



Specialist Family  
Violence Service

# A pathway to a safe future

**Annual Report 2020/21**



# We have a new name



This was a big year for our organisation, with one of our most significant changes taking place in mid-2021 as we underwent a rebranding exercise and changed our name from Safe Futures Foundation to Refuge Victoria.

Our new logo signifies protection and shelter with an open house that shows Victoria symbolically sheltered by 'Refuge'. The visual language highlights that the path to living safe and free will take many turns; however, Refuge Victoria is here to guide and empower victim survivors along the way.

Our colour palette embodies the women's movement using purple, green, and white and includes a warm yellow to reference the organisation's history as Safe Futures Foundation.

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## Purpose

To provide refuge and support for those escaping family violence.

## Vision

For people escaping family violence to live safe and free.

## Mission

To help people escaping family violence on their journey to safety with individualised support and crisis accommodation.



# Refuge Victoria is here to guide and empower victim survivors along the way.

## Values

### **Working with compassion**

We care deeply about the work we do and whom we do it for.

### **Empowering people**

We empower people to become more confident and make informed decisions.

### **A collaborative approach**

By working together and sharing knowledge, we continue to strengthen our culture and outcomes.

### **Act with integrity**

We are respectful and transparent and will always hold ourselves to account.

### **Commitment to progress**

We are committed to providing the best care and outcomes for our clients through the continuous improvement of our services.

## Strategic Action Priorities

### **Governance**

We commit to implement our purpose and live our values.

### **Sustainability and growth**

We commit to provide and grow our high-quality services in response to community needs.

### **Our people and culture**

To enhance our culture of service excellence, we commit to supporting our people to deliver high-quality sustainable services.

### **Community partnerships**

We are committed to building connections and relationships across our community to free people from control, abuse, and family violence.

### **Performance driven**

We are committed to being a performance (data and evidence) driven organisation.



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## About Us

Refuge Victoria is the largest family violence refuge provider in Victoria. We have a long-standing, proven history, originating as grassroots organisations run by community volunteers who knew there were women and children in the suburbs who were unsafe in their homes and needed a safe place to stay.

From our infancy in 1976, when we opened our first refuge to support women and children in our community, we have seen growth and transformation. Fast forward to 2021, and we operate three refuge facilities, 15 crisis properties, and have nomination rights to 35 transitional homes, supporting, enabling, and empowering over 1,000 people each year.

Refuge Victoria supports people experiencing homelessness from the impacts of family violence, providing refuge and crisis accommodation along with a range of supports to enhance their safety and wellbeing. Clients are referred to our service by Safe Steps, the state wide refuge referral service. Our highly skilled team works alongside our clients to help form their individual plans to achieve their goals towards a safer and better life.

We are experts in assessing and monitoring family violence risk. We work with our clients and focus on their wellbeing, all the while supporting their pathway to a safer future.



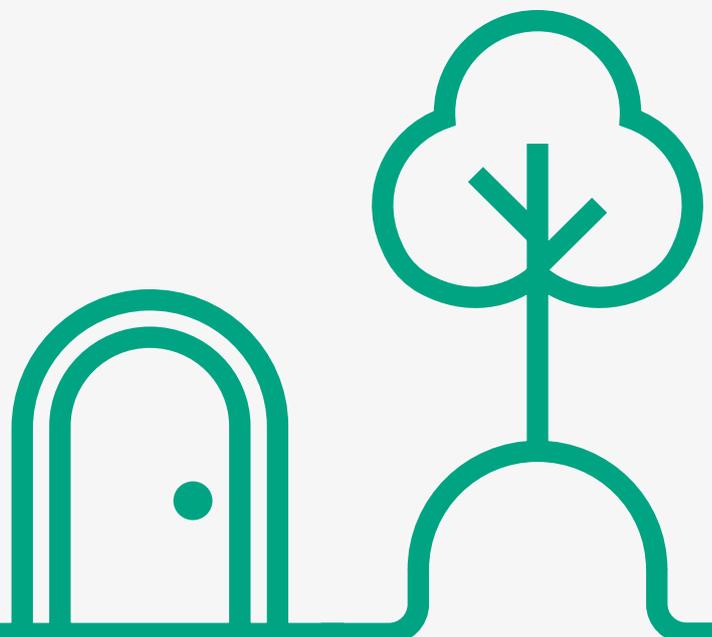
Refuge Victoria acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.



We recognise intersectionality and celebrate the diverse identities in the LGBTIQAP+ community. We are committed to supporting, encouraging and ensuring our staff and clients feel safe to be seen and treated as they are.



Refuge Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation, primarily funded by the Victorian Government, along with intermittent grants and donations from other sources.





**"We work alongside our clients and focus on their wellbeing, all the while supporting their pathway to a safe future."**

**- Paula Piccinini, CEO**

# Acting Chair's Report

**"There are no  
limitations on  
what's possible."**

- Jessica Alba



**It is my pleasure to commend the 2021 Annual Report of Refuge Victoria to you. The last 12 months have been a period of immense change for our organisation, through planned growth, service expansion, success and sudden loss.**

The ongoing impacts of COVID-19 have seen an increased risk of family and domestic violence and our service delivery team was continually challenged with recurrent lockdowns and ongoing restrictions. Yet despite the challenges of changed work routines and often sudden changes to restrictions, our staff have continued to always prioritise the safety of our clients. On behalf of the board, I would like to thank our CEO, Paula Piccinini for her leadership and resilience during

these uncertain times and each of our staff members for their agility and commitment.

From the excitement of deciding on a new name and brand to better reflect the nature of our organisation's core purpose and service, time stood still with the sudden passing of our Board Chair, colleague, mentor and dear friend, Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP on 5 July 2021. Ill health had forced Doreen to retire from the board just a few weeks earlier. Our board, staff and colleagues are only some of the many lives Doreen touched with her tireless advocacy and passion to help vulnerable women and children.

Doreen leaves a legacy beyond measure. Her memory continues to inspire all at Refuge Victoria. We have a strong board that is fully committed to continue to work for the cause so important to her and us all – for people escaping family violence to live safe and free.

This year we also said farewell to Florence Mauwa, Board Treasurer from 2016–2021. At the 2019/20 AGM, held in March 2021 when an in-person meeting was possible, Florence described her five-year involvement with the organisation as the most amazing years of her life. When she joined the board, the organisation had a \$351,000 deficit and uncertainty around the ongoing ability to pay staff salaries. Doreen and Florence were integral parts of

the organisation's subsequent transformation, growth and ability to prosper during uncertain times. They were both enormously proud to report organisational equity exceeding \$3.7m at their final AGM.

Looking ahead, our board has set a new Strategic Plan for 2021–2023 and we look forward to implementing our key actions and initiatives to bring our vision to life over the coming years.

In closing, I would like to personally thank my fellow directors for their time, expertise and dedication to governance to ensure that Refuge Victoria continues to provide quality services to our clients. On behalf of the board, I would like to thank our service partners and funding bodies, particularly the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and the donors who so generously help us to support and build resilience of clients to give strength for their futures.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emily Ryder'.

**Emily Ryder**  
Acting Chair

# CEO's Report



## The last 12 months have been a period of significant growth and change for Refuge Victoria.

In October 2020, we undertook an organisational restructure to clearly align our service delivery with refuge and support. We moved our outreach services into the refuge setting, providing outreach to clients leaving refuge to support them on their journey to safety. The new structure is clear and simple with one service team per refuge site and a corporate team at head office supporting service delivery and strategy.

The restructure was timed to accommodate our new Eastern Refuge coming online with a team of 10 staff members. We took possession of the refuge site on 17 December 2020 and commenced operations less than

two months later, on 7 February; a significant achievement considering our staff had both the traditional Christmas break and COVID-19 restrictions to overcome in sourcing furniture and services to set up a six-unit facility.

With three refuge sites and 15 crisis properties located statewide, it came time to consider a new name for our organisation. Loud and proud of the work we do, Refuge Victoria was a unanimous choice by our staff, board members and stakeholders involved in the rebranding. It is of great comfort to me that our late eminent Chair and pioneer of the family violence sector, Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP, embraced and endorsed the new name with passion and enthusiasm.

High quality accommodation is one of our key strategic objectives. To this end, we have embarked on a rolling plan to upgrade our crisis properties. This year two properties received a complete overhaul with new kitchens, bathrooms, lighting, carpets, flooring and paint work. Such is the commitment to ensure high quality facilities that Refuge Victoria expended its own reserves towards some of this work.

Excellence in support and service has always been at the heart of our work. Following best practice, in 2022 we will upgrade the

**Excellence in service has always been at the heart of our work.**

facilities at our original Eastern Refuge and extend operational hours to 24/7, adding to our portfolio of properties offering around-the-clock onsite staff.

The last 12 months have clearly been trying on clients, staff and our board. Entering in and out of rolling lockdowns, curtailed services, and the vaccine rollout have all been challenging. I would like to thank our staff for their unwavering commitment to our clients and their wellbeing and safety. I acknowledge and thank the board members for their support, expertise and vision. I would like to acknowledge our stakeholders, in particular the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and Family Safety Victoria for their continued support, funding and commitment to our sector. And most importantly, I acknowledge and pay my respects to the family violence victim survivors who we are here to serve.

On a personal note, I acknowledge the tragic loss of our esteemed Chair, Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP, a pioneer in our field and a woman who touched and influenced so many lives for the better. We stand on the shoulders of the great women who have come before us, and Doreen was one of them.

*Paula Piccinini*

**Paula Piccinini**  
CEO

## Service Highlights 2020/21

# Making an Impact

### OUR CLIENTS

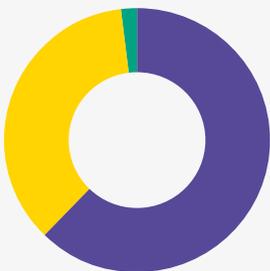
**1,001**

People supported



**377** Women supported

**624** Children supported



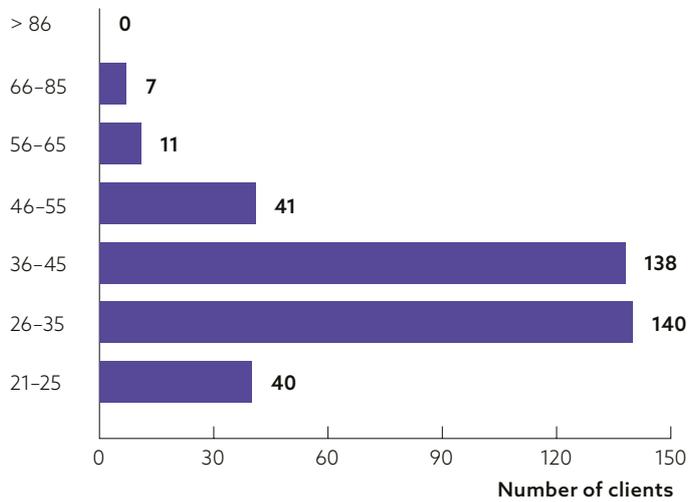
**624** Clients under 20 years

**359** Clients 21 - 55 years

**18** Clients 56 - 85 years

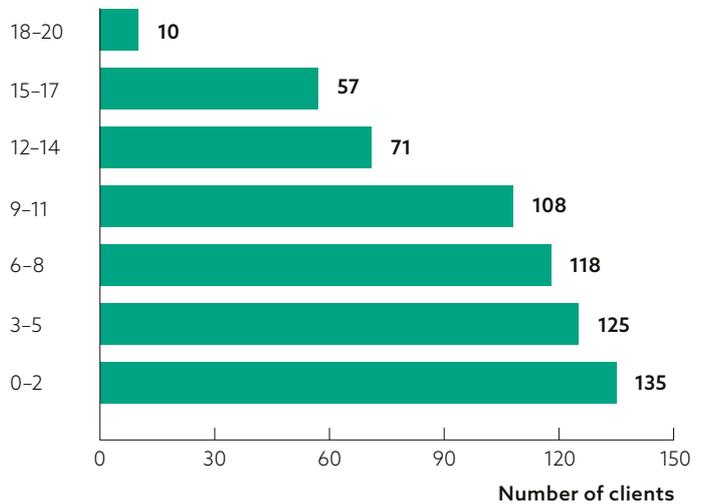
### AGE RANGE OF WOMEN

#### Age range



### AGE RANGE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

#### Age range





**462**

Culturally and linguistically diverse people supported



**69**

People identified as Aboriginal or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



**91**

People needed an interpreter for communication

**MATERIAL AID FUNDING TO CLIENTS**

**\$356,329**

Total payments made to clients



<b>\$248,922</b>	Flexible Support Packages
<b>\$40,602</b>	Assistance to victim survivors on temporary visas
<b>\$36,754</b>	Housing Establishment Funding – Family Violence Crisis brokerage
<b>\$30,051</b>	Housing Establishment Funding

**SUPPORT PROVIDED**

**1,336 days**

Support periods (days)

**CLIENT CULTURAL DEMOGRAPHICS**

Most common countries of birth

Country	Count
Australia	<b>448</b>
New Zealand	<b>43</b>
India	<b>25</b>
Sudan	<b>17</b>
Afghanistan	<b>15</b>

Most common main languages spoken at home

Language	Count
English	<b>695</b>
Arabic	<b>49</b>
Vietnamese	<b>40</b>
Dari	<b>30</b>
Dinka	<b>26</b>

# Our Accommodation



**Refuge Victoria operates three refuge facilities and 15 Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) properties at undisclosed locations throughout Victoria.**

The CAP properties are individual 2 or 3-bedroom homes and units with their own gardens and off-street parking. In addition, our partnerships with community housing providers (Community Housing Ltd and Eastcare) provide nomination rights to a further 35 transitional homes across Melbourne for clients awaiting permanent housing.

Our three refuges operate under the 'core and cluster' model, a refuge model endorsed by the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2016. Refuge Victoria first pioneered this approach by converting our 'communal' refuge to a 'core and cluster' facility, the first of its kind in Victoria. The individual client units, each with their own kitchen, bathroom, and separate courtyard, form the 'cluster', and qualified staff work from the 'core' office onsite.

## **New Eastern Refuge**

**Our new Eastern refuge has had a busy and exciting first few months of operation.**

After taking the keys in December 2020, we set ourselves an ambitious goal of taking referrals by early February. This required a robust recruitment strategy and a significant commitment from current staff to provide quality service in line with best practice standards. The team worked tirelessly through Christmas and January and this short turnaround time between keys handover and client intake has set a new 'benchmark' for new refuge builds.

The first month of operation was hectic and fast-paced. Within two weeks of opening, our refuge of six units was full, with six women and 12 children onsite. All the children and young people were

disengaged from education due to the transience associated with family violence. Our Specialist Children's and Young People's (SCYP) Practitioner worked hard to develop relationships with local primary schools and high schools to ensure the children and young people remained engaged in education.

Refuge staff also supported several specialist family violence services at various 'core and cluster' build stages. In addition, staff welcomed service providers onsite to share learnings from our experience, which equipped other services to avoid some of the disruptions that often accompany a new build.



Our first challenge came very early on as we welcomed our first clients onsite, with only two holding permanent residency status. This made exploring alternative housing options and pathways out of the refuge a challenge. However, staff worked collaboratively across sites to utilise internal resources to accommodate clients while they were being supported to gain permanent residency.

While a great deal of the time in the past year has been spent in lockdown, staff were able to develop and implement a range of group activities with clients during the brief periods where restrictions were eased. Activities included regular communal breakfasts, BBQs, group painting and movie nights. Clients engaged well in the activities, and staff observed increased engagement, morale, and social interaction as a result.

Staff built some great relationships with local service providers and engaged several key stakeholders including Victoria Legal Aid, local maternal health nurses, Housing Connect, and Child Protection

to meet with clients regularly onsite. Our refuge staff have also supported several clients living in social housing and others residing in the community.

While there has been a focus on establishment and building stability at this site in our first year, our clients have also achieved some fantastic outcomes. Clients were supported to access specialised legal services for various matters to help them take steps to address barriers that may put their safety at greater risk. Clients were also supported to access medium and long-term housing options, including transitional housing and private rental accommodation as well as increase their understanding of tenancy requirements.

Clients have also reported a significant reduction in self-assessed risk after being supported by our refuge team. In addition, staff have received great feedback from clients who have stated that they feel safer, calmer, more optimistic about their future, and more stable after their stay.

**The focus moving forward for the team at the second Eastern refuge is to strengthen key stakeholder relationships, particularly in the housing sector. With limited housing options, it can be challenging to transition clients into long-term, sustainable accommodation.**

Staff will aim to build relationships with local housing providers and real estate agents to give our clients a greater chance of access to these options. Refuge Victoria's commitment to our staff remains, making professional development a priority as we afford our staff opportunities to grow and learn, ensuring our 100% staff retention record at this refuge site is sustained.



## CASE STUDY

### Tarni's story

**Following a family violence relationship that spanned 10 years, Tarni, a 43-year-old Aboriginal woman from rural Victoria fled to Melbourne and called Safe Steps fearing for her safety. Safe Steps placed Tarni in a motel and then referred her to Refuge Victoria.**

Tarni arrived at refuge exhausted from her week of transience. Our staff welcomed Tarni and gave her some space to rest before they completed the intake process. Our staff developed a Cultural Plan with Tarni as she identified fear of being isolated from her mob and referred her to a local Specialist Aboriginal service to assist with cultural support. With the help of this service, Refuge Victoria staff worked alongside Tarni to develop safe ways for her to remain connected to country and her mob back home.

While Tarni was in the family violence relationship, she was under complete control of the perpetrator and had very little knowledge of how to live independently. Our staff assisted Tarni to gain control of her own finances and manage her accounts. Tarni slowly developed the confidence to travel around the local area independently and attend services on her own.

Tarni's long-term goal was to return home when it was safe to do so. Staff successfully referred Tarni to medium-term accommodation while she accessed legal support to plan a safe return home. Refuge Victoria staff remained involved with Tarni to ensure her support needs continued to be met. Tarni went on to find casual employment and accessed medical support to address several long-term health issues. Tarni is still actively working with Refuge Victoria to achieve her long-term goals.

### Original Eastern Refuge

**Our original refuge site continues to be a part of the education and establishment of the newer refuges.**

During 2020/21 this site experienced a period of transformational change with streamlining, specialisation, and growth at its core. The leadership team recognised that current programs duplicated others in the sector and re-aligned this site's services to align more closely with support provided at other Refuge Victoria sites.

The Safe in Community (SIC) Program ceased in mid-2020; however, Refuge Victoria continued to support existing program clients to ensure they were not impacted by service changes.

The refuge team is responsible for three service contracts, supporting clients accommodated in our five refuge units; offering intensive outreach support to clients living in 13 crisis properties; and supporting clients living in transitional housing (THMs) and social housing properties in partnership with Women's Housing Ltd.

The most significant change for this refuge was the introduction of extended stay units onsite, allowing clients to be supported for 6-8 week stays. Three of the refuge's five units moved to the new model while the other two remained short stay in partnership with Safe Steps. This change has meant staff could provide more intensive support to clients onsite, allowing for some fantastic outcomes.





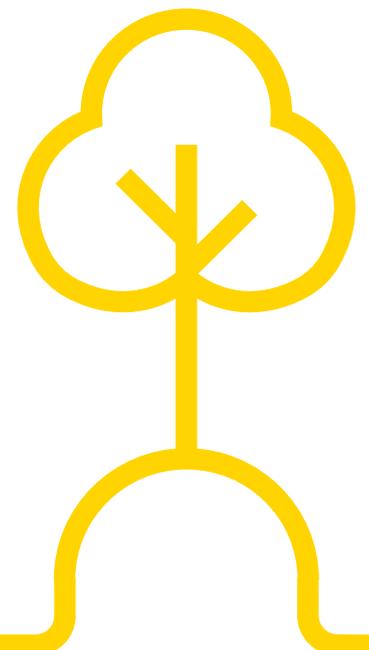
Staffing changes at our original refuge saw the mobilisation of employees from other Refuge Victoria sites join the team. These staff had experience within the 24/7 'core and cluster' model, which further supported the alignment process. The team also farewelled some long-term staff who had made a significant contribution to Refuge Victoria over several years. These staffing changes led to a robust recruitment and onboarding process, which was highly successful.

Our original refuge site provides specialised outreach services. Over the last year, staff have faced significant barriers to providing outreach support given the continuing impacts of COVID-19. The team has demonstrated astounding creativity in their advocacy and engagement with both outreach and refuge clients throughout the pandemic.

Staff have continued to assess client risk constantly, allowing for advocacy for some outreach clients to move back into secure refuge at times as needed. This agile approach has allowed clients to access more intensive support when required, leading to safer, more sustainable outcomes.

Support Workers were also introduced to this refuge team to provide more practical and generalist support to clients accommodated onsite. The valuable input from the Support Workers has already served as an asset and enhanced the team's great work. This Eastern refuge team looks forward to the next year and focusing on providing the best support to the refuge and community clients.

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## Western Refuge

**The 2020/21 year has seen the Western refuge grow and consolidate the team, site and service delivery provided to women and children.**

This team supports clients in seven refuge units onsite and two offsite crisis properties recently added to the Western portfolio. The beginning of the year saw further recruitment of all positions to a full team, with the site transitioning to being staffed 24 hours, seven days a week from November 2020.

The varied demographics of clients are also reflected in the diversity of Western refuge staff, who bring unique knowledge, skills, and perspectives to the team and the support we provide to clients. The move to 24/7 service has allowed for out-of-hours support, prompt response to concerns and safety issues, and an increased sense of security for clients. In addition, the team has worked to improve quality processes to ensure consistent care and

communication around clients' needs to provide holistic support to those staying with us.

The first clients to stay in the new crisis properties arrived during the week of Christmas. These properties have provided a valuable next step for people who may face additional barriers to accessing housing, while allowing for more independent living. For those clients who are ineligible for Centrelink payments due to residency status, for example, the properties allow for ongoing secure accommodation and family violence case management support.

Nine households can now be supported by the Western refuge team at any time, and staff ensure a seamless transition to support new clients once a property becomes vacant.

Our refuge site was enhanced with sunshades installed over the play areas, playground markings painted, and a cubby house added to the playground. Other purchases for the refuge included

extra cots to accommodate more families with infants, desks to support children undertaking remote learning, and other items to ensure units can meet client health needs.

The contained backyards have allowed for several dogs to be housed at the refuge with families who may otherwise have not been accepted into a refuge setting. In one case, a woman's dog was a crucial part of her mental wellbeing plan and support, and the client was able to reside safely in refuge with her beloved pet until a housing outcome was achieved.

The past year has been a tough one as COVID-19 continued to present challenges with repeated lockdowns, yet the team responded with the required agility, adaptability, and innovation. COVID safe planning has become a staple of practice with measures taken to ensure appropriate testing for both staff and clients as needed, comprehensive cleaning, and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

**The past year has been a tough one as COVID-19 continued to present challenges with repeated lockdowns, yet the team responded with the required agility, adaptability, and innovation.**

The first full year of service for the Western refuge has also focused on building networks and partnerships with other services in the area, with a plan for some of these partnerships to be formalised. This has allowed for secondary consultation and advice to improve our response to clients and their needs. The consultation included training on being culturally appropriate, ease of linking clients to other services to meet varied needs, increasing support networks, and building awareness of Refuge Victoria and our work in the west. In addition, formal partnerships have been explored with: Wyndham Uniting, including an in-reach service once restrictions lift for clients to receive a soft entry into housing support; Odyssey House; VACCA; Wyndham City Council; Enhanced Maternal and Child Health Service; and, Good Start Early Learning Centres.

## CASE STUDY

### Jordan's story

**Jordan is a 31-year-old who identifies as non-binary. Jordan uses they/them pronouns.**

Jordan accessed crisis family violence services after experiencing years of emotional, verbal and physical abuse from their partner and in addition faced several barriers to accessing refuge including their own fear, uncertainty, limited knowledge about services as well as service exclusion and discrimination based on gender identity.

Jordan feared that they would not be eligible for secure refuge as most services seemed to only offer support to CIS women and their children. However, there are certainly exceptions. Further, Jordan was also concerned about how refuge staff would respond to them. Jordan finally gained the courage to reach out for support by contacting Safe Steps who referred Jordan to Refuge Victoria, where a space of refuge was offered to them. Our staff ensured they were inclusive in their approach to

Jordan, aware of the unique challenges faced by people of the LGBTIQAP+ community. Jordan settled in quickly and was able to safely connect with other residents onsite. Staff made sure to engage Jordan's existing care team and referred them to appropriate LGBTIQAP+ supports. Staff assisted Jordan to make safe connections with family and engage in family violence counselling. Jordan was linked to legal support services and successfully applied for an intervention order. Jordan stated that they feel less isolated and significantly safer in the community since being with Refuge Victoria. Jordan is now connected to support groups and a mentoring program.

Jordan's risk of family violence has significantly reduced since being with Refuge Victoria and they are now protected by a full three-year intervention order. Jordan is looking for share accommodation and looks forward to living independently.



# Partners and Key Stakeholders

Supporting victim survivors who are escaping family violence relies on specialists from a broad range of community services working together to achieve the best outcomes possible for our collective clients. We acknowledge with great appreciation the expertise our many partners and stakeholders provide across all aspects of our service.

Accommodating clients in our secure refuges and crisis accommodation properties would not be possible without our partnership with Safe Steps. Safe Steps is one of the first points of contact for women escaping family violence and the tireless work of Safe Steps staff is well respected by our team. We are particularly grateful for the Brief Intervention Team who refer us clients and collaborate around risk assessment and safety planning for them.

After we settle clients into our service, we turn to our partners who provide fundamental support. Both Centrelink and Victoria Legal Aid offer in-reach support to our clients, helping them to navigate some of the most complex aspects of support, removing much of the stress and time it takes to attend to their financial



and legal needs. Other community legal services, financial counselling services, and employment agencies such as Fitted for Work and the Red Cross also provide valued support to our clients.

Frequently we rely on our partners and valued stakeholders for other specialised needs. This often includes counselling from Centres Against Sexual Assault, visits and reviews by culturally specific organisations including InTouch, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, and secondary consults and case planning from Rainbow Door and Pride Disability Services.

Our Specialist Children's and Young People's team work closely with NDIS providers, enhanced maternal and child health practitioners,

Paediatricians, Child Protection services and the education system. Enrolment officers, school counsellors, teachers and student wellbeing officers provide essential assistance to support children and young people escaping family violence. We hope to strengthen the ties within the education sector enabling access to resources to be more streamlined in the future.

We are indebted to our partners, funders and supporters who assist us to provide financial and material aid to our clients. Oz Harvest's supply of fresh fruit, vegetables and other pantry items are so valuable to us, as are the clothing items provided by St Kilda Mums and The Generosity Collective. Women's Health West and EDVOS assist us with funding through the Flexible Support Package Program via the Victorian Government,

# We are indebted to our partners, funders and supporters

who also funds the Housing Establishment Fund. We also frequently turn to organisations such as Eastern Emergency Relief Network, various foodbanks and St Vincent De Paul and the Salvation Army.

Housing services are crucial to our work to support women and children escaping family violence. Our partnership with Uniting, which provides Housing Connect in-reach support, is invaluable and facilitates a pathway to the private rental market for many of our clients in the Eastern region. Also critical are our partnerships with Community Housing Ltd, Eastcare and Women's Housing Ltd. Without these alliances it would be almost impossible for us to provide short to medium-term housing options.

Our collaboration and consortium with Uniting, EACH, Family Access Network and the Australian Childhood Foundation provides therapeutic intervention through the Pathways to Resilience Program in the Outer East – a program and partnership, which we are pleased and proud to be aligned with.

## TESTIMONIAL

### Pathways to Resilience Program

From a daughter and her Dad

*"Engaging with Refuge Victoria has enabled me to access support, information, and guidance to learn and practice safe and healthy parenting. From a place to talk and learn to outreach such as phone checks and in-home support like cooking sessions with my daughter. Thank you."*

**- A grateful Dad**

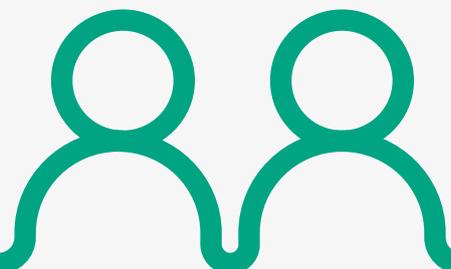
*"Refuge Victoria has helped us a lot. They're helpful."*

I feel happy to talk with Devorah (worker). I can talk in a room of safety.

I like when I arrive through the door when others are smiling and when I wait my turn on the couch to chat to Devorah. When Devorah visits our place, I feel glad, and she helps us cook recipes.

When she asked what rugs and stuff [I liked], I was happy. I think it will make the house feel very happy and cleaner. It makes me feel very happy, excited, comfortable. Thank you."

**- Young client (8 years of age)**



## Student Placement Program

Refuge Victoria has participated in the Victorian Government project Enhanced Pathways to Family Violence Work since the project commenced in 2019 to provide funding, training and other resources to assist specialist and non-specialist community service organisations to develop and transition students and new workers to family violence roles.

While placements were not possible for many months due to the continuing impacts of COVID-19, we continued to work with education providers to offer placements to students in Social Work and Community Services disciplines. Four students successfully completed work placements with us ranging from 4 to 13 weeks in line with their course requirements. Two of these students have continued their journey with Refuge Victoria having recently gained employment with us.

**From day one, the learning opportunities were endless.**

## TESTIMONIAL



**As a student completing a Diploma of Community Services at Box Hill Institute, I was fortunate to be given an opportunity to complete one of my placements at Refuge Victoria. I was blessed to receive an extremely thorough induction from Bianca who demonstrated the organisation's culture and focus on quality and compliance.**

From day one, the learning opportunities were endless. My previous work experience had been in customer service and people management with a retail franchise. Although some of these skills were transferable, I was acutely aware I needed to develop a different set of skills and knowledge to succeed in this field of work. My supervisor Natalie and all the refuge staff were a wealth of knowledge and acted as a sounding board throughout

my placement. Over seven weeks, there were many opportunities to engage with clients in formal and informal settings. Under the guidance and supervision of the staff, I assessed the needs of clients and developed case plans, which was an invaluable learning experience.

Before my placement, I didn't think family violence was an area I would like to work in, considering my own life experiences at an early age. But then I began focusing on the women and children and how assistance and guidance enable them to make better choices for their futures. These decisions help them to live a life free of family violence, while keeping perpetrators in view.

I did not want the placement to end. However, numerous times I felt like I was already a staff member!

On my last day, to my surprise, the staff had signed a card, organised a cake and flowers; it was overwhelming. However, this wasn't my only surprise. I was also fortunate enough to be offered a casual position as a Support Worker. I was so rapt. Since then, I have worked across all three refuge sites to further my skills and knowledge. I would highly recommend Refuge Victoria to anyone looking to complete their placement with a specialist family violence organisation.

**- Michelle**



**Family violence impacts a child's development, physical, emotional, and psychological health, education, peer and family relationships and connection to culture.**



# Vale Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP



The Victorian family violence and community services sectors sadly lost one of their fiercest advocates with the passing of Refuge Victoria's Board Chair, Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP on 5 July 2021. Doreen was a woman larger than life who dedicated an incredible 50 years to the welfare of others during a distinguished career, and, as a foster parent and mother.

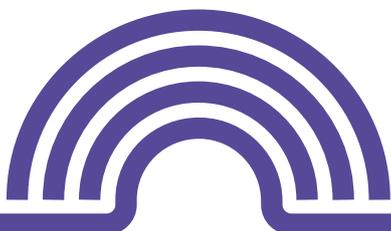
Doreen commenced her working life at Holloway Prison in London in 1971 and became one of the last Ten Pound Poms when she came to Australia on a whim in 1974. Following stints at Fairlea Women's Prison and Winlaton Youth Training Centre, she was appointed Principal Child Care Officer at Allambie Reception Centre in 1984. By 1989 Doreen was appointed CEO and later charged with the mammoth task of phasing down and closing the facility.

During her 25 years at the Department of Human Services (DHS), Doreen managed family, youth, and children's services in the Outer East region, including child protection, youth justice, and early intervention services. She was later awarded a Public

Service Medal for the pivotal contribution she made to the redevelopment of Allambie Reception Centre and her service to DHS.

In 1994 Doreen was instrumental in creating a service to support women affected by domestic violence, encouraging two small services to amalgamate, establishing the Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS). She organised a premises in the form of an old house, where the service operated for the following 11 years.

Doreen commenced as the CEO of Doncare Community Services in 2001. Within four years, Doncare's budget tripled. At the time, the scale of this development – a small team of paid staff leading



**“If you’re going to live, leave a legacy.  
Make a mark on the world that can’t  
be erased.”**

– Maya Angelou

the community to help its own through volunteerism – was unique in Victoria. During her 19-year term as CEO, Doreen successfully led Doncare to fund and implement a wide range of innovative programs to respond to identified community needs.

Many in the Eastern region will remember Doreen as a highly regarded and avid networker. This persuasive campaigner paved the way to develop a wide range of partnerships to deliver sustainable services to help achieve better outcomes for people facing adversity.

Doreen retired as Doncare CEO in April 2020. Sadly, a significant community celebration to acknowledge her 50 years of public service could not occur due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Though both COVID-19 restrictions and ill health severely curtailed her retirement, Doreen continued as Board Chair of Refuge Victoria. As our Chair for four years, she applied her extensive sector expertise and leadership skills to guide and govern our organisation through challenging times to its current vision, mission and strong financial position and future.

**Doreen will be remembered as one of the most charismatic, compassionate, and hardworking community leaders in the City of Manningham and pioneer of the family violence sector. She is deeply missed by many current and former colleagues, volunteers, and clients who were lucky enough to meet her.**



# Treasurer's Report



It is with pleasure that I present my first report as Treasurer of Refuge Victoria.

## Overview

When we presented our report for the previous financial year, I doubt we could have imagined that the events of 2019/20 would continue in 2020/21 and that the way we worked and operated our services would again be dominated by COVID-19. The global pandemic created extra challenges and resulted in increased workloads for our staff as they navigated a safe and efficient way of operating in a new environment.

Despite these challenges and demands, I am delighted to present the 2020/21 Financial Report for Refuge Victoria and announce an operating surplus of \$1,224,159.

## Audited accounts

The operating surplus reflects strong financial management, carefully stewarded by our CEO, Paula Piccinini, Finance Manager, Bhavna Joshi and Bookkeeper, Rosemary Scott, and overseen by the expertise of my fellow members of the Board's Finance and Audit Committee. A thorough understanding of our financial model has helped to implement a cost structure system of reporting for each of our properties, which has allowed us to manage expenses without compromising the quality of our service delivery or the quality of the properties.

Operating revenue for the year (\$6,289,305) increased by 49% of which 56% was attributable to an increase in State Government grants to operate the service. A significant component of the increase related to the introduction of the new Eastern Refuge, which we were delighted to bring online in early 2021. This facility is a state of the art 'core and cluster' refuge, which was tastefully furnished and fitted out by our staff and provides a safe and modern place to stay for clients.

Expenses for the 2020/21 financial year increased by 34% to \$5,065,146 (2020: \$3,777,485) primarily due to costs associated with running the new facility. Management undertook a restructure of the organisation

and achieved productivity savings that have allowed Refuge Victoria to run a service that is efficient and effective. Investments in enhanced technology and systems have resulted in the organisation achieving economy of scale in the back of office operations, which in turn allows for further investment in the refuges and services provided to vulnerable clients.

The expenditure increase was due to salaries and WorkCover expenses – 30%, administration and other expenses – 100%, property expenses – 108% while there were significant reductions in both project and utilities expenses. Our leadership team continues to drive productivity improvements to ensure expenses are controlled wherever possible while ensuring service delivery and the facilities utilised by our clients are of an extremely high standard.

The future for Refuge Victoria is bright with significant financial reserves in place to strategically review our direction and to address areas where there may be opportunities to improve service delivery and service design.

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**Kerrie McMahon**  
Treasurer

# Financial Summary

## Refuge Victoria Inc (previously Safe Futures Foundation)

For year ending 30 June 2021

	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>6,289,305</b>	<b>4,230,426</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Salaries and oncosts	3,452,883	2,658,045
Operating Costs	1,612,263	1,119,440
<b>Total expenditure for the year</b>	<b>5,065,146</b>	<b>3,777,485</b>
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>1,224,159</b>	<b>452,941</b>

## Summary Balance Sheet

As at 30 June 2021

	2021 (\$)	2020 (\$)
Current Assets	4,639,545	3,631,992
Non Current Assets	3,021,361	3,019,448
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>7,660,906</b>	<b>6,651,440</b>
Current Liabilities	2,351,739	2,532,685
Non Current Liabilities	263,532	351,279.00
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>2,615,271</b>	<b>2,883,964</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>5,045,635</b>	<b>3,767,476</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Retained Earnings and Reserves	5,045,635	3,767,476
<b>Total retained Earnings and Reserves</b>	<b>5,045,635</b>	<b>3,767,476</b>

To obtain a copy of the full financial reports for the year, please visit our website at:

[www.refugevictoria.org.au](http://www.refugevictoria.org.au)

## Highlights of the financial year

**\$6.2M**

Income

**\$3.4M**

Salaries and Oncosts

**\$1.6M**

Operational Costs

# Board of Directors



Refuge Victoria is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors; a skilled group of professionals who are leaders in their chosen fields. We are grateful to our Board Directors for sharing their time and expertise to provide the governance and strategic guidance that enables our team to help people escaping family violence on their journey to safety.

**“Doreen leaves a legacy beyond measure. Her memory continues to inspire all at Refuge Victoria.”**

- Emily Ryder  
Acting Chair



Departing Board Directors  
Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP and Florence Mauwa



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**Doreen Stoves AM PSM JP**  
Joined Board in 2016  
Chair from November 2018  
– June 2021  
\*Retired from Board June 2021



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**Emily Ryder**  
Joined Board in 2019  
Deputy Chair/Acting Chair from  
May 2021



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**Bernadette Dobeli**  
Joined wider Brenda House  
collective in 1990  
Chair 2013 – 2017  
Deputy Chair from 2018 – April 2021



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**Florence Mauwa**  
Joined Board in 2016  
Treasurer from 2016 – March 2021  
\*Retired from Board March 2021



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**Kerrie McMahon**  
Joined Board in 2018  
Secretary from 2018 – April 2021  
Treasurer from April 2021



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**Professor Karen Smith**  
Joined Board in 2020  
Secretary from April 2021



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**Pradeepa Jayawardena York**  
Joined Board in 2018



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**Raymond Burnett**  
Joined Board in 2018



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**Kerryn McLean**  
Joined Board in 2020

# Our Volunteers and Supporters



While the pandemic's ongoing restrictions meant that some volunteer roles were on hold for much of the past year, Refuge Victoria has still significantly benefited from the contributions of a small team of dedicated volunteers who continued to work tirelessly behind the scenes.

## Board of Directors

We are grateful for the ongoing commitment of our volunteer board, a group of skilled professionals who give their time freely to guide and govern the organisation. Many of the board meetings were held virtually this year, and technology also assisted the sub-committees to convene regularly. The board was fortunate enough to convene in person to oversee the organisation's rebranding, endorse a revised Constitution, and set a new Strategic Plan for 2021–2023.

In December 2020, we presented Board Director Bernadette Dobeli with a plaque to acknowledge her significant contribution to refuge services in Melbourne. Bernie joined the broader collective of

Brenda House in 1990 and has served continuously since then. Her family violence committee and governance experience now extend to over 30 years. Brenda House was one of the four refuges that amalgamated during 2012 – 2014 to form Safe Futures Foundation, now known as Refuge Victoria.

Bernie's ongoing commitment and dedication to supporting the governance and growth of family violence refuges has significantly enhanced crisis accommodation services for women and children.

Bernie remains as dedicated as ever to the eradication of violence in all settings and fostering respectful relationships in every interaction.

## Our handyman hero

Frank, a retired carpenter, has been a volunteer with Refuge Victoria for the past two years. Over the past year, Frank dedicated 150 hours of his time to tackle various maintenance and repair tasks that our staff challenged him to across our refuges, crisis properties, and offices. As if that wasn't enough, Frank has recently onboarded his brother Martin to help out too! Our ongoing thanks for your helping hands, Frank!



Refuge Victoria's work would not be possible without the support of the Victorian Government, and we acknowledge funding from the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing with great appreciation. We also acknowledge the continued generosity of individuals, community groups and businesses who have helped us provide advocacy, additional services, referral, and practical support to our clients.

### Community support

- Alannah and Madeline Foundation
- BJ Quilters
- CWA of Victoria
- Eastern Emergency Relief Network
- Fitted for Work
- Girlfriend's Club
- Gracedale Knitting Circle
- Knitting for the Needy
- Impact
- Locked Down Trivia
- Oz Harvest
- Quilts for Orphans
- Red Cross
- Rotary Club of Croydon & Montrose
- Rotary Club of Maroondah
- Rotary Club of Mount Waverley
- Share the Dignity
- St Kilda Mums
- St Vincent De Paul
- Streetsmart
- The Generosity Collective
- The Salvation Army
- Warrandyte Gardens Knitting Circle

### Corporate support

- Apto Services
- Celsius Design
- Jim's Test & Tag
- Philip Webb Real Estate
- Qatar Airways
- Ray White Real Estate (Croydon)
- Snooze (Nunawading)

### Partners

- Anglicare
- Australian Childhood Foundation
- Boorndawan Willam Healing Service
- Centrelink
- Community Housing Ltd
- DV Vic
- EACH
- Eastcare
- Eastern Health
- ECASA
- EDVOS
- Family Access Network
- Family Safety Victoria
- Eastern Regional Family Violence Partnership

- InTouch
- Odyssey House
- Pride Disability Services
- Rainbow Door
- Safe Steps
- Uniting
- VACCA
- Victoria Legal Aid
- Victoria Police
- WESNET
- WestCASA
- Western Regional Family Violence Partnership
- Women's Health West
- Women's Housing Ltd

### Individuals

- M Davies
- K Harbert
- Haywood family
- A Jackomos
- Maroondah City Council (Workplace Giving)
- R Parker
- G Phillips
- M G Thomas
- K & D Yong



# I would like to thank our staff for their unwavering commitment to our clients and their wellbeing and safety

- Paula Piccinini, CEO





For confidential support and  
information call (03) 9877 0311

All donations of \$2 or more are  
tax deductible. Refuge Victoria is  
a Deductible Gift Recipient.

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[www.refugevictoria.org.au](http://www.refugevictoria.org.au)