

# Safety. Support. Respect.



Family Violence  
Response Centre

ANNUAL REPORT 2019–20



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# Introduction

## Who we are

Safe Steps is the only 24/7 family violence response centre in Victoria, providing a state-wide entry point for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. Our work is dedicated to their safety.

## What we do

Safe Steps delivers programs at a state and national level. Our services include information and referral, crisis response, specialist family violence risk assessment, safety planning, and access to supported crisis accommodation. We also provide specialist counselling nationally through 1800RESPECT for those affected by domestic, family or sexual violence.

Our practice is trauma-informed and guided by evidence. We provide services to all victim-survivors and recognise that most of our work is dedicated to the needs of women and children, which reflects the gendered nature of domestic and family violence.

Our research and advocacy is informed by our practice and promotes the collective voices and diverse experiences of our clients and Survivor Advocates. We value diversity and inclusivity and are committed to an intersectional approach.

We advocate to create systemic change and effective pathways for victim-survivors from crisis to safety and living a life free from violence.

## How we do it

### Safety

- Delivering Victoria's 24/7 specialist family violence crisis response service, 365 days of the year.
- Individual specialist risk assessments, safety planning and advocacy for victim-survivors including children.
- Access to safe, secure and supported accommodation for those who need it, including through our own highly secure supported family violence crisis accommodation services.

### Support

- Lead national provider of free, 24/7 specialist trauma-informed online and phone counselling for all victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence via 1800 RESPECT.
- Access to additional wrap-around family violence supports through our Courts, Pets and Disability programs.

### Respect

- Commitment to client-centred, supportive, respectful and empowering practice and services.
- We believe in continuous improvement, reflective practice and evidence-based, best practice responses.
- We value and promote the voices, insights and experiences of all victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and advocate with them to hold systems and perpetrators to account.

## Why we do it

### In Australia:

- On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner
- Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk factor for women aged 25–44
- An estimated one in six women (1.6 million) aged 18 years and over have experienced violence by a partner since the age of 15
- Young women (18–24 years) experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups
- Approximately one in four women (23% or 2.2 million) have experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15
- Domestic or family violence against women is the single largest driver of homelessness for women, a common factor in child protection notifications, and results in a police call-out on average once every two minutes across the country
- More than two-thirds (68%) of mothers who had children in their care when they experienced violence from their previous partner said their children had seen or heard the violence.

For a full list of sources, visit [safesteps.org.au/statistics](https://safesteps.org.au/statistics)

“

**I have learned quite a bit from these beautiful caring workers. My day will come when I will feel so powerful as each step that I take I feel is a huge step forward for my freedom, peace and the happiness that is my goal. A heartfelt thank you to each of the workers, may peace follow their hearts always. The work they do for people like me is to me pure sympathy, empathy, caring, loving and understanding of my pain and my hurt.**

– Victim-survivor accommodated at Trish’s Place

”



# Message from the Chair

## Jen Allen

I am pleased to report that the Safe Steps Board completed the review of its governance functions through remediation in December 2019 and successfully achieved accreditation as part of the QIC Health and Community Service Standards for a further three years.

This outcome was achieved through many focused hours of work by Board members and staff, who remain committed to continuous improvement across all our work. I am grateful to have such high-performing, reflective and action-oriented leadership behaviours across all parts of Safe Steps.

The Board has had another year of change, evolution and positive learnings. We farewelled Chair Janine Bush, who departed after 10 months to take up another executive position. We thank her for her leadership during this important time. We again welcomed Mary Barry as Chair while we recruited, and under her leadership the Board and organisation continued to flourish.



I am excited to welcome Ingrid Williams, who was appointed to the Board in June to take the position of Chair in September 2020. Ingrid brings years of expertise in the human services industry as well as extensive experience in governance through several executive and board positions. Ingrid has stepped smoothly into her role as a Board Director and brings reflective wisdom and positive leadership.

I have been a member of the Board for the past eight years. During this time, I have seen many changes since the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It is encouraging to see the commitment of the Victorian Government and the family violence sector to evidence-based practice and to incorporating the voice of victim-survivors throughout this work.

The challenge of meeting the demand for crisis emergency accommodation has been at the forefront of our work. I am heartened by the Government's support through additional money to the Housing Establishment Fund to meet this shortfall.

This is the first year since the Family Violence Royal Commission where Safe Steps has not carried a deficit related solely to meeting the costs of crisis accommodation to keep women and children safe. From a solid financial position, Safe Steps is able to put its energies into its core business of supporting all victim-survivors in their times of need.

I would like to warmly thank Rita Butera, who has been our CEO for the past 12 months. I welcome her commitment, leadership and passion to work with the Board, staff and stakeholders in meeting the challenges of a changing service system and the impact of COVID-19 on staff, clients and all other services.

Rita's leadership capacity is reaching deep and wide in supporting Safe Steps to be the best it can be. I am also grateful for the support of all Board members and for their dedication, commitment and ability to adapt to the way we must work during these uncertain times.

In conclusion, I invite you all to review this report and take note of our new strategic plan. This has been developed after extensive consultation and provides the Board and staff with a guiding map of our strategic priorities for the next three years.

# Message from the CEO

## Rita Butera

This eventful year has truly brought into focus the crucial role that Safe Steps plays as the 24/7 'crisis entry point' for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in Victoria.

Our role is central to the effective operation of the family violence service system in Victoria. It's a responsibility we take incredibly seriously and one that I am proud to say we have risen to and met through the COVID-19 global pandemic.

This central role has informed our review of our crisis service model, with a focus on achieving real-time assessment and response. The leadership team worked closely with our skilled and dedicated staff of frontline Family Violence Crisis Specialists to achieve this significant transformation, all while maintaining continuity of service through the unprecedented challenges of a global pandemic.

We have also reached an important milestone with the review of our priorities and development of our new Strategic Plan. Our vision – for safety, support and respect for all victim-survivors of domestic and family violence – will be critical in guiding our priorities over the next three years. Thank you to all who participated as we reflected on the past and worked together in defining our roadmap moving forward.

A special thanks to the victim-survivors who contributed to the Strategic Plan as well as providing important insights into our service, including the development of the new Live Web Chat function on our website. Live Web Chat has provided victim-survivors with an important new way to reach us in a situation such as lockdown, when they may not feel safe or comfortable making a phone call.

Thank you also to colleagues at Family Safety Victoria for their confidence and support throughout the year.

Safe Steps is proud to be a lead partner and provider of specialist counselling services nationally through 1800RESPECT. This is a critical service with a highly skilled workforce that provides specialist trauma-informed counselling for victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse across the country, day and night. Over the past year Safe Steps has increased its proportion of the workforce to 36.8% of full-time equivalent staff and answered approximately 35,500 calls. We greatly value our partnership with Medibank Health in delivering this critical national service.

The 11th Walk against Family Violence, held on 25 November 2019, was an enormous success with Melbourne's streets awash in a sea of orange. A special thanks to partners, guests and the Victoria Police, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Ambulance Victoria



and other emergency services who showed their support with bright orange cars and trucks.

Other important achievements included completing a remediation process, achieving full reaccreditation at the end of 2019, and progressing our new Core and Cluster refuge, which is scheduled to start construction in July 2020 and which will provide an additional eight independent units during the 2020-21 year.

I am proud and grateful to be working with all the staff at Safe Steps. They are courageous professionals who deeply care about making a difference in the lives of women, children and victim-survivors of family violence. They do this day and night with passion, dedication and commitment. This was even more evident as the pandemic affected how we delivered essential services during lockdown, knowing how much harder it was for victim-survivors to reach out for help.

A special thanks to the Safe Steps Board members for their confidence and support during such an unprecedented year.

The Safe Steps team – the Board, staff, Survivor Advocates and volunteers – look forward to working with our partners in the year ahead as we aim to achieve so much more together.

# Board of Directors

Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre is an incorporated association governed by a Board of Directors. The Board is responsible for ensuring strategic direction, implementing governance policies, meeting regulatory obligations and overseeing performance and management activities.



## Jen Allen, interim Chair

Jen is the Executive Director of Jen Allen Coaching and Counselling (JACC) providing counselling, leadership coaching, training of emerging counsellors, supervision and reflective practice. She consults and shapes workplace practice in emotional intelligence and organisational culture. As one of the first Media

Advocates trained by Safe Steps for the prevention of violence against women and children she is proud to have contributed to many prevention messages over the years through media and keynote presentations.



## Cristina Wolters, Treasurer

Cristina is a Chartered Accountant with more than 20 years' experience in corporate taxation and leads the Transurban team responsible for global tax matters including risk and governance. She was previously a corporate tax adviser with PwC (Australia and Brazil) and was a Board member and Treasurer for Women's Health Victoria for eight years. Cristina is undertaking a Senior Executive MBA with the Melbourne Business School.



## Belinda Bales, Director

Belinda is a lawyer with Victoria Police and works in the Legal Services Department managing the Civil Law Division. She has worked in several areas including the Prosecutions Division, incorporating several metropolitan courts, and in the coronial jurisdiction. She has also managed the Specialist Summary Sex

Offences Prosecutions Team. Belinda is Chair of the Therapeutic Treatment Board of Victoria and a member of the Child Witnesses Services Advisory Committee. She has worked in other federal government legal departments including most recently at the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency.



## Penelope Cottrill, Director

Penelope is a Principal at Nous Group, a leading management consultancy. She consults on strategy, organisation, workforce and leadership. Penelope has held voluntary advisory roles in health and education.



## Nicole Lee, Director

Nicole is a family violence survivor. Through her appointment to the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, she is able to speak for those who have suffered family violence and specifically for those who have a disability and suffered at the hands of a perpetrator.



## Pam Newton, Director

Pam is the Manager Family Youth and Children at the City of Port Phillip. She is a practising psychologist and has been a member of the Australian Psychological Society for 25 years. Pam brings extensive experience in managing human services within local government and not-for-profits.



## Ingrid Williams, Director

Ingrid has more than 30 years' experience in the health and aged care sectors and has held several senior executive roles, including CEO and Managing Director. Ingrid now runs her own advisory business, where she provides consulting services to various businesses across Australia. She is a graduate of the

AICD and INSEAD and has more than 15 years' board experience. She has completed the Williamson Community Leadership Program run by Leadership Victoria and was a Telstra Business Woman of the Year finalist. Ingrid will take the position of Chair from September 2020.

# 2019-20 Crisis Response at a Glance



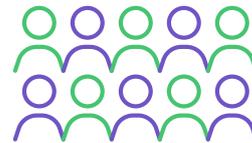
**74,377**

**Inbound calls to our service**  
Around 200 calls per day



**96,434**

**Outbound calls made to manage the risk and safety of victim-survivors**  
Around 264 calls per day



**3220**

**People escaping family violence were safely accommodated:**

**1717**  
Women

**1503**  
Children



**450**

**Family Support Packages**  
Provided to assist victim-survivors as they moved out of crisis



**500**

**Women supported in court**  
By our Family Advocacy Support Services program

**People supported by Safe Steps:**

**20%**  
Under five years old

**39%**  
Under the age of 14



**2581**

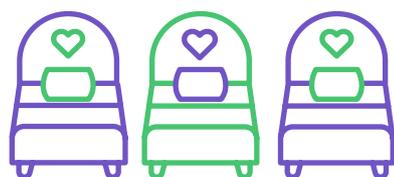
**Families\* provided with crisis services, including accommodation to escape family violence**  
Equates to 7 new families per day



**24**

**Private accommodation partnerships**

**38%**  
Between 26 and 45 years old



**38,004**

**Bed nights provided in secure crisis accommodation**  
Equates to 104 victim-survivors accommodated on any given night

**9%**  
Identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

**26%**  
Identified as being from a culturally or linguistically diverse background

*\*Families include family groups and single women*

# New Strategic Plan: 2020–23

## Strategic Plan 2020–23: Safety, Support, Respect

One of the key priorities for Safe Steps over the past year has been the development of our new Strategic Plan for 2020–23. Working with the team from EY, we embarked on an extensive research and consultation process that included:

- Discussions with organisations that provide similar services to Safe Steps in other states and countries
- Face-to-face consultations with the Board, leadership team and staff
- Input from Survivor Advocates
- An all-staff survey
- A focus group with key partners and stakeholders.

It became clear in March 2020 that our Strategic Plan would also need to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Flexible work practices and the health and wellbeing of staff became more urgent priorities, as did our ability to provide agile and adaptive support to victim-survivors.

Financial sustainability and collaborative partnerships with service delivery and advocacy partners emerged as clear priorities in the consultation process, as did the need to invest in data collection, research and evaluation. A greater focus on inclusion and diversity was strongly supported, including work on Rainbow Tick Accreditation, a Disability Action Plan and a Reconciliation Action Plan.

The final two-page document sets a clear vision and mission to help guide our work over the next three years, captured in three key words that are at the heart of everything we do: safety, support and respect. Four strategic focus areas were identified from the consultation process, with high-level priority actions under each. The focus areas are:



1. Delivering outcomes for victim-survivors.
2. Growing our partnerships, advocacy and awareness.
3. Strengthening our role within the family violence ecosystem.
4. Building an organisation and culture that is supportive, responsive and sustainable.

The Strategic Plan 2020–23 will represent Safe Steps to external stakeholders and guide our work internally.

### Our vision

**Safety, support  
and respect  
for all victim-survivors  
of domestic and  
family violence.**

### Our mission

**Provide evidence-based responses for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence by creating pathways to safety through collaborative partnerships.**

### Our values

**We are courageous, feminist, empowering, inclusive, respectful and reflective.**

# Crisis Response Program and Supported Accommodation

The 2019-20 year was dominated by three major events that shaped and reshaped the Safe Steps Crisis Response Program: a remediation process coupled with accreditation activities; a major restructure of the whole program; and the concurrent rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required speedy and novel solutions to maintain services at a time of surging demand.

The drivers of the program restructure included funding service agreements, sector reform, internal cultural reform, work process and practice reform, and the need to boost support and supervision for all staff.

## New teams and work practices

In January 2020, the former Case Management team became the Brief Intervention team, headed by a Program Lead charged with building sustainability and driving consistent evidence-based practices and trauma and violence-informed care.

The Brief Intervention team increased its direct engagement with supported accommodation, refuge and outreach providers using dedicated phone and email channels. Relationships were strengthened with the Housing Initial Assessment and Planning teams to ensure that victim-survivors made a timelier transition from crisis to the next stage of their journey to live a life free from violence.

In March 2020, the former rapid risk and assessment teams merged into the larger Intake and Assessment team, committed to providing person-centred and trauma-informed services through real-time assessment and response. By removing physical and psychological barriers (a wall and separation of programs), the new team has been able to maximise the use of resources, which has improved responsiveness and the experience of victim-survivors accessing Safe Steps' services.

In creating the Intake and Assessment team, Safe Steps has been able to successfully:

- Review and realign shifts to meet service needs and demand
- Provide additional resources to those working overnight, acknowledging the additional toll these shifts take on wellbeing
- Respond quickly to the rapidly changing landscape caused by COVID-19 by modifying risk assessments and safety planning.

Safe Steps also reviewed practice and processes as new cohorts increasingly accessed the service in the context of COVID-19, including male family violence victim-survivors and young people; and friends, family members and neighbours concerned about the safety of someone in their life.

As the state-wide family violence crisis response centre, Safe Steps took a leadership position during COVID-19, reporting to Family Safety Victoria daily with emerging practice issues and trends that required cross-department input for resolution.

## Improving responsiveness

Other activities that improved the agility, sensitivity and responsiveness of the Crisis Response Program, particularly during COVID-19, included:

- Improved collaboration with Victoria Police Specialist Family Violence Units, Family Safety Victoria, Domestic Violence Victoria and outreach providers
- Quickly revising the delivery of the court-based Family Advocacy and Support Services to phone-based support from April due to the effects of the pandemic
- Working with inTouch to meet the needs of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Women's Legal Service to ensure that immigration issues, particularly related to visa abuse, were addressed as part of a risk management response
- Starting work with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Djirra to develop greater awareness and responsiveness for clients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Developing organisational capacity to respond to women and children with a disability to overcome obstacles to accessing the service.

## Live Web Chat service added

Safe Steps rapidly developed, deployed and soft-launched a Live Web Chat service on its website in May 2020 as a new channel for victim-survivors to contact Family Violence Crisis Specialists. During the pandemic, victim-survivors were being forced into isolation with perpetrators, reducing victim-survivors' capacity to make calls for help when needed. This was witnessed in the initial significant decline in calls received from women and the increase in calls from concerned family, friends and neighbours.

“Thank you, you helped a lot.  
That is exactly what I needed to talk to someone  
to figure out what to do next. Many thanks.”

– comment from Live Web Chat user

For more on this service, see [Launching Live Web Chat](#) on page 17.

### Other developments

The Safe Steps Crisis Response Advisory Group was established in late 2019 to provide expert advice on service model design, intersectional feminism, and trauma and violence-informed practice.

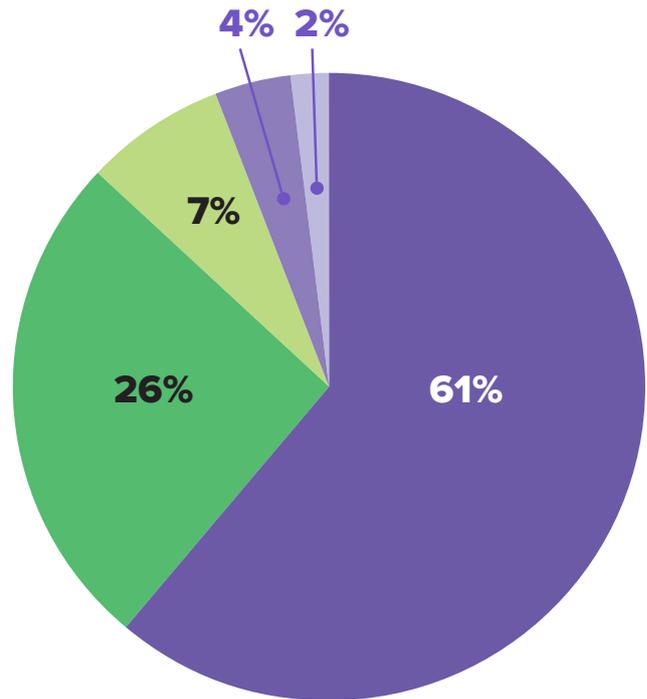
We have representation on a variety of DHHS and peak body sector reform advisory and working groups, which are contributing to the future of the specialist family violence sector.

### Trish’s Place

The Trish’s Place safe house provides face-to-face intensive specialist family violence case management and support to women and children in a communal living space. It is particularly important for women and children who do not have permanent residence, providing support and services that may not otherwise be available.

The work of Trish’s Place was affected by COVID-19, with use of a communal property no longer possible after 23 March. Essential building and maintenance works also affected the property’s capacities throughout the year. During its closure, the Trish’s Place staff provided case management services to the Brief Intervention team, supporting women and children in accommodation via phone.

**Average length of stay in crisis accommodation, 2019-20**



- 1-5 bednights
- 6-10 bednights
- 11-14 bednights
- 15-21 bednights
- 22 and above bednights

## Helen's Story

When Helen\* and her 12-month-old baby arrived at Trish's Place, Safe Steps' supported accommodation, they were both very quiet. Her son had already learnt that being noticed was a bad thing, and the injuries Helen's husband had inflicted on her were still fresh.

With the help of her Enhanced Maternal Health Nurse, Helen had escaped from the family home where she had been kept as a prisoner by the perpetrator. For months Helen had not been allowed out of the house, even into the backyard, and the windows were always shuttered. The perpetrator had denied her access to a telephone, computer and money.

Helen had been forced into an arranged marriage as a teenager to a much older man. The perpetrator had brought her back to Australia, lying about her age on her identity papers so she qualified for a partner visa.

There was never a good time in the marriage. From the start it was abusive and controlling, with the perpetrator demanding and taking what he wanted by life-threatening violence, coercion and vicious threats. When their son was born, Helen was left to parent on her own without any support from the perpetrator and no access to community services or finances for essential items.

Eventually, Helen's contact with the community service support helped her find a way out. At Trish's Place, Helen and her son took the first step to reclaiming their lives.

Over an intensive four weeks, the Safe Steps Family Violence Specialists at Trish's Place provided space for Helen to experience self-efficacy and confidence and to understand that there were people who cared deeply about her and her son, and that she deserved to have her needs met. Helen was able to build skills in setting boundaries for herself and working towards goals that she hoped to achieve in her life. She also learnt the practicalities of living independently, such as having a bank account, how to pay bills, how to budget, how to shop for day-to-day essentials, and how to access and navigate services.

Her son blossomed as Helen was supported to build and strengthen their mother-child bond. Helen was thrilled when he started smiling and making sounds. He began crawling, exploring his environment, forming a stronger attachment with his mother and learning to trust other people.

Due to her situation, Safe Steps was able to arrange both a car and stable permanent housing for Helen and her son. The family is now living safely in the community. Helen worked hard to regain her independence during her time at Trish's Place. She has remained engaged with local family violence services and is living safely and free from violence.

\* Not her real name

# 1800RESPECT Specialist Counselling Program

Safe Steps is one of five partners that jointly deliver the national 1800RESPECT specialist phone counselling service for people experiencing current or historical domestic, family or sexual violence.

During 2019-20, in response to additional funding, Safe Steps nearly doubled the number of counsellors working on 1800RESPECT to 31 full-time equivalents (FTE). We now provide the largest proportion of the workforce (36.8%) as measured by FTE staff. The rapid increase was made possible by the service's robust induction processes and the clear person-centred, trauma-informed framework it uses across the country.

Safe Steps' highly skilled counsellors answered approximately 35,500 calls (41%) over the year, or about 100 a day. As demand rises for services, the focus for the new year will be on how best to meet this need while ensuring the wellbeing of counsellors.

*Caller wanting to say thank you. She has managed to take her baby and leave an abusive marriage and now has her own rental property and a car and is filled with gratitude and joy. 1800RESPECT gave her the confidence to leave and helped her realise that she did not have to put up with the abuse.*

## Clinical governance, supervision and professional development

Social distancing requirements meant that our specialist counselling team members began to work from home from March, rather than in the supportive office environment. This made clinical governance and supervision requirements even more important. Many counsellors spoke of the personal impact of bringing trauma into their home environment and additional layers of support were activated. Medibank's well-established technology platforms enabled the establishment of systems to ensure clinical governance remained front of mind.

Counsellors remained connected through a variety of online platforms, engaging in peer debriefing, case consultation, coaching and supervision as needed. Staff increased accessed to real-time support through use of online chat functions. Coaching and supervisory support for frontline staff remained a top priority for senior practitioners, the program manager and the broader organisation.

Counsellors and senior staff participated in professional development activities presented by international and local experts in trauma, with a focus on the impact of trauma on behaviour. Staff reported an increase in understanding and confidence in responding to the various ways in which trauma presented in the helpline setting.

## Service development

Safe Steps and its partners continued to develop the consistency and quality of the service. Face-to-face forums were held in September 2019 and March 2020 to explore opportunities for service innovation and best-practice responses that better meet client needs.

Disability training for all staff began in August 2019 as part of the accreditation process to achieve the Communication Access Symbol. This shows that 1800RESPECT staff now have the confidence and competence to respond to people who have communication difficulties.

Other service development activities that Safe Steps contributed to included exploration of counselling pathways for clients; mapping the journey of clients through the service; and identifying the need to improve referral pathways to state and territory crisis partners.

## 1800RESPECT calls answered by Safe Steps specialist counsellors in the 2019-20 financial year

Total calls answered by Safe Steps	% of total calls answered by Safe Steps
35,429	41%

# Connections through Crisis: A closer look at two key projects

## The Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative

The Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative (DFVCRI) was established in 2011 in recognition that people with disabilities experience family violence at higher rates and often encounter significant barriers to reporting violence or accessing support.

Safe Steps began administering the DFVCRI fund in late 2019 with the support of Women with Disabilities Victoria and Domestic Violence Victoria. The three organisations are members of the Project Advisory Group alongside Family Safety Victoria and a representative from the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner.

The DFVCRI provides rapid access to brokerage funding specifically for victim-survivors with disabilities who need support in a crisis timeframe. The DFVCRI also funds a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) who provides specialist advocacy, secondary consultation to Safe Steps staff and the wider sector, and rapid, coordinated access to specialist disability supports, goods and services.

*“These two components are linked in an integral way. Workers from referring agencies across Victoria would not be inclined to pursue calling the Liaison Officer if there was not the chance of getting funds for the additional costs of disability support and equipment. Without the Liaison Officer, referring agencies would not have the knowledge of disability requirements and service providers to get benefit from the funding.”<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Women with Disabilities Victoria, in representation to government, July 2020.

From January to June 2020:

- 195 victim-survivors who contacted Safe Steps discussed their disability needs as part of their family violence assessment
- 51 families (victim-survivors and their children) directly benefited from accessing disability brokerage funds
- 62 capacity-building activities were provided by the DLO, including secondary consultations with workers, training, and presentations to large groups.

Funding for the DFVCRI was due to expire in July 2020 and we are pleased to report it has been extended for a further six months. Safe Steps has seen the benefits of this program on the lives of women and children with disabilities and, with our partners, will be advocating strongly for its extension into the future.

**For Sarah, a young woman with autism, home was not safe. Getting safe quickly, however, left Sarah without much-needed personal care support. Safe Steps was able to increase her support worker hours until her NDIS plan review and provide her support worker with information and advice so they could help Sarah stay safe, slowly talk about the abuse at home, and cope with her feelings.**



## Launching Live Web Chat

Live Web Chat is a new chat function on the Safe Steps' website that makes it possible for people experiencing family violence to connect with a Family Violence Crisis Specialist without placing a phone call.

The first COVID-19 lockdown went into effect across Victoria in March, bringing a notable drop-off in calls to the crisis response line compared with the same period in the previous year. It also brought an increase in calls from third parties who were concerned about the impact of lockdown measures on women and children experiencing, or at risk of, family violence.

Understanding that someone may not be able to find a safe time to make a private call if they are in lockdown with someone who uses violent or controlling behaviour, Safe Steps decided to explore adding a live chat option to its website.

This new chat platform was quickly scoped and built out, with staff updating and integrating existing content, testing the concept and delivery with a Survivor Advocate, and training Family Violence Crisis Specialists to use the new platform.

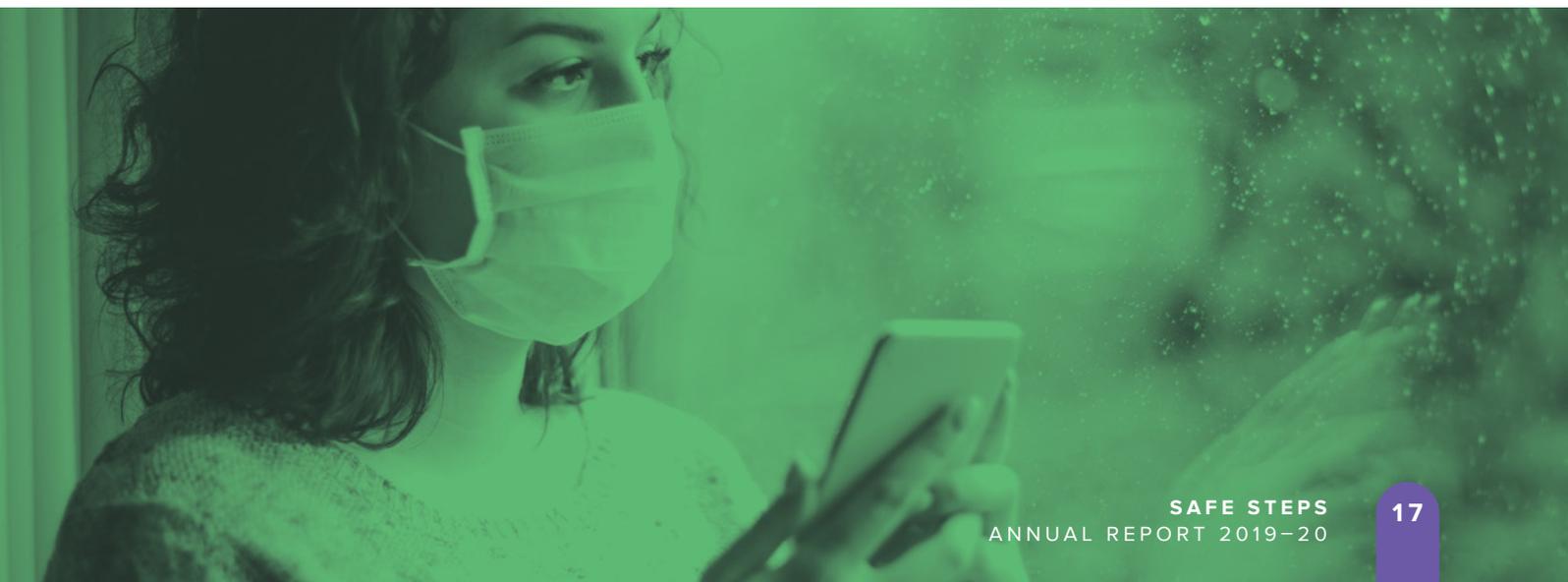
Live Web Chat was launched within eight weeks of the initial lockdown. Its features include:

- Immediate connection to a Family Violence Crisis Specialist from Safe Steps' Crisis Response team
- A 'quick exit' button, which automatically wipes the conversation from the user's computer or phone, clearing their browser history and returning them to the Google home page
- Security and anonymity when using the service.

The initial uptake of Live Web Chat was positive, with a steadily increasing flow of users who have been supported by Safe Steps specialists to:

- Access emergency services
- Make a plan to call us when it is safe for them to do so
- Plan for their safety, whether they are staying in the family home or wanting to leave
- Find out more about what they are experiencing and the different types of family violence and abuse
- Find out what other services are available to them
- Find out how they can support someone they are concerned about.

While the uses for Live Web Chat have been even broader than initially imagined, the core service has functioned exactly as it was intended. A number of victim-survivors who reached out through Live Web Chat have been able to safely plan to call Safe Steps and to then access the crisis accommodation they needed.



# Policy, Advocacy and Research Highlights

## Policy

Safe Steps has a long and proud history of advocating for social change and policy reform. Our research and advocacy is informed by the lived experiences of victim-survivors, particularly women and children who comprise the majority of those we support. We seek to ensure that their voices are at the heart of policy reforms.

One way we do this is through evidence-based submissions to state and federal governments that articulate the needs and experiences of those affected by domestic and family violence. We shine a light on the complex social structures that stand in the way of their safety and independence.

Over the past year Safe Steps has provided submissions informing the:

- Joint Select Committee Inquiry into Australia's Family Law System
- Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria
- Final Report of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor.

## Advocacy

Other joint advocacy efforts included working closely with Women with Disabilities Victoria, the Office of the Disability Service Commissioner and Domestic Violence Victoria to have funding extended for the Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative (DFVCRI).

Administered by Safe Steps, the DFVCRI assists women and children with a disability who are experiencing family violence to quickly access the services and supports they need to become and stay safe. We provide access to brokerage funding, specialist support and advocacy via a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer.

Funding has been extended until January 2021 and further advocacy is planned to ensure the initiative continues beyond this date.

Safe Steps joined the new Women's Housing Alliance in 2019. Our collective goal is to take actions that lead to a significant increase in emergency accommodation, short-term supported or transitional housing and long-term and affordable housing for women and children, including clear, sustainable pathways for those who have experienced family violence.

The alliance comprises key organisations specialising in family violence, gender equity and housing for women, including Safe Steps, YWCA Housing, Women's Housing Ltd, Women's Health Victoria, McAuley Community Services for Women, Good Samaritan Inn, WISHIN, Women's Property Initiatives, Flat Out and Elizabeth Morgan House.

## Research

Thanks to funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, in 2019 Safe Steps was able to use its unique insight into the family violence crisis response system to highlight inequalities faced by women and children without permanent residency.

Women without permanent residency and their children who experience family violence face many and compounding barriers to safety in Australia, including access to safe and secure housing. Women and children who have temporary, tourist, working, spousal and student visas are affected by immigration policies that restrict their access to health, employment and social services, directly increasing their dependency on the person using violence. Perpetrators may also deliberately exploit their partner's insecure residency status as a control tactic.

The research involved interviewing family violence workers from Safe Steps and other services about their experiences working with women without permanent residency and speaking directly to victim-survivors.

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**"I explained to them the conditions of my partner visa: that if I'm placed in a refuge ... that means I'm not living with my partner and I'm supposed to report back to ... Immigration, and if I report that, then that will mean they will look into reviewing my visa ... I didn't want to create any attention or any negative feedback that would make them think maybe ... my relationship and my partner is struggling ... so I [stayed with my partner to] do what I could do for the sake of my visa."**

– Victim-survivor without permanent residency

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## Survivor Advocate Program

Safe Steps was one of the first organisations to develop a Survivor Advocate Program. In 2019 we paused the program to review its model and resourcing requirements in light of feedback from Survivor Advocates and in anticipation of a new national 'Experts by Experience' framework, to be released in July 2020.

We had planned to hold a special International Women's Day 'thank you' event for all of our Survivor Advocates in March, but this was cancelled due to COVID-19. It was wonderful that several Survivor Advocates were able to participate in the 2020 Candlelight Virtual Vigil to remember those who had lost their lives as a result of domestic and family violence.

# Community Support Highlights

## 2019 Walk Against Family Violence

The Walk Against Family Violence was held on 25 November – the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – and also marked the beginning of ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence’. Thanks to our working partners – Respect Victoria, City of Melbourne, Domestic Violence Victoria, No to Violence and Emerge.

More than 3500 people took part in the walk, including key community members such as Victoria Police, Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), corporate leaders and local politicians.

Activities were focused around Federation Square. The messaging of the event reached an estimated 33,000 people directly through exposure on the digital screens at the square. The event was covered by all the major news networks in Melbourne as well as *The Herald Sun* and *The Age*. Overall, the event’s reach was estimated to exceed one million people.

Victoria Police, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Ambulance Victoria and the SES further solidified their commitment to the event, leading the walk with police, ambulance and fire vehicles and trucks all specially painted in orange, reflecting the primary colour of the activities.





## 2020 Virtual Candlelight Vigil

The 2020 Candlelight Vigil was held across social media due to COVID-19 restrictions. On the evening of Wednesday May 6, community members were encouraged to post a photo of a candle on social media and share a message using the hashtags #EndDV and #LightACandle2020.

Although we were unable to come together physically as a community, our focus was still on providing a space for people to share their remembrances, connect with the community and help raise awareness of the lives lost to family violence. Safe Steps showcased video recordings made by key figures and posted these throughout the evening on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The speakers at the 2020 vigil were:

- Rosie Batty, family violence advocate
- Rita Butera, CEO, Safe Steps Family Violence Crisis Response Centre
- The Hon. Gabrielle Williams MP, Victorian Minister for Prevention of Family Violence (pictured on the opposite page)
- Michal Morris, CEO, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
- Dianne Hill, CEO, Women's Health Victoria
- Joanna Fletcher, CEO, Women's Legal Service Victoria
- Tracey Gaudry, CEO, Respect Victoria
- Mary Barry, Interim Chair, Safe Steps Family Violence Crisis Response Centre.

Hundreds of people engaged with the online event by posting their own photos and videos and sharing their messages of remembrance.

## Dancing With the Stars

Actor Celia Pacquola's win in the 2020 edition of *Dancing with the Stars* brought a windfall \$50,000 donation to Safe Steps.

Ms Pacquola, pictured above with dance partner Jarryd Byrne, is also a comedian and director. She is best known for her roles in *Have You Been Paying Attention*, *Utopia* and *Rosehaven*, which she writes and directs. She was recruited as one of the celebrity dancers for the hit show and chose Safe Steps as her charity.

She said: "One of the things that really stood out for me about Safe Steps is how active they are in helping women who need it, right now. While I believe there is always work to be done around the background and causes of family and domestic violence, Safe Steps provides a vital, active, emergency response which is helping to save lives of women and children in our country.

"I received a large amount of positive responses from many people who didn't know this service existed and were keen to spread the word and donate or raise money. I also received heart-breaking but beautiful messages from people who had been helped personally by Safe Steps. I am so proud to be associated with this extraordinary organisation and I hope I can continue to help raise awareness and funds so they can continue to help save women and children."

## Community support keeps spirits high

With COVID-19 cancelling many Melbourne fundraising events, individuals and businesses still found innovative ways to share their support for women and children experiencing family violence.

Safe Steps was proud to receive the proceeds of many community fundraising campaigns. Some highlights included:

- A Melbourne man who raised money by completing a solo marathon after just three weeks of training
- A financial manager who pledged to let his teenage daughters give him a 'lockdown haircut' on Zoom when he met his fundraising goal
- The instructors, artists and small business owners who generously donated the proceeds from their work even during uncertain economic times
- The many people who – on a birthday, anniversary or special day – asked their friends and family to make a donation to us, instead of buying them a gift.

Every contribution is meaningful, and Safe Steps would like to express gratitude for the tens of thousands of dollars that will help women and children live free from violence.

Our staff were also moved to hear that these efforts had helped people have meaningful and practical conversations about family violence and domestic abuse with their friends, co-workers and members of their communities.

## Corporate partners provide practical support

Providing women and children with the material support they need can help them move through a crisis with a sense of safety, dignity and control.

By donating new items directly our corporate partners stepped up to help Safe Steps meet the needs of clients in our service and essential staff required to work onsite through lockdown, while also meeting the important public health standards required by COVID-19.

These donations included toiletry packs from Aesop, Lego sets from Myer, iPads and mobile phones from ProBuild, gift cards from Women of Allens and Civica, and breakfast packs from the ALH Group.

*The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Victorian Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and Rita Butera, CEO of Safe Steps, in February 2020.*





# Strengthening Partnerships

Safe Steps appointed its first dedicated Crisis Response – Services Partnership Manager in the second half of 2019-20, which includes a focus on private accommodation partners, pets and transport. Several existing properties were reviewed, eight new properties were recruited to improve our geographic spread, and new service-level agreements were put in place.

The new service agreements have strengthened our accommodation partnerships, ensuring that we can provide a safe, trauma-informed and person-centred response to victim-survivors in need of crisis accommodation. We now have 24 private accommodation partners.

## Safety for the family pet

A special thanks to the Myer Foundation and the ACF (Charles David Fund) for their generous support. This support has enabled Safe Steps to make it easier for women and children to escape family violence by ensuring that their pets will also be safe when they leave and not left behind with a perpetrator.

Four of the eight new properties recruited as private accommodation partners are pet friendly. The donations have enabled Safe Steps to build cooperative and supportive relationships with the partners and cover costs associated with the ‘pet component’ of the accommodation stay.

Another pet-focused initiative has been the development of a new partnership with PETstock Assist, the charitable arm of PETstock. After an initial donation of pet food and accessories, PETstock Assist is providing ongoing support by delivering food and other pet items direct to our pet-friendly accommodation partners.

Any pet (predominantly dogs and cats, but also the occasional rabbit, reptile and ferret) that arrives with their family will have access to food and other pet items all sourced through PETstock Assist.

## Rapid Relief Team

Another new donor to come on-board is Rapid Relief Team, which is providing food packs for women and children staying with our Melbourne accommodation partners. These packs, delivered each month to our accommodation partners, ensure women and children have access to basic food items whatever time they arrive.

## Brookfield Multiplex

Brookfield Multiplex, working with its industry partners in the 405 NAB Bourke Street development, celebrated its second year supporting the work of Safe Steps with a fund-raising event.

Brookfield hosted a curling event in March at the O’Brien Icehouse in Docklands. This was one of the first activities to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the travel bans and social distancing requirements, nine companies participated in the event, which raised \$36,000.

Safe Steps CEO Rita Butera addressed the event, telling the industry stakeholders about family violence and its impact on the community and highlighting the challenges in finding emergency accommodation and affordable housing.

## Adore Beauty

Adore Beauty is Australia’s longest running online beauty store and an official stockist of more than 200 leading global beauty brands. Wanting to do something to help, Adore rallied its suppliers, staff and customers and together they were able to deliver \$50,000 worth of assistance.

Suppliers donated products and the Adore Beauty staff created a limited edition seven-piece Beauty Care kit, which was sold online for \$20. Adore kicked off the promotion with a \$10,000 donation and within two days 2000 kits had been sold, raising an amazing additional \$40,000.

Adore Beauty said: “We became aware of the extra need for domestic violence services during COVID-19 after reading some news articles, so we started researching the organisations doing work in this space and found Safe Steps.

“The decision to support women experiencing family violence during COVID came from our founders, but our team members were the ones who really got behind it and were able to create such an impactful campaign.”

# Operations

## A focus on continuous improvement

Safe Steps reviewed and enhanced its operational framework for People and Culture during the year. All People and Culture policies and procedures were reviewed and updated to ensure best practice, legislative compliance and equity for all staff.

The review included the implementation of streamlined recruitment processes, such as the launch of a new careers portal. These new processes ensure clear and coordinated transitions in and out of employment with the organisation.

## Staff Alignment and Engagement Survey

Increasing employee engagement remains a priority for Safe Steps. The first Staff Alignment and Engagement Survey was conducted in 2019-20.

The survey outcomes highlighted high levels of satisfaction and support from managers, a commitment to best practice and high performance, and pride as well as satisfaction to work at Safe Steps and strong willingness to go the extra mile.

Areas identified for improvement included further investment in systems to improve engagement and communication across the organisation as well as increase levels of staff support across all program areas.

## Learning management system

Safe Steps has partnered with ELMO a (Human Resources Information System) to deliver its compliance training in an online offering that targets training to individual roles.

As part of the recently reviewed formal induction program, new staff are required to complete online training in key areas such as the Safe Steps Code of Conduct, bullying and harassment, privacy, equal opportunity, health, safety and wellbeing, and other areas relevant to their employment.

The online learning management system also provides access to additional professional development opportunities where staff can self-enrol in individual development courses.

## Health, safety and wellbeing

Safe Steps worked towards embedding its health, safety and wellbeing (HSW) practices across the organisation during 2019-20. The focus has been on ensuring a strong HSW culture. Health, safety and wellbeing practices and processes were evaluated, with several initiatives strengthened. These included:

- Health, Safety and Wellbeing Representatives
- First Aid Representatives
- A new Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Working from home checklists and assessments.

## Free flu vaccinations

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges. Safe Steps responded by adding fortnightly sanitisation services, free flu vaccinations, increasing hygiene practices, and providing travel to and from work, on-site meals and personal sanitiser products for staff as well as extension of our Employment Assistance Program.

## Our workforce

The services of Safe Steps could not be delivered without the commitment, passion and dedication of staff across all teams. The workload is constant and services are delivered around the clock every day of the year.

The workforce is made up of 121 staff with 71% employed part-time and 29% working full-time. We have an overall retention rate of 98.24%.



## Information, communication and technology

Safe Steps has continued to invest in its information and communication technology (ICT) systems throughout the year to ensure a scalable, supportable and sustainable operating environment. This work will continue into the new year.

In 2019, an independent audit was conducted of our ICT infrastructure. This allowed Safe Steps to pinpoint key ICT risks and to identify how our infrastructure can continue to grow and adapt to emerging technologies, which will support us to continue to our work with clients.

The improved ICT environment allowed us to introduce a higher level of security using contemporary solutions to protect the organisation from cyber risks. We have worked with our partners to ensure that security remains a top priority, with 24/7 monitoring of all infrastructure and our website.

The challenges that COVID-19 presented, accompanied by the need to work remotely, meant many ICT projects were fast tracked. The completed projects have given us flexibility in how staff engage in their day-to-day work and in how clients interact with Safe Steps.

Examples of the fast-tracked projects include:

- Mitel phone system upgrade – cloud-based technology
- Firewall upgrade
- Multi-factor authentication
- Turbo Recruit Careers Portal
- Live Web Chat website functionality
- Migration to Office 365.

“

**I am proud and grateful to be working with all the staff at Safe Steps. They are courageous professionals who deeply care about making a difference in the lives of women, children and victim-survivors of family violence. They do this day and night with passion, dedication and commitment.**

– Rita Butera, CEO of Safe Steps

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# Quality and Risk

Quality and risk are important aspects of Safe Steps' operations. They ensure sound clinical governance and reinforce our commitment to continuous improvement.

There were some major changes and achievements in both areas during the financial year. In November 2019, Safe Steps successfully gained reaccreditation against the Quality Improvement Council Health and Community Service Standards (seventh edition). This standards framework, commonly known as the QIC Standards, is focused on the way we develop and improve systems in areas such as governance, people and culture, compliance, sector engagement and partnerships, capacity building, diversity and inclusion, consumer participation and some aspects of service delivery.

Alongside this process, Safe Steps was also reaccredited against the Human Services Standards (HSS). The HSS are set by the Department of Health and Human Services and comprise four elements focused on service delivery: empowerment, access and engagement, wellbeing, and participation. The standards aim to ensure that the rights of our client group are embedded in service delivery and that there is transparency in our practice.

The accreditation process highlighted many strengths of Safe Steps as a dynamic organisation with considered systems and an appetite for innovation, while maintain-

ing an environment that supports safety and is driven by sound outcomes. As quality improvement is a circular process, the organisation continues to reflect on its services, systems and programs and to search for improvement in day-to-day activities.

Safe Steps' risk management system is an essential framework that underpins all our operations and governance activities. In 2020 we began to redevelop our risk management system with the aim of aligning it with our strategic direction, streamlining it to parallel our business areas and enabling a better-managed process for identification and enactment of controls. Risk management is now firmly entrenched in all decision-making processes, particularly in areas relating to the safety of our people and client group.

While the impact of COVID-19 was challenging for all areas of operations, we were in a position to respond quickly. Our Business Continuity and Impact Management Plan, along with other associated action plans and processes, helped to ensure our response was considered, systematic and well managed with well-defined responsibilities and decision-making. Safe Steps will continue to monitor the changes caused by the pandemic as part of its risk and quality improvement system and will use what is learnt for future planning.

# Financial Summary

## Summary of Statement of Comprehensive Income for year ended 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Total income	18,236,130	13,811,582
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Client direct relief	4,059,093	4,570,912
Operating costs	13,470,925	10,570,634
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>17,530,018</b>	<b>15,141,546</b>
<b>Surplus / (deficit) for the year</b>	<b>706,112</b>	<b>(1,329,964)</b>
Other comprehensive income Unrealised gains / (losses) from financial assets	(64,312)	54,440
<b>Total comprehensive Income for the year</b>	<b>641,800</b>	<b>(1,275,524)</b>

## Summary of Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2020

	2020 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Current assets	9,852,171	6,447,740
Non-current assets	1,105,462	316,496
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>10,957,633</b>	<b>6,764,236</b>
Current liabilities	6,048,151	3,151,159
Non-current liabilities	801,992	147,387
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>6,850,143</b>	<b>3,298,546</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>4,107,490</b>	<b>3,465,690</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Financial asset reserve	11,065	75,377
Accumulated surplus	4,096,425	3,390,313
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>4,107,490</b>	<b>3,465,690</b>

**Independent Audit Report Safe Steps  
Family Violence Response Centre Inc.  
ABN: 86 138 521 643**

Independent Audit Report to the Members of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc for the Year Ended 30 June 2020.

**Report on the Summary Financial Report**

The accompanying summary financial statements, which comprises the Summary Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2020 and the Summary Statement of Comprehensive Income for the year then ended, are derived from the audited financial report of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc for the year ended 30 June 2020.

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on that financial report in our report dated 30 September 2020.

The summary financial statements do not contain all the disclosures required by Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 and the Australian Charities and Not for profits Commission Act 2012. Reading the summary financial statements, therefore, is not a substitute for reading the audited financial report of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc. The summary financial statements and the audited financial report do not reflect the effects of events that occurred subsequent to the date of our report on the audited financial report.

**Management Responsibility for the  
Summary Financial Report**

Management is responsible for the preparation of the summary financial report.

**Auditor's Responsibility**

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on the summary financial statements based on our procedures, which were conducted in accordance with Auditing Standard ASA 810 Engagements to Report on Summary Financial Statements.

**Auditor's Opinion**

In our opinion, the summary financial statements derived from the audited financial report of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc for the year ended 30 June 2020 are consistent, in all material respects, with that audited financial report, on the basis described in Note 1.



**Ryan Leemon**  
Director

Moore Australia  
Melbourne Vic  
30 September 2020



# Acknowledgements

The continued support of the Victorian Government, community, donors, volunteers, schools, businesses and corporations are fundamental to Safe Steps' ability to deliver much-needed, good-quality services to women and children.

- Adore Beauty
- AESOP
- ALH Group
- Anyone For Copy
- Arup Pty Ltd
- Australian Communities Foundation
- Auto & General Holdings
- Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership
- Break-Up Boss
- Brentwood Sewing Group
- Brookfield Multiplex
- Bunnings
- CBRE
- Chrysalis Foundation
- City of Melbourne
- Civica
- Creative Works
- Davies Lawyers
- Dawn Wade Foundation
- Donald Cant Watts Corke
- Ereshkigal Foundation
- Fitzroys
- Fulton Hogan
- Highlands Foundation
- IG
- IMPACT For Women

We would like to sincerely thank all of those who have generously contributed to Safe Steps. We would like to acknowledge the following supporters for their ongoing commitment against family violence.

- ISPT Operations
- Kaplan Dascalu Fund
- Kick&Co
- Knight Frank Australia
- Matthews Pegg Consulting
- Metro Trains
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade
- Multiplex Constructions
- Myer
- Myer Community Fund
- NAB
- Naylor Stewart Ancillary Fund
- Nicholes Family Lawyers
- Norman Disney Young
- P&C Sitch Foundation
- Respect Victoria
- Russell Kennedy Lawyers
- Slater and Gordon Lawyers
- Today Strategic Design
- Top Shelf Group
- United Workers Union
- Veasel
- Victoria Police
- Victorian Chamber Commerce and Industry
- WT Partnership
- Zehntenhof Pty Ltd

Safe Steps respectfully acknowledges and celebrates the Traditional Owners of the lands throughout Victoria and pays respects to their Elders of past, current and future generations.

Safe Steps acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.





Safe Steps acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

