THANK OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS

Government	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Department of Social Services – Families and Communities Program: Volunteer Grant Kingston Council
Partnerships	ANROWS Ashfords Accountants and Advisory Bayside Community Emergency Relief – President Deb Brook FareShare Good 360 La Trobe University Lions Club – Mentone/Mordialloc – Melinda Men’s Shed – Mordialloc Nappy Collective Regenerate Relove Rize Up Rotary Mordialloc and Moorabbin – Di Taranto and Geoff Gray Swinburne University Thread Together
Donors	Cheltenham Mentone Uniting Church Commonwealth Golf Club Daly Family Foundation Kelly Family Foundation Pethard Tarax Charitable Trust Pymble Ladies College St Augustine Op Shop Mentone Sisters of Charity Waverly Wood Workers Zimmermans
Fundraisers	Pay it forward Royal Oak Pub Ballarat St Michaels St Monica’s Epping

SUPPORT OUR WORK

All gifts, large or small, help us provide services, activities and amenities that enable us to deliver essential housing and support programs for women and children escaping family violence.

MAKE A DONATION

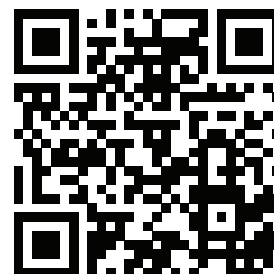
To donate, please scan the QR code and choose your amount; or use the details below for Electronic Funds Transfer.

Account name Emerge, Women and Children's Support Network Inc.

Bank Westpac

BSB 033 060

Account number 164606.



JOIN OUR NEWSLETTER

Sign up to our newsletter for occasional updates on news and updates from Emerge Women and Children's Support Network - please go to emergesupport.org.au/subscribe/

HOST A FUNDRAISING EVENT

If you would like to host a fundraising event on our behalf, please contact: mail@emergesupport.org.au



“ Without all of you, we would not be able to deliver on our work and the remarkable outcomes we continue to achieve with our clients and the community. ”

CONTACT US

If you are immediate danger call 000.

If you or someone you know is experiencing family violence please call the Safe Steps 24/7 Family Violence Response line on 1800 015 188.

Emerge Women and Children's Support Network

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