

Safety. Support. Respect.

# 2021-2022 Annual Report



Family Violence  
Response Centre

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## Acknowledgement

Safe Steps acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

Safe Steps acknowledges victim-survivors who have lost their lives due to domestic and family violence, and those who continue to live with the trauma of family violence.

## Our vision

We want safety, support and respect for all victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

## Our mission

We 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 and empowering. Our work is inclusive, respectful and reflective.



Safe Steps is  
Victoria's only 24/7  
domestic and family  
violence crisis  
response centre.

# About us

We provide specialist crisis support to people experiencing domestic and family violence. We are also the statewide entry point for victim-survivors to access the wider family violence service system.

## Who contacts us

Anyone who is experiencing domestic and family violence or who is at risk, can contact us for information and support.

We also provide information and advice to family, friends, colleagues and neighbours who are concerned about someone's safety at home; and agencies and other family violence organisation for information and secondary consultations.

You can contact Safe Steps by phone, email and webchat and we have access to interpreters for those with a non-English speaking background.

We also have specialised support for victim-survivors with a disability.

## Our services

- Family violence information and support
- Risk assessment
- Safety planning
- Pet safety
- Family violence crisis accommodation
- Disability support
- Financial and material support
- Court advocacy

## Our history

Victoria's first domestic violence phone referral service was started in 1979 by the Women's Liberation Halfway House collective in a suburban Melbourne home. This vital support became known as the Women's Refuge Referral Service, then the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, and in 2014, Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre.

# What we do

In 2021-2022, we...



Responded to

Inbound calls

**67,661**

or an average of **188 calls per day**

Made

Outbound calls

**106,098**

to manage victim-survivor risk, an average of **291 per day**

Answered

**3,119**

webchats



Provided

**375**

victim-survivors with flexible brokerage (flexible support packages)



Supported

**3,905**

victim-survivors with a crisis service



Worked with

**531**

victim-survivors in court

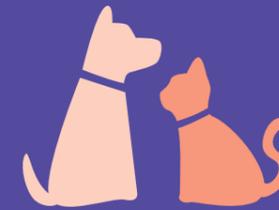


Provided

**347**

**pets with safety**

through our Pets in Crisis Program



Fostered

**26**

**private accommodation partnerships**

to provide crisis accommodation for victim-survivors



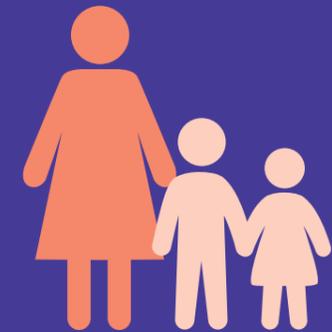
**SAFELY ACCOMMODATED**

**3,124**

victim-survivors in crisis accommodation

Including

**1,783** women



**1,341** children

at an average of **97 women and children each night**

with a total of...

**35,936**

bed nights



Of those we supported:

**10%** identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

**21%** under 5 years old

**24%** from a culturally diverse background

**39%** under 14 years old



## From the Chair

It has been an extraordinary year for Safe Steps. Our dedicated staff have responded to ever-changing circumstances to ensure we can deliver positive outcomes for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

We continued to strengthen our vital role in the family violence system, growing awareness and forging stronger partnerships across sectors and the community.

In rising to the profound challenges of these past two years of the pandemic, Safe Steps has demonstrated that it is adaptive and responsive, its work informed by the lived experiences of victim-survivors.

This year we also transitioned 1800RESPECT to a new provider. I want to acknowledge our expert team who delivered this crucial service over five years.

As a Board, we have continued to improve our governance processes to ensure Safe Steps is a strong and sustainable organisation. Our gratitude and thanks go to departing Board

members Pam Newton and Belinda Bales for their long service and valued contributions. We also welcomed new Board members Sandy Forbes, Kamalini Kandasamy and Sharon McKinnon who bring with them passion, commitment and a shared resolve to end family violence.

After three inspiring years as Safe Steps' CEO, Rita Butera left us in July to become CEO of health sector leader BreastScreen Victoria. I want to sincerely thank Rita for her compassion, warmth and leadership.

I look forward to working with incoming CEO Dr Chelsea Tobin and the Safe Steps Board to ensure victim-survivors of domestic and family violence are safe, supported and respected.

**Ingrid Williams**  
Chair, Safe Steps



## From the CEO

This year, demand for our domestic and family violence crisis services showed no signs of slowing. Our team responded to more than 68,000 calls for support and made more than 106,000 outbound calls to manage family violence risk. This record number of outbound calls reflects the growing complexity of the work we do to support victim-survivors.

We continued to work closely with Family Safety Victoria to build and strengthen a whole-of-system response

for victim-survivors. This included improving linkages between Safe Steps and local support and safety hubs, the Orange Doors, as well as coordinating state-wide refuge access and sharing best practice in family violence crisis responses.

This year's *Walk Against Family Violence* was again held around the state, and achieved record levels of social media engagement. Our media event brought together key family violence stakeholders including government, Aboriginal services, multicultural services, police, fire rescue, sports icons, and animal welfare groups.

Designed and delivered by advocates and victim-survivors, our *Candlelight Vigil* was held at the newly opened Family Violence Memorial Gardens in East Melbourne. More than 70 landmarks across Victoria were lit up in purple to remember those who have died from family violence.

We concluded our five-year 1800RESPECT partnership with Medibank who provide specialist trauma counselling to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence and their families. I am so proud of our professional, compassionate and committed team for their hard work, and also their patience as we made the transition to the new provider effective from 1 July 2022.

I would like to thank Family Safety Victoria for its ongoing support. I would also like to thank Board members for their commitment and contributions. To our incredible Safe Steps team, thank you for all that you do. And to victim-survivors, know that it is for you that we do this work.

It has been a privilege to lead this organisation.

**Rita Butera**  
CEO, Safe Steps

## Our Board

The Board sets strategic direction, implements governance policies, meets regulatory obligations and oversees performance and management activities.



**INGRID WILLIAMS**  
Chair

Ingrid brings 20 years' experience as a Director in the not-for-profit and private sectors and 30 years' experience in the health and aged care sectors in senior roles including CEO and Managing Director. She is a graduate of the AICD and INSEAD and has completed the Williamson Community Leadership Program. Ingrid originally trained as an intensive care nurse and has a Bachelor of Educational Studies, a Master of Health Administration and a Diploma of Business.



**PAM NEWTON**  
Deputy Chair  
(Until October 2021)

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



**CRISTINA WOLTERS**  
Treasurer and Chair of Finance, Audit and Compliance Subcommittee

Cristina is an experienced Chartered Accountant specialising in mergers and acquisitions and corporate taxation who now leads Transurban's global tax team. She holds a Senior Executive MBA from Melbourne Business School and a Master of Taxation. Cristina was a Board member and Treasurer of Women's Health Victoria for eight years.



**BELINDA BALES**  
Board Member and Chair of Governance Subcommittee (Until September 2021)

Belinda is a lawyer and previously worked with Victoria Police in its Legal Services Department. She has held positions on the Therapeutic Treatment Board of Victoria and the Child Witnesses Services Advisory Committee of Victoria.



**ALEXANDRA WALL**  
Board Member and Chair of Governance Subcommittee

Alexandra is a product, marketing and communications professional who currently works with Arnott's Good Food Partners division. Alexandra holds an MBA and has governance experience with not-for-profits including Global Ideas, Girl Guides Victoria and One Girl, where she is the Deputy Chair and Company Secretary.



**PENELOPE COTTRILL**  
Board Member and Chair of Quality, Risk and Performance Subcommittee

Penelope is a principal at Deloitte Human Capital. She consults on organisation, workforce and leadership. Penelope has held voluntary advisory roles and works extensively in health, education and government.

Our Board



**NADINE BARTHOLOMEUSZ-RAYMOND**

Board Member

Nadine has 20 years' experience in the mental health and women's health sectors. As an Executive Leader with Beyond Blue, Nadine led the delivery of national programs in areas such as education, families, primary care, and diversity and inclusion.



**JULIA REYNOLDS**

Board Member

Julia is a principal at Austech Surveying and Mapping Pty Ltd, specialising in underground mine void investigation services. She has 15 years' experience in P&L, operations management, business strategy, global sales and marketing, and finance and corporate governance. Julia holds an MBA and is a Board member of the Australian Institute of Mine Surveyors, Bendigo Community Bank and Cohuna District Hospital.



**NICOLE LEE**

Board Member

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



**KAMALINI KANDASAMY**

Board Member (from 28 October 2021)

Kamalini is a graduate of the AICD and a Fellow of CPA Australia and brings more than 15 years experience in financial management and corporate governance, having worked with organisations in the commercial and not-for-profit sectors in the United Kingdom and Australia.



**ALEXANDRA (SANDY) FORBES**

Board Member (from 28 October 2021)

Sandy is a graduate of the AICD and has worked in executive roles in community services, health and education. She has wide governance experience as a non-executive director in public entities and is the Independent Chair of the National Program Reference Group for the development of Epilepsy Smart Australia Program. Over the last 10 years Sandy was a Principal with the Nous Group and is now self-employed and provides consulting services to a select number of clients.



**SHARON MCKINNON**

Board Member (from 1 February 2022)

Sharon has been with Victoria Police for over 30 years and is currently a divisional and regional commander with experience in regional operations, covert policing, investigations and specialist responses to sexual assault, child abuse and family violence.

Sharon holds a Graduate Diploma in Executive leadership (AIPM) and Graduate Certificate in Applied Management (AIPM).

# On the frontline

Last year, our frontline team responded to

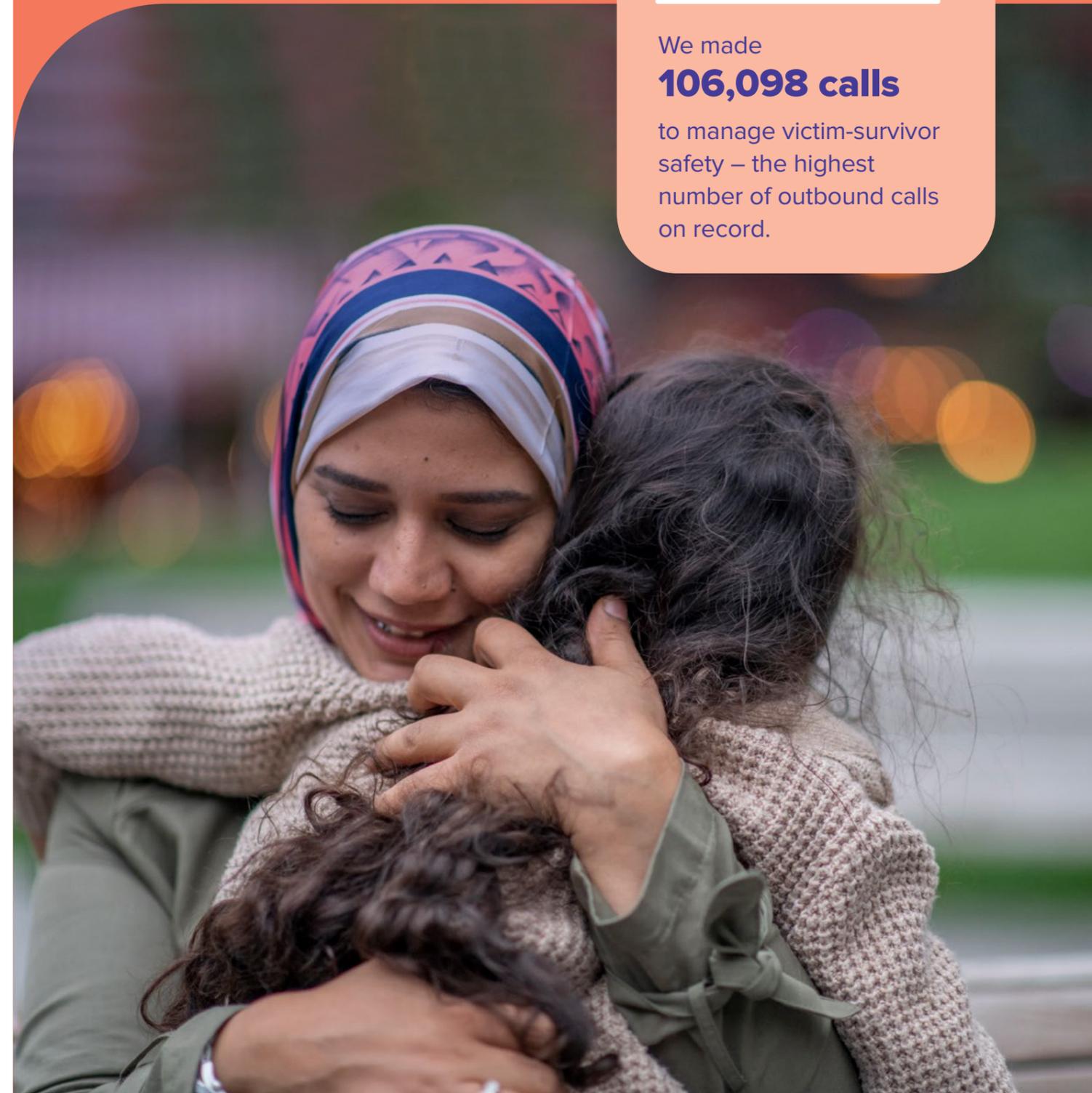
**68,661 calls**

an average of 188 calls each and every day.

We made

**106,098 calls**

to manage victim-survivor safety – the highest number of outbound calls on record.



## Always there – any time of day or night



Through the pandemic and beyond, Safe Steps remained Victoria’s only 24/7 domestic and family violence response centre.

In 2021-22 we were there 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year for victim-survivors needing support whether in or out of lockdowns, and throughout periods of uncertainty.

Our frontline team **responded to 68,661 calls, an average of 188 calls each and every day.** We made 106,098 calls to manage victim-survivor safety – the highest number of outbound calls on record.

These figures are testament to our ongoing commitment to keep victim-survivors of domestic and family violence safe, supported and respected.

They also reflect the growing complexity in managing the risk people using violence pose to the people we work with.

Our specialist-trained practitioners worked around the clock to assess family violence risk, access immediate material supports, provide crisis accommodation and a safe place for pets, providing **3,905 victim-survivors and 347 pets with a crisis response.**

We responded to **3,119 webchats**, providing flexibility in how people needing our support can interact with us.

While webchat was originally a response to addressing barriers to support during the pandemic, our webchat function has become part of our core business.

As well as providing an alternative pathway for people needing support, webchat was used by organisations and professionals including health workers, schools and other services seeking information and advice about domestic and family violence.

We would like to thank Family Safety Victoria for providing the funding to allow us to maintain this vital service.

## Working with our service partners for after-hours crisis responses

As a 24/7 service, Safe Steps works closely with other services to enable a more seamless, systems approach to after-hours support for people in family violence crisis, so that help is available when it is needed.

There are many reasons victim-survivors who are supported by other services may need to reach out to us after-hours, and we are committed to making this as simple as possible.

In 2021-2022, this support included:

- ✓ moving victim-survivors from unsafe accommodation
- ✓ providing urgent material aid and support
- ✓ managing risk to psychological and physical safety
- ✓ providing support for the victim-survivor to stay safe in the home

To build a sustainable and integrated crisis response service system, Safe Steps:

- ✓ Contributed to the State-wide Family Violence Crisis Response Model
- ✓ Supported the Accommodation and Refuge Register
- ✓ Participated in the Victorian Family Violence Reform Advisory Group
- ✓ Took part in the Systems Accessibility Working Group

## CASE STUDY

### Integrated, after-hours support

# Bronwyn’s story



**In fear for her life, Bronwyn contacted Safe Steps late in the evening. When she called, our crisis support workers were able to act quickly as they had her information onhand.**

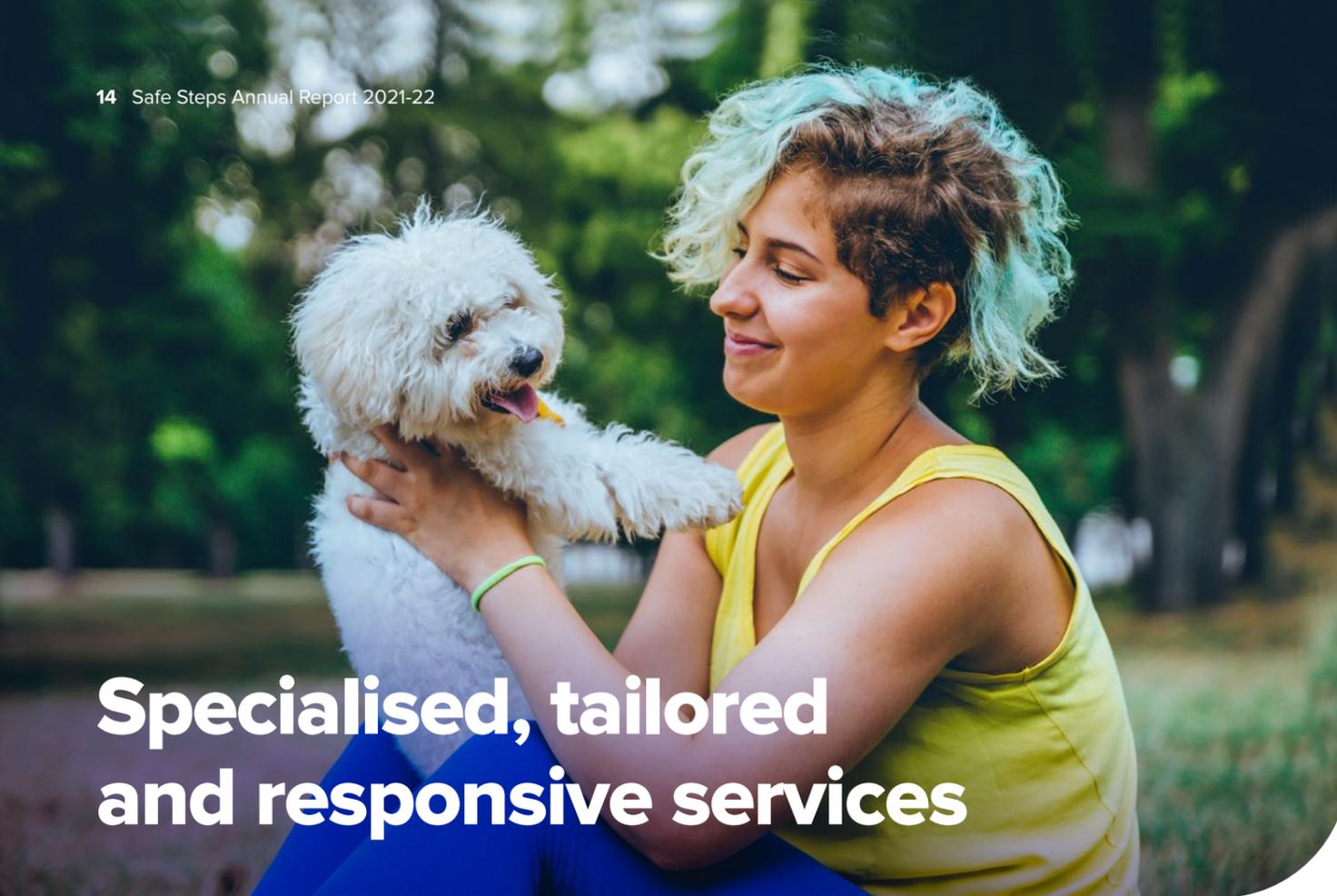
Bronwyn was contacted by her local Orange Door the day after police were called to her home due to domestic and family violence.

The practitioner at the Orange Door completed a Risk Assessment with Bronwyn and identified that she was at very high risk of further harm. While Bronwyn had been living with the violence for a long time, she knew it was escalating and she was no longer able to keep herself or her children safe. She agreed to move into local crisis accommodation so she could continue to work and her children could keep going to school.

The Orange Door placed Bronwyn in short-term, crisis accommodation in her area, but was concerned that, given the risks, she may need to be moved at short notice. Bronwyn was asked if her information could be shared with Safe Steps in case she needed after-hours support – and Bronwyn agreed.

Unfortunately, Bronwyn’s partner’s violence began escalating once she had left, and Bronwyn became concerned again for her immediate safety. He had been contacting her persistently and indicated to Bronwyn that he knew where she was staying.

In fear for her life, Bronwyn contacted Safe Steps late in the evening. When she called, our Family Violence Crisis Specialists were able to access her Risk Assessment and other information so that she did not have to repeat her story. We were able to act quickly and move her to a safer location.



# Specialised, tailored and responsive services

## Safety and support for our beloved pets

In 2021-2022, Safe Steps provided support for 347 pets through our 'Pets in Crisis' program.

Pets are a central part of the family, and can be harmed in domestic and family violence. Our program means pets can remain with their families while in crisis accommodation, or if that is not possible, are supported in kennels and foster care while more longer-term accommodation is sought.

The service partnership team at Safe Steps works closely with motels and other crisis accommodation providers to enable pet-friendly options. They work with a range of suppliers

to provide pet food, toys, beds, scratching posts and other material needs that support pet wellbeing and provide important mental stimulation. We also fund any necessary health care costs and needs.

We are grateful to the Flack Foundation for their generous support to keep the program running.

## Court advocacy

Navigating the court system is tough at the best of times. When victim-survivors come into Safe Steps, they can be experiencing a range of challenges that require court involvement. Funded by the Victorian Legal Aid Commission, we are able to help victim-survivors

navigate the family court system through our Family Advocacy Support Service (FASS).

The service combines free legal advice and support at court for people and for families involved in family law proceedings that are affected by domestic and family violence.

In 2021-2022, we supported 531 victim-survivors through the program.

We supported

**531**

victim-survivors in court

## Tailored financial support to transform victim-survivors lives as they seek safety.



While many victim-survivors need to leave their home due to domestic and family violence, with the right supports in place, many can return home with additional safety measures.

We have access to Flexible Support Packages to help victim-survivors stay safer at home and to aid in their recovery.

Packages can be used for a range of items that are essential to safety including closed circuit television, security cameras, and changing of locks. They are also used for anything else that is necessary to healing such as computers for further study, car repairs, new rental accommodation and living essentials.

This funding also assisted victim-survivors on temporary visas who had no income, providing living essentials and bond, rent and furniture for new accommodation.

Last year, 375 victim-survivors were provided with Flexible Support Packages to support their safety and enable their healing.

## Shorter-term case management and support

While someone is housed with Safe Steps in crisis accommodation, we make sure we can help hold them steady through this difficult process.

Our team provides material aid for food, clothing and anything else that might be needed, with victim-survivors and their children often only having the clothes on their back after leaving.

Our Crisis Specialists provide support to victim-survivors in crisis accommodation. One of critical things they create is a Risk Management plan in collaboration with each victim-survivor to support their safety and plan for their exit from the service.

The pathway through crisis to support varies for each person. We support transition to longer term refuge, to housing services, community-based specialist family violence services, and other support.





## Removing disability as a barrier to support

Having a disability can create additional barriers to accessing support and people with a disability are disproportionately impacted by domestic and family violence.

The Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative at Safe Steps assists victim-survivors of family violence living with a disability or who have disability needs. These can be physical, mental health, intellectual, or emotional, including temporary conditions.

Our Disability Liaison Officers are specialists who assess the individual needs of victim-survivors with a

disability and have access to flexible brokerage and options to break down barriers to access for support.

Victim-survivors, carers and parents of a child with a disability accessed support through this specialist initiative.

In 2021-2022, Safe Steps supported 84 families through brokerage and 182 people through capacity building.

### Disability Action Plan

**Safe Steps is proud to have launched our first formal Disability Action Plan.**

This plan, which was endorsed by the Board in June 2022, is a key component of the organisation's commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity. The plan outlines the actions the organisation will undertake to build our capacity to respond appropriately to victim-survivors who have a disability, and to provide opportunities for those with disability to contribute as staff of the organisation.

### CASE STUDY

#### Disability Support

## Amanda's story

Amanda\* was hesitant to access family violence support services with her children, due to fears that her children's disability and medical needs would not be supported in a crisis accommodation environment – with two of her children, Jason\* and Jasmine\* living with ADHD and her other children experiencing chronic health conditions.

When Jason and Jasmine experience stress due to being in an unfamiliar environment or disruption to their routines, they display internalising behaviours such as withdrawal and self-injury.

The stress of fleeing family violence, entering crisis accommodation, then having to move accommodation due to unsafe circumstances, meant that the children's behaviours were escalating and additional support was required.

The Disability Liaison Officer completed a needs assessment with Amanda, who advised that the children typically have a range of supportive items in the home (e.g. weighted blankets, sensory toys, feeding equipment), but unfortunately these items were either destroyed by the perpetrator or could not be retrieved safely.

The Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative (in consultation with Amanda and the children's medical support team) funded a package of sensory items for each child, including a weighted blanket, weighted support animal, fidget toys and other sensory items; to be used as tools to redirect the children and support them to adjust to their unfamiliar surroundings.

The program also supported Amanda to purchase the medical equipment she needed to safely manage the children's health whilst in crisis accommodation.

\* Names and some details have been changed to protect the identity and privacy of the family.



# A safe place to escape and restart

“

Being able to go somewhere safe, where he (the perpetrator) could not get to me, and figure out what me and my son were going to do... I was so relieved. I felt like we were able breath again.”

*Victim-survivor of family violence*

Many victim-survivors have to make the difficult decision to leave everything behind to stay safe. We support them in this journey by ensuring they have a safe place to stay and what they need to begin healing.

3,124 women and children were supported in crisis accommodation in 2021-2022 including refuge, supported accommodation and in private motels and serviced apartments.

### Refuge and supported accommodation

Providing access to a refuge place is Safe Steps' first preference in crisis accommodation. In refuge, victim-survivors are provided with face-to-face support. They are able to stay in accommodation that is therapeutic, fit-for-purpose and designed for their needs like Trish's Place, Safe Steps family violence refuge.

In 2021-2022 Safe Steps was able to provide 563 victim-survivors accommodation in a family violence refuge, representing 9.2% of all people accommodated. We continue to work with Government and others to increase the capacity of refuges and increase the total number of beds available through initiatives such as the Refuge Management Portal and through the development of new core-and-cluster type of refuges like Virginia's Place.

### Motels and private accommodation providers

While never our preferred option, a shortage of supported accommodation and refuge means motels are often our only option for more than 90% of people needing family violence support. We value the partnerships we have with the 26 motels and other accommodation providers, and the effort and care they put into creating a safe space for women and their children.

We continue to advocate strongly for improvements to crisis accommodation. While motels provide an immediate and important reprieve, people leaving violence deserve a safe, therapeutic space where they can pause and take the time to plan next steps. Their children need a place to feel emotionally safe and a home away from home through best practice accommodation responses.

## Virginia's Place



Virginia's Place is Safe Steps new 'core and cluster' refuge, named after domestic and family violence activist Virginia Geddes.

At it's 'core' is a welcoming office space, breakout areas and meeting spaces where victim-survivors can access face-to-face, around the clock supports.

Around this is a 'cluster' of eight beautiful, bespoke units, each with their own kitchen, living area and outdoor space so families can bring their beloved pets with them in the most difficult time in their lives.

We are extremely grateful for the Victorian Government for providing us with the funding to operate such an important facility. We are also grateful to the amazing team at Rize Up, who furnished and added all of the finishing touches to make Virginia's Place feel like a home away from home.



Virginia's Place will be fully operational in 2022-2023.

# Community events

## #WhyWeWalk



**2.5 mil**  
social & digital  
media reach



On Thursday 25 November, an estimated 4,000 people from 300 city and regional locations took to their local streets wearing orange to take a collective stand against family violence and acknowledge the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on this year's *Walk Against Family Violence*.

The event was promoted by our WAFV2021 ambassadors: Survivor Advocate Rosie Batty, Actor and Advocate Kym Valentine and Advocate Tarang Chawla, with a reach of 2.5 million through social and digital media.

In Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens, a media event brought together the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Gabrielle Williams MP; City of Melbourne Lord Mayor, Sally

Capp; Respect Victoria Chair Kate Fitz-Gibbon; Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner, Family Violence Command Lauren Callaway; Djirra CEO, Antonette Braybrook; Safe Steps CEO, Rita Butera; No to Violence CEO, Jacqui Watt; and the Walks ambassadors.

The Walk was supported by Respect Victoria and the City of Melbourne, and coordinated with Djirra, Emerge Support, InTouch Multicultural Centre,



No To Violence, Respect Victoria, Safe and Equal, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Victim Survivors' Advisory Council and Women with Disabilities Victoria.

It is held each year on the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women, the first day of the United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.



## MDXO

In 2019, Lisa van der Poel from 38 Grace Events reached out to Safe Steps wanting to develop an event that also made a difference.

Planned for 2020, the pandemic delayed the event for two years but we were humbled by Lisa's commitment, and in 2022 the inaugural MDXO Mother's Day Event was launched.

Speaking to over 200 guests, Safe Steps CEO, Rita Butera explained how Safe Steps assisted those in crisis and how the support of events like MDXO enabled Safe Steps to help those most in need.

The 2023 MDXO event is already in planning and we look forward to seeing it grow to be an event on everyone's calendar.



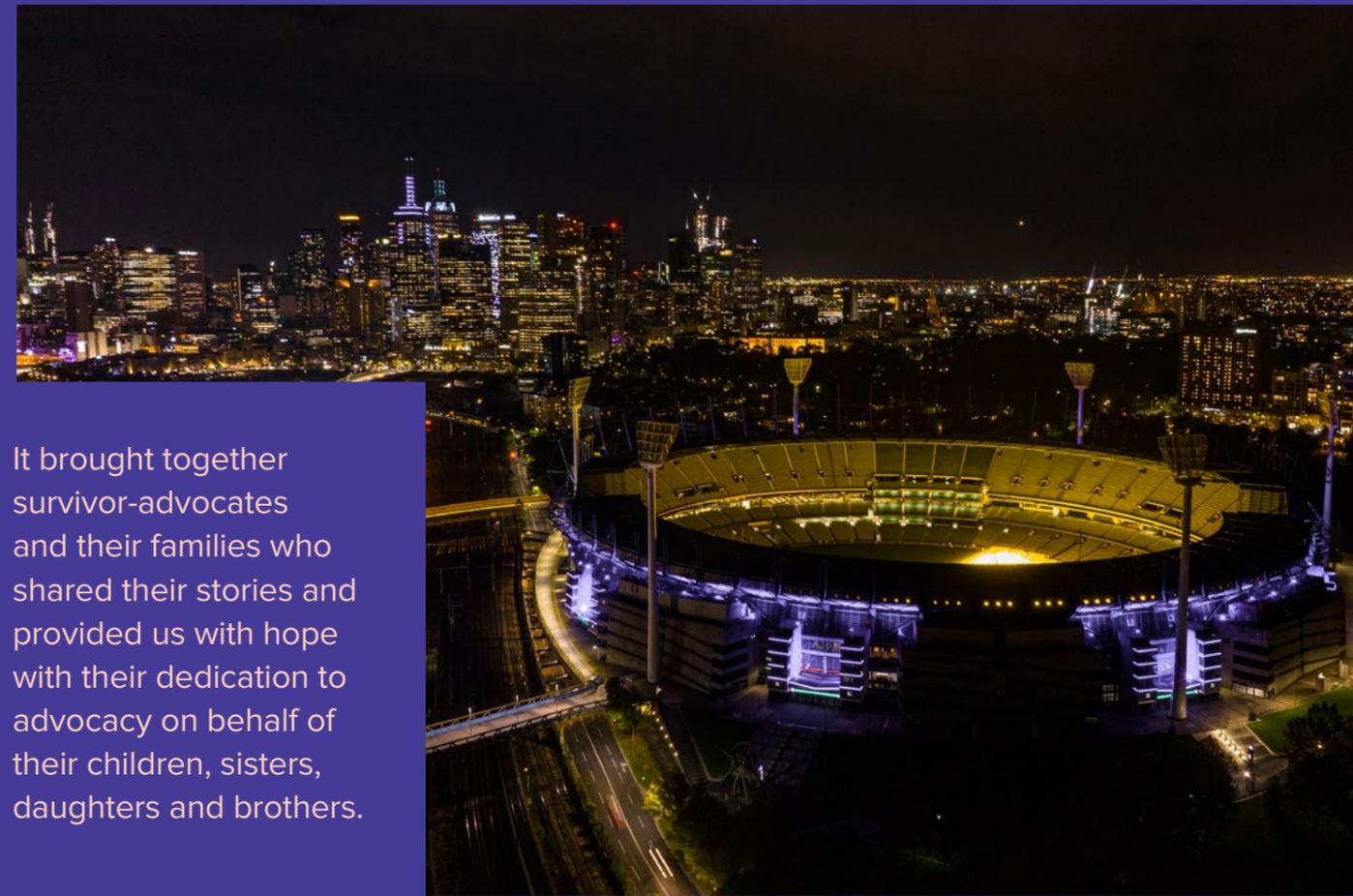
# Lighting a candle



The 2022 *Candlelight Vigil* was held on Wednesday 4 May 2022 at the Family Violence Memorial Gardens, providing a beautiful space for families and the community to come together to mourn, share, connect and hopefully go some way toward healing some of their deep hurt.

It brought together survivor-advocates and their families who shared their stories and provided us with hope with their dedication to advocacy on behalf of their children, sisters, daughters and brothers.

As part of this year's *Candlelight Vigil*, more than 70 landmarks across Victoria were illuminated in purple to draw attention to this national tragedy. These include the Arts Centre, Bolte Bridge, Melbourne Town Hall, 405 Bourke Street, The Rialto, AAMI Park, the Victoria Police Building, Geelong Arts Centre, and the Yallourn and Loy Yang Power Stations.



It brought together survivor-advocates and their families who shared their stories and provided us with hope with their dedication to advocacy on behalf of their children, sisters, daughters and brothers.



**70**  
landmarks  
across the state





## 1800RESPECT

In 2021-2022 we were proud to partner with Medibank as a provider of specialist trauma counselling through 1800RESPECT, providing **25,941 people** with specialised support for sexual assault, family, and domestic violence.

This vital service links victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and sexual assault with specially trained counsellors to work through their trauma and start to rebuild their lives.

The service also provides support and advice to people who are concerned about a loved one.

We are proud of the amazing work done by the 1800 team. Our team delivered 38-40% of overall service delivery, being the largest provider of the five partners.

The year saw a re-tendering process for the program and as of 30 June, the movement to a new provider.

The team continued to provide exceptional service in difficult times. In and out of lockdowns and throughout periods of uncertainty, they adapted to changes and made sure the victim-survivor remained at the centre of their work, 24/7/365.

We thank them for their dedication and know they will all continue to make a difference in the lives of so many victim-survivors.

“

The counsellors at 1800RESPECT have been here with her when she was at her lowest, and every time she spoke with us, she feels much better and stronger. She noted how important this service is to many women like her whose escaping domestic and family violence and thank us for what we do with all her heart.

# Advocating for change

To end family violence, we need to advocate for changes to the systems and structures that drive it.

We also need to ensure that our work and our responses are driven by best practice and current research. Our policy advocacy is always driven by practitioner expertise, our practice experience and critically – the lived experience of survivor-advocates.

## Safe and affordable housing

From improvements to crisis accommodation through to investment in social housing, we continue to advocate for better housing options for victim-survivors. We know that lack of housing is a major barrier to recovery and that there is a dire shortage of housing in Victoria.

We advocated for change through our continuing involvement in the Women’s Housing Alliance, an advocacy group formed in 2019 to help address the systemic barriers and housing crisis being faced by women and children facing homelessness across Victoria.

We met with Ministers and senior bureaucrats in government to push for a gendered lens to be applied on housing policy, to fund more housing options for victim-survivors and to provide greater wrap-around supports.

We contributed to the Everybody’s Home campaign and advocacy group, and worked with the peak body for housing services to agitate for reform.

## Access to justice

Many aspects of the justice system, such as IVOs, perpetrator accountability and the family court continue to traumatise victim-survivors and there is simply not enough access to legal help and support.

We advocated for change through submissions to inform family court reform, and by working closely with Victoria Police we will continue change.

## PERPETRATOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Calls to Safe Steps hit record numbers during the pandemic. While victim-survivors reached out, perpetrators remained even more hidden than in pre-pandemic times.

Safe Steps in the months of February, March and April, received more than double the demand for support than at the same time pre the pandemic.

Perpetrators took advantage of lockdowns, threatening victim-survivors, certain that no one could

easily leave the home. They used misinformation like the police won’t help you, no services are open, you can’t go anywhere, if you leave I will report you. These were typical threats reported to Safe Steps.

Victim-survivors lived with added abuse. Online gambling, alcohol consumption and other forms of financial abuse thrived.

Perpetrators track victim-survivors down in record numbers via phone technology and car tracing. The act of stalking partners remains as unchecked as it is common. Strangulation is more frequently

Thousands of perpetrators breach Intervention Orders each year and experience no consequences.



reported in victim assessments, with our intake processes now focussing intently on this risk factor. Serious assaults, sexual assaults and death rates are unchanged in Victoria.

Without perpetrator accountability, the family violence service system is limited in providing effective support to victim-survivors. Without perpetrator accountability, victim-survivors will continue to leave the family home, boarding an express service directly into homelessness and poverty.



### Sustainable family violence services

Family violence services are overworked and under-resourced. In 2021-2022, we advocated to government for additional resources to help us with our work.

We continued to advocate with our peak body, Safe and Equal, for family violence services to be funded in a systemic and long-term way.

We also participated in the Victorian Family Violence Reform Ministerial Advisory Group; Service System Reform Working Group and Systems Accessibility Working Group to develop strategies for sector sustainability.

### Decriminalising victim-survivors

While the exact numbers are not known, it is estimated that 90 per cent of women in the justice system have experienced family and sexual violence, and the number of women in prison continues to climb.

We also see in practice the misidentification of primary aggressors, a lack of perpetrator accountability and issues with the Family Court processes.

We advocate in spaces including the Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee, participated in research investigating the prevalence of misidentification primary aggressor.



### Getting the message out

To advocate and to let people know who we are, our social and digital media presence is critical.

Followers, engagement and impressions have increased in 2021-2022 across all social media platforms. Website traffic also increased.

#### Followers increased by

**13.2% to 27,844**



supporters across our social media platforms

**138,670**

visits to our website in 2021-2022 – an increase of **30.75%**



**2.5 mil**

impressions made



with the hashtags #WAFV2021 #WAFV #WhyWeWalk for the Walk Against Family Violence

**3 mil**

impressions made



with the Candlelight Vigil hashtag #LightACandle2022 #Vigil2022

### SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL PLAN

In our submission and feedback to the **National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children**, we outlined key issues for inclusion in the plan.

These included:

- ✓ The criticality of access to safe and affordable housing, from crisis accommodation to long-term affordable housing
- ✓ Family violence and trauma-informed practices for Federal Government services that work with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence including Services Australia
- ✓ Reform in cyber governance and practices to respond to cyber stalking and technology-facilitated abuse
- ✓ An increase in and security of operational funding for specialist family violence services
- ✓ Focus on the economic drivers and impacts of domestic and family violence on victim-survivors, including an increase in income support payments to a liveable level
- ✓ Changes to immigration laws and increased supports for women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence
- ✓ National consistency in the risk assessment and management for domestic and family violence
- ✓ Meaningful reform to the Family Court system and access to legal support
- ✓ An increase in accountability for people using violence
- ✓ Strengthening responses to children and young people as victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in their own right



# Lived experiences inform our policy and advocacy

Last year saw the continued evolution of the Safe Steps Survivor Advocate Program to refocus it on embedding lived experience expertise across all of the organisations systems, processes and structures.

The Safe Steps program was established 15 years ago in 2007 with funding from VicHealth. In that time, the program has achieved amazing outcomes including participation in parliamentary inquiries, public and community events, seminars and workplaces, and interviews with print and broadcast news.

Re-orienting the existing Survivor Advocate program increases opportunities for engagement and empowerment of Survivor Advocates to participate in targeted opportunities in support of embedding lived experience expertise into organisational functions, rather than maintaining a sole focus on awareness raising via media and external advocacy.

In this way, Safe Steps supports a move to recognising and mobilising Advocates to become more than their stories and provide their expertise in different ways.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the amazing advocates that have come along in this journey with us and we look forward to strengthening and centering the voice of survivor-advocates in all of the work that we do.



Safe Steps Advocate Program has focussed on awareness-raising, training, and supporting women with lived experience to share their personal stories and raise awareness.

“

Safe Steps supports a move to recognising and mobilising Advocates to become more than their stories and provide their expertise in different ways.





## Together, we can make a difference



Fundraising and corporate relationships works hand-in-hand as we aim to increase awareness around our work, and raise money for the much-needed support that our frontline provides.

Corporate support is important, not only for the financial support received by the organisation.

Violence against women and their children carries an enormous economic cost to society and in 2015-16 it was estimated to be \$22 billion<sup>1</sup>. With the worldwide trend of family and domestic violence increasing over the past two years, it is more important than ever for our corporate sector to play a role in making a difference, not only for the

broader community, but also for their staff with women making up 47.4% of the workforce in Australia<sup>2</sup>.

In 2019, Brookfield Properties reached out to Safe Steps to be their charity partner for the 405 Bourke Street Project. Two events, two lockdowns and almost \$100,000 later, and our partnership has evolved as Brookfield looks for other ways it can support the organisation, and Safe Steps looks at how it can support the work of Brookfield.

This year, as part of their commitment to Safe Steps and building awareness, Brookfield illuminated the now completed 405 Bourke Street with Regional Director, Development, Will Green attending the Vigil.

We look forward to growing our relationship with Will and Brookfield Properties.

1. [the\\_cost\\_of\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_their\\_children\\_in\\_australia\\_-\\_summary\\_report\\_may\\_2016.pdf](#) (dss.gov.au)  
 2. Gender equality workplace statistics at a glance 2022

**\$22 billion**

is the estimated cost to society for Violence against women and their children and increasing.



### Our sector partnerships

Safe Steps plays a central role in Victoria's family violence sector, working with our colleagues in many other organisations and committees to achieve a more integrated and coordinated response.

Safe and Equal

Djirra

Emerge Support

Family Safety Victoria

InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

No To Violence

Respect Victoria

Switchboard

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

Victoria Police

# Supporting safety and wellbeing

In this challenging year, we focussed on staff wellbeing, hybrid workplace flexibility and strengthening our technology platforms.

Throughout 2021-2022, our staff demonstrated commitment, compassion and resilience as we navigated the continued challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this year, when Melbourne went into its 5th and 6th lockdowns, we continued with remote, hybrid and 'team' arrangements to safeguard staff health and ensure continuity of service.

Following feedback and consultation with all staff through surveys and focus groups, Safe Steps extended the hybrid model across the organisation.

We listened closely to our staff in order to ensure that we provided the necessary supports and tools given the immense pressure and uncertainty that COVID-19 continued to deliver.

Throughout the year, we provided online Health and Wellbeing programs offering mental, physical, general and occupational health advice and support to staff.

With the end of the 1800RESPECT contract in June 2022, we farewelled 45 specialist trauma counsellors, supporting them to transition to other roles within Safe Steps and externally.

## Initiatives in 2021-2022

A new Wellness Framework in partnership with Smiling Minds

A new Learning and Development Framework utilising the 70:20:10 model

Completion of Staff Alignment and Engagement Survey including regular Pulse Surveys

New Inclusion training modules making a total of 46 online courses

A new careers portal, Turbo Recruit, to attract diverse candidates and build our candidate database

Internal and external audit of payroll processes to ensure data integrity

Our Information and Communications Technology (ICT) priority is to protect and enhance Safe Steps data, disaster recovery, incident management and change management to ensure that all systems operate effectively in the event of an emergency.

COVID-19 has increased our reliance on technology to achieve a greater impact and help us engage with the victim-survivors we support. Our technology platforms have also been crucial supporting our staff to deliver services onsite or remotely during periods of lockdown or restrictions.



We listened closely to our staff to sure that we provided the necessary supports.

# Building quality, managing risk

We upgraded and consolidated our reporting and compliance systems, maintaining Safe Steps as a secure and responsive service.

Amidst ongoing challenges of the pandemic in 2021-2022, we continued to strengthen and refine our quality and risk systems including:

- Modifying our incident management and reporting systems to improve our understanding of incidents and trends, and how these connect to our overall risk management processes. This analysis of incidents and corrective actions provides Safe Steps with a mechanism for reflection and opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Enhancing our legislative compliance system through a new partnership with 'Comply Online', which provides a register of all legislation that Safe Steps is required to meet. Each quarter, we receive alerts regarding any major changes and generate reports which identify changes to be made to practice or policy. This new system gives us a higher oversight of compliance issues and provides assurance that we are operating within our legal parameters.

At Safe Steps, we are committed to implementing a formal risk management system in order to provide a sound quality and governance framework that aligns with the Australian Standard for Risk Management (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2018). This ensures decision-

“  
We were again challenged this year by the impact of COVID-19 and its effect on all areas of Safe Steps.”

making and accountability are aligned and articulated, and tie in with Safe Steps' Strategic Plan, the MARAM framework, and key legislation.

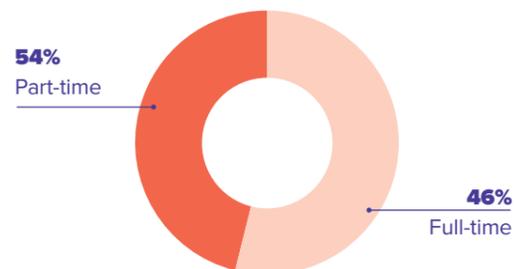
We were again challenged this year by the impact of COVID-19 and its effect on all areas of Safe Steps. We have continued to be responsive and manage impacts in a considered and systematic way with responsibility for tasks and decision-making assigned in all areas. Safe Steps continues to monitor the changes that the pandemic has brought, and as part of our risk and quality improvement systems, we will use learnings and reflections to forward plan.

We have continued working towards the September 2022 accreditation when we will be assessed against the Quality Improvement Council Health and Community Service Standards (7th ed.), and the Human Services Standards (HSS).

We developed and launched our Disability Action Plan and made further progress towards achieving the national Rainbow Tick accreditation later in 2022-2023. Becoming Rainbow Tick accredited will support Safe Steps in providing services and programs in an inclusive way for LGBTIQ+ people and demonstrate our commitment to addressing issues of equity.

## Our staffing

In 2021-2022, the Safe Steps workforce comprised 95 staff





## Financial statements

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME – FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2022	2022 \$	2021 \$
Revenue	22,645,702	20,737,631
Employee benefits expense	(13,126,087)	(12,286,242)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(322,107)	(412,811)
Client direct relief	(5,116,162)	(4,140,001)
Consultancy expenses	(1,285,935)	(758,028)
Marketing and publicity expenses	(106,807)	(79,310)
Occupancy costs	(350,773)	(418,180)
Telephone expenses	(241,122)	(270,648)
Other expenses	(292,732)	(295,372)
Motor vehicle expense	(18,316)	(22,931)
IT expenses	(498,854)	(420,477)
Printing and stationery expenses	(5,332)	(6,206)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>1,281,475</b>	<b>1,627,425</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income / (loss)</b>		
Unrealised gains / (losses) from financial assets	(45,842)	111,483
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>1,235,633</b>	<b>1,738,908</b>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION – AS AT 30 JUNE 2022	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
<b>Cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>8,644,857</b>	<b>7,648,863</b>
Trade and other receivables	580,200	1,506,025
Other financial assets	461,132	523,470
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>9,686,189</b>	<b>9,678,358</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	420,280	375,067
Right-of-use assets	28,165	140,917
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>169,945</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>618,390</b>	<b>515,984</b>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION (CONTINUED) – AS AT 30 JUNE 2021	2022 \$	2021 \$
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	1,290,453	1,538,310
Lease liabilities	5,988	196,617
Employee benefits	822,896	843,310
Other financial liabilities	1,054,856	1,675,684
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>3,093,193</b>	<b>4,253,921</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Lease liabilities	22,416	656,159
Employee benefits	106,939	94,023
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>129,355</b>	<b>94,023</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>3,222,548</b>	<b>4,347,944</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>7,082,031</b>	<b>5,846,398</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Reserves	76,706	122,548
Retained earnings	7,005,325	5,723,850
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>7,082,031</b>	<b>5,846,398</b>

## Independent Audit Report Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc.

ABN: 86 138 521 643

### Report on the Financial Report

The accompanying financial statements, which comprises the Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2022 and the 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 2022.

The audited financial report was prepared as a general purpose financial report and in accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards – Simplified Disclosures and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*. The prior year financial reports were prepared as special purpose financial reports to meet the reporting requirements of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012* and not in full accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards. The transition from the previous financial reporting framework to Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosures has not affected the Association's reported financial position, financial performance and cash flows.

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on that financial report in our report dated 28 September 2022.

The 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 financial statements, therefore, is not a substitute for reading the audited financial report of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc. The 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 Financial Report

Management is responsible for the preparation of the financial report.

### Auditor's Responsibility

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

### Auditor's Opinion

In our opinion, the financial statements derived from the audited financial report of Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre Inc for the year ended 30 June 2022 are consistent, in all material respects, with that audited financial report, on the basis described in Note 1.

Signed by



Ryan Leemon, Director,  
Moore Australia

Melbourne Vic, 28 September 2022

# Thank you for your support

Safe Steps is grateful to the Victorian community for its generous support. Our sincere thanks to the Victorian Government and the corporations, foundations, individuals and community groups that enable us to provide crisis support for victim-survivors of family violence.

## OUR DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Through the generous support of the Victorian Government, corporations, foundations, community groups and individuals, Safe Steps continues to provide crisis support to those who are in immediate danger due to family and domestic violence.

And, through the support shown for the *Candlelight Vigil* and the *Walk Against Family Violence*, we are able to reach people who may need our help and until now, did not know that we were here for them.

### Safe Steps thanks you all

180 Degrees Consulting	Fire Rescue Victoria	Next Steps Australia
Monash University	Flowers Across Australia	Old Treasury Building
38 Grace Events	Francesca Jewellery	Perpetual Trustee Company Ltd
AGL Loy Yang	Geelong City Council	Quantum
Allens	Gippsland Womens Health	Ratio
Art Centre Melbourne	Healesville Distilling P/L	Respect Victoria
Berwick Opportunity Shop	Jodie Plum	Rialto
Berwick Secondary College	Latrobe City Council	RizeUp Australia
Bethany	Lendlease	Royal Exhibition Building
BreakUp Boss	Life Uncut	SAFV Geelong
Brooke-Lynne Foundation	Lions International, District 201 V1-4	Sally Piskuric
Brookfield Properties	Lois Bryson Fund	Securitas
Built.	Manchester Unity Building	Shameless Podcast
Carlton Football Club	Melbourne & Olympic Parks	Sweater Club
Chrysalis Foundation	Melbourne Commonwealth	Shire of Baw Baw
City of Melbourne	Parliament Offices	South Gippsland Shire Council
City of Melbourne Bowls Club	Myer Community Fund	The Marian & EH Flack Trust
Design Doctor	Myer Distribution Centre	Transurban
Development Victoria	Myer Frankston	Ultra Violette – Grace & Fire P/L
Dexus	Myer Melbourne	Victoria Police
East Gippsland Shire Council	Nature Research	Wellington Shire Council
EnergyAustralia	Naylor Stewart Foundation	
Federation Square		



**Safety. Support. Respect.**

**Our 24-hour family violence  
crisis line 1800 015 188**

**Web Chat:** [safesteps.org.au](https://safesteps.org.au)

**Email:** [safesteps@safesteps.org.au](mailto:safesteps@safesteps.org.au)

**Safe Steps  
Family Violence Response Centre**

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**Family Violence  
Response Centre**