



# 2020-2021 Annual Report

Safety. Support. Respect.



Family Violence  
Response Centre

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## 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 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 the women and children who have been killed by someone they once loved and trusted, and those who continue to live with the trauma of family violence.

## Safe Steps is the only 24/7, family violence response centre in Victoria, providing a statewide entry point for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence

Most of our work is dedicated to the needs of women and children, which reflects the gendered nature of domestic and family violence.

Everything we do is informed by the lived experiences of victim-survivors of family violence. We ensure that their voices are at the heart of all reforms.

We advocate for policy and law reform, and social change.

**Family  
violence  
information  
and support**

**Risk  
assessment**

**Safety  
planning**

**Family  
violence crisis  
accommodation**

**Disability  
support**

**Financial  
and material  
support**

**Court  
advocacy**

**Pet  
safety**

Safe Steps is  
proud to be a  
joint provider of  
1800RESPECT

# At a glance

## 2020-2021

### Highest number of calls on record

Inbound calls

86,428

Outbound calls

94,790

to manage client risk and safety



#### Inbound calls monthly

July 2020

5,948 calls

June 2021

9,023 calls

#### Outbound calls monthly

July 2020

6,243 calls

June 2021

9,593 calls

35,363

Bed nights in secure crisis accommodation

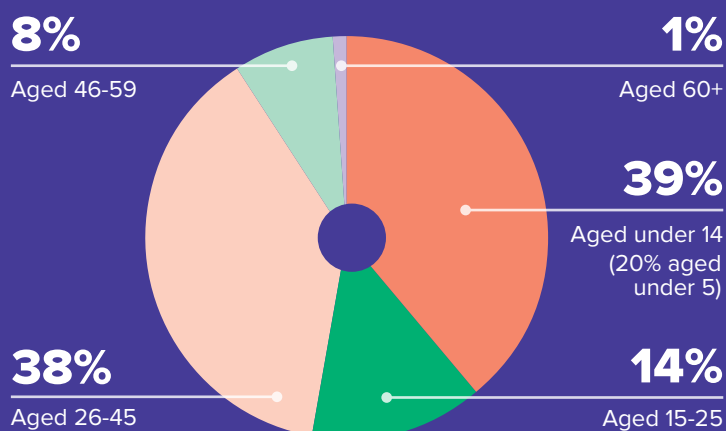


97 Women & children accommodated on any given night



26 Private accommodation partnerships

## People accommodated by Safe Steps



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

**27%** Identified as culturally and linguistically diverse

**480**

Family support packages



**305**

Pets safely housed



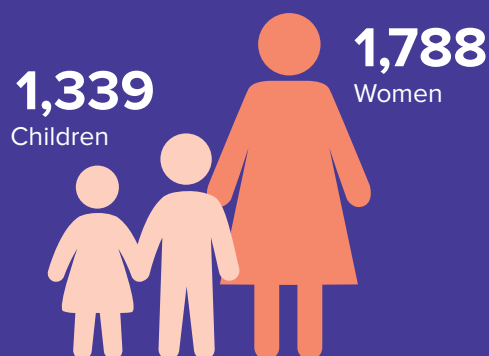
**413**

Women supported in court



**3,127**

People escaping family violence accommodated safely



**4,061**

People provided with crisis services





**Ingrid Williams**  
**Chair**



Ingrid Williams has 18 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. 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.

## Our Board

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

**Pam Newton**  
**Deputy Chair**



Pam Newton is the Manager 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-profits.

**Cristina Wolters**  
**Treasurer and Chair of Finance, Audit and Compliance Subcommittee**



Cristina Wolters 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.

**Alexandra Wall**  
**Director**



Alexandra Wall 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.

**Belinda Bales**  
**Director and Chair of Governance Subcommittee**



Belinda Bales is a lawyer with Victoria Police and works in its Legal Services Department. She has also worked in the Prosecutions Division and managed the Specialist Summary Sex Offences Prosecutions Team. Belinda holds positions on the Therapeutic Treatment Board of Victoria and the Child Witnesses Services Advisory Committee of Victoria.

**Nadine Bartholomeusz-Raymond**  
**Director**



Nadine Bartholomeusz-Raymond has 20 years' experience in the mental 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. She has also worked in communications and media advisory roles with Women's Health in the North and Women's Health West.

**Julia Reynolds,**  
**Director**



Julia Reynolds 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.

**Penelope Cottrill**  
**Director and Chair of Quality, Risk and Performance Subcommittee**



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

**Jen Allen**  
**Director**



Jen Allen is the Executive Director of Jen Allen Coaching and Counselling. As one of the first media advocates trained by Safe Steps, Jen has contributed to many prevention messages over the years through media and keynote presentations. Jen, a previous interim Chair, completed her nine-year term on the Board in May 2021.

**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 experienced family violence and specifically for those who have a disability and suffered at the hands of a perpetrator.

# From the Chair

I am delighted to have become the Chair of such an important organisation as Safe Steps since joining the Board in June 2020.

This year we implemented the second year of the comprehensive strategic plan that provides a clear roadmap for delivering safety, support and respect for all victim-survivors of family violence.

Our focus continues to centre on delivering strong governance and providing strategic guidance to ensure the responsiveness and sustainability of the organisation.

COVID-19 has brought many challenges including unprecedented demand for our services with record numbers of inbound and outbound calls. The year has also seen a greater dependence on technology with most staff required to work from home. The swift rollout of a business continuity strategy ensured

minimal disruption to our services during these critical times.

We are grateful for additional funding from the Victorian Government to support us in meeting these increases in demand. It will be essential that this level of funding is maintained to ensure the safety of victim-survivors who contact us.

As a national 1800RESPECT partner with Medibank Health, we delivered almost 40 per cent of the overall counselling services. This vital service has been transformative, delivering specialised trauma-informed counselling to victims of domestic, family and sexual violence across the nation.

This year we farewelled Jen Allen (Director and interim Chair), who dedicated more than eight years to the Board. Her expertise and insights were highly valued.



I would like to thank our CEO Rita Butera along with the executive leadership and their teams for their commitment, agility and innovation. Their efforts in providing our regular services while contending with extraordinary demand, working from home, prioritising workplace health and safety and a major upgrade to our technology platforms have been outstanding.

Our profound thanks go to the victim-survivors and advocates who support our work, our sector partners, Family Safety Victoria, Victoria Police and the family violence and homelessness services our staff work with every day.

**Ingrid Williams**  
Chair, Safe Steps



# From the CEO

The past year at Safe Steps has proven the organisation's resilience as we managed dramatic increases in the volume, complexity and risk of our work.

As first responders and Victoria's only 24/7 crisis response service for victims of family and domestic violence, we have maintained full operations in an extraordinary year.

Calls to our crisis line and outbound calls to manage clients' risk increased significantly this year. Alarming, our options for referral have been greatly reduced because of higher demand for homelessness services, as well as a lack of refugees and affordable housing.

To deliver COVID-safe operations, our crisis response team remained on site, with our 1800RESPECT counsellors and

corporate staff working from home for much of the year.

Our major events moved online, turning the annual Walk Against Family Violence into a successful 'walk from home' community activity. The Candlelight Vigil, in memory of the women and children tragically lost to family violence, was screened via YouTube. We sincerely thank the victim-survivors and advocates who shared their stories.

Safe Steps plays a central role in Victoria's family violence sector, working closely with Family Safety Victoria and sector partners to contribute to a more integrated and coordinated response.

We are proud to be delivering 1800RESPECT trauma counselling as a specialist partner with Medibank Health.

Our passionate and dedicated team saw increased demand related to the impacts of COVID-19 and the long overdue focus on sexual harassment and sexual violence.

We are grateful to our Survivor Advocates for their dedication and contribution to our events and consultations, including the review of our new advocates' program.

My thanks to the Chair, Ingrid Williams, for her wisdom and support during this difficult year and to all Board members for their time, skills and commitment.

And a special thank you to our extraordinary Safe Steps staff for the expertise and passion they bring each day to this critical work.

**Rita Butera**  
CEO, Safe Steps



# COVID, CRISIS AND SAFETY

At Safe Steps, Victoria's only 24/7 family violence response centre, our frontline crisis specialists took a record number of calls and contacts from victim-survivors, their supporters and sector partners in 2020/2021.

Our Intake and Assessment team of family violence crisis specialists received more than 86,000 calls, Web Chat texts and emails last year.

The crisis specialists' role is to listen, support, provide information, develop safety plans, conduct risk assessments (using MARAM, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework), and offer crisis accommodation if a woman and her children are at high risk of serious harm.

The team completed about 5,500 comprehensive MARAMs with victim-survivors during the year, with more than 70 per cent indicating serious risk requiring immediate protection.

Our work in 2020/2021 was dominated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prolonged and multiple lockdowns had a 'roller-coaster' effect on the number of contacts from victim-survivors with calls dipping and spiking as lockdowns initially limited people's capacity to reach out for help.

Another year of COVID-19 outbreaks and public health measures continued to create greater risks for victim-survivors.

## Improving safety

Safe Steps' wide-ranging measures to help improve safety included:

- Further developing our new text-based Web Chat and extending operating hours to midnight on weekdays
- Extending the Pets in Crisis program

- A pilot program at several Coles and Priceline stores where discreet signage encouraged women at risk to call us or to speak with a staff member if they needed to use a phone in a private room to call for help
- Coordinating the statewide refuge response with Family Safety Victoria to ensure any COVID-positive women and children experiencing family violence could access a refuge
- Creating capacity in motels to support victim-survivors who had to self-isolate after a COVID exposure
- Collaborating with Victoria Police on the message that nobody would be fined for leaving home against stay-at-home rules to escape family violence



- Providing capacity building, consultation and specialist management support for Quarantine Victoria's Complex Assessment Response Team, which was responding to family violence in hotel quarantine
- Helping staff in homelessness hotels build their capacity to respond to family violence
- Advocating for victim-survivors who needed to cross state borders to be safe from a perpetrator.

### After-hours contact

Over the year, 58 per cent of contacts were received during business hours with 42 per cent of contacts after hours. Demand increased in the afternoons, with many education and family violence services referring clients at serious risk and with complex needs towards the end of their working day. We added extra Intake and Assessment staff to support a more timely crisis response.

The team completed about 5,500 comprehensive MARAMs with victim-survivors during the year, with more than 70 per cent indicating serious risk requiring immediate protection.

### Increase in demand

We continued to work closely with hospitals, police and sector partners to support best practice for victim-survivors.

This year, we heard from many people and victim-survivors who had not contacted a service before, including victim-survivors with complex physical health, mental health and alcohol and other drug issues, requiring extensive liaison with health services that were operating at limited capacity. There were also increased disclosures of sexual assaults, and elder abuse perpetrated by children and grandchildren.

As a crisis response service, Safe Steps does not have waitlists and cannot 'reach capacity'. We must provide a crisis response if a victim-survivor is assessed to be at serious risk.

The Victorian Government has acknowledged this sustained increase in demand, confirming extra funding for staffing and crisis brokerage. Additional recurrent funding will be critical to ongoing operations.



## Live Web Chat tackles lockdown effects

Our new live Web Chat platform has been critical to the safety of some victim-survivors.

In 2020/2021, live Web Chat became a key service with more than 15 contacts a day. Live Web Chat and email together received more than 450 contacts per month.

### A text-based option

During Victoria's first lockdown in 2020, it quickly became clear that women trapped at home couldn't safely use the phone to call us. In the first weeks, inbound calls from victim-survivors to our crisis response line dropped significantly, while over the year calls from concerned family and friends rose.

In response, we developed and launched an innovative live Web Chat function within eight weeks. Web Chat users have a real-time text conversation with a family violence crisis specialist for immediate support, safety planning, risk assessment and, if warranted, a move to crisis accommodation.

### Building trust

For many victim-survivors, reaching out via Web Chat was the first step to establishing trust with a crisis specialist. Those at serious risk often chose to make contact via phone once they had gathered information and built trust.

More than 50 per cent of Web Chat users were seeking help to leave a dangerous environment.

Web Chat has also made our crisis service more accessible to young people, a demographic that historically has not used

our services. For almost all of the young people who contacted us, the primary issue was parental/guardian coercion or violence. This was often complicated by rejection of the family faith, exploration of gender identity or sexuality, and limited supports in isolated communities.

### Translation support

Many contacts came from people from non-English speaking backgrounds who were able to use Google Translate on Web Chat. After this initial contact, they felt able to call us on the phone and use our interpreter service.

We are grateful for extra investment from Family Safety Victoria, which enabled Web Chat services to be extended from 1 February 2021. Recurrent funding for Web Chat is critical to continue its operation 9am to midnight, Monday to Friday.

# The downside of technology

Technology can be a dangerous weapon used against victim-survivors. Our research shows it is a major risk for almost every victim-survivor in emergency accommodation.

An important first step for our crisis specialists is to check that technology is not being used as a tactic for abuse, threats, monitoring and surveillance against victim-survivors.

Most victim-survivors reported that perpetrators limited their access to technology, monitored their internet use and had removed or damaged their mobile phone. A smaller number reported technology abuse through

stalking, tracking, hacking of digital accounts and defamation and intimidation on social media.

Technology safety planning is an important part of our work with victim-survivors and can include education with regard to setting up apps and devices.

Safe Steps partners with a cyber security specialist service to ensure the safety of all technology before coming into crisis accommodation.

We also provide new phones to women escaping family violence so they can safely stay in touch with support services. These phones are provided through the Safe Connections program, a partnership between WESNET, the peak body for women's family violence services, and Telstra, funded by the Australian Government.

## Improving safety, offering hope

Providing tailored support to meet individual need continued to transform women's and children's lives as they sought safety.

During 2020/2021, 480 of our clients benefited from flexible support packages. These included 'Safe@Home' CCTV, sensor lighting and alarm systems, and items such as computers for further study, car repairs, new rental accommodation and living essentials.

Demand spiked in June 2021, with 63 packages provided during the month.

We supported male victims with Safe@Home measures and were able to relocate women and children at high risk. Although COVID-19 restrictions affected travel, families were moved interstate or overseas to a supportive and safer environment.

... we used this flexible funding to inspect cars, mobile phones, computers and homes for tracking and stalking software and devices.

With so many more victim-survivors reporting sophisticated technology abuse, we used this flexible funding to inspect cars, mobile phones, computers and homes for tracking and stalking software and devices.

This funding also assisted victim-survivors on temporary visas who had no income, providing living essentials and

bond, rent and furniture for new accommodation.

We are grateful to the Victorian Government for the continued funding of these vital support packages to 2022/2023, enabling victim-survivors to begin a new life free from family violence.

## Equity and access

Funded by the Victorian Government and administered by Safe Steps in partnership with Women with Disabilities Victoria and DVVic/DVRCV, this initiative delivers essential support to people with a disability who are experiencing family violence.

Women with disabilities face a significantly higher risk of family violence and many women acquire disability as a direct result of family violence.

Safe Steps' family violence specialist Disability Liaison Officers assess the particular needs of each victim-survivor with a disability and provide a rapid crisis response. This includes transport required to leave a dangerous



During 2020/2021, **300 women and children with disability received direct support** through the Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative.

environment, resources in emergency accommodation and safety measures for those who choose to stay in their home.

In 2020/2021 our Disability Liaison Officers were involved in 530 secondary consultations with the broader sector related to the roll-out of NDIS training across the family violence and sexual assault sectors.

In February 2021, we welcomed the Victorian Government's extension of

the Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative to 2024.

The Disability Liaison Officers will continue to take a sector leadership role, breaking down barriers and overcoming obstacles through education and advocacy.

## Helping women navigate the court system

Our family violence specialist based at the Family Court provided information, advocacy and emotional support to protect victim-survivors' rights, accessing further supports as required.

We also helped victim-survivors to navigate federal and state jurisdictions and find legal representation, and provided family violence risk assessments and safety planning. We worked alongside other support services including Child First, mental health support services, disability support services, and Aboriginal, LGBTIQ+ and CALD specialist services.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns reduced and then stopped in-person court proceedings, which were moved online. We supported victim-survivors by telephone and video chat.

Online court proceedings proved to be a benefit for victim-survivors whose safety was at risk. Appearing via Zoom and not in-person is likely to remain a welcome option in post-COVID proceedings.

Our family violence specialist engaged in professional development related to child-inclusive practice, financial abuse legal issues, dealing with difficult calls, and changes caused by the merger of the Family Court of Australia into the Federal Circuit Court.

The Family Advocacy and Support Services program is funded by the Victorian Legal Aid Commission.



Safe Steps supported **more than 400 women** to navigate legal and Family Court processes in 2020/2021.

## CASE STUDY

# HEATHER'S STORY

Heather\* called Safe Steps at the urging of her Child Protection worker. Her ex-husband, who had been jailed after seriously assaulting and threatening to kill her and take their five children, was about to be released.

Her child protection worker was concerned that Heather would be at risk of serious harm. Although she was worried about disrupting the children's routine and removing them from school, Heather decided to move into crisis accommodation.

Safe Steps used dedicated family safety funding to provide support for the family during their time in the refuge. This included laptop computers for the children to take part in remote schooling.

After 35 nights in crisis accommodation, Heather and her children returned home with a safety plan developed by Safe Steps and the Child Protection Service.

Using Flexible Support Package funding, Safe Steps arranged a home security assessment, CCTV installation and safety watches.

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



# Planning to help build a better life

Safe Steps' Brief Intervention team helps women and their children with their immediate needs in the days and weeks following a family violence crisis.

The first days in emergency accommodation are overwhelming for victim-survivors who are dealing with fear and trauma, disruption to every aspect of their lives, medical issues and financial challenges.

Our Brief Intervention team of family violence crisis specialists support women and children in emergency accommodation and provide Safe@Home measures for those who remain in their homes.

Their goal is to ensure each client's safety and help them secure safe, longer-term accommodation. This might be in new housing or returning to the previous home with additional safety measures.

Our crisis specialists speak with victim-survivors every day. They begin with a detailed risk management plan then make sure that women and children have whatever material support they need such as food, medications, access to medical treatment, a safe replacement phone, clothing and toys. They also help with government support applications, advocacy to government agencies, and in planning victim-survivors' next step into safe housing.

'Brief intervention' at Safe Steps is an average of seven days although clients without income or permanent residency status may be accommodated for up to 60 days.

During 2020/2021 the Brief Intervention team assisted 3,127 women and children in crisis accommodation. About 38 per

... in June 2021, we supported some 120 victim-survivors per day, of whom 100 were in motels.

cent of victim-survivors were children under the age of 14.

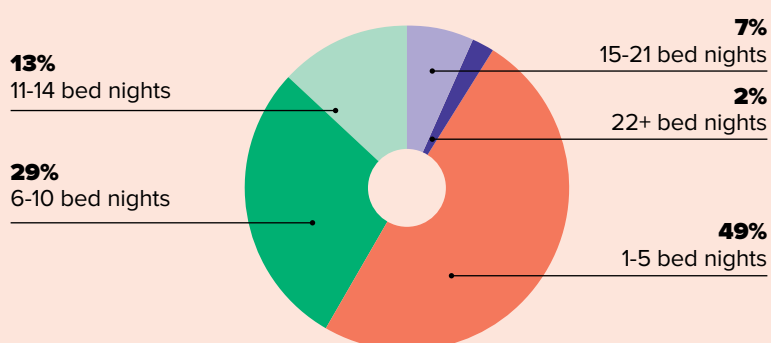
At its peak in June 2021, we supported 120 victim-survivors per day, of whom 100 were in motels.

During the year significant work was undertaken to streamline the Family Violence Accommodation Register to provide equitable access to limited

refuge vacancies based on risk to the victim-survivor. We will continue working on this in 2021/2022.

We continued to develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialist services, child trauma specialist services, and specialist services for the CALD community, as well as other sector partners.

## Bed nights in secure crisis accommodation



## CASE STUDY

# SAMIRA'S STORY

When Samira\* first called Safe Steps for help she spoke of having been sexually assaulted by her husband. She had been sleeping on the streets for three nights, separated from her children and too afraid to return home. With help from police, Samira was reunited with her children and taken to crisis accommodation.

Samira had entered an arranged marriage at 16 because she was afraid of being kidnapped if she was unwed. Samira, her husband and his family came to Australia on refugee visas. She had no access to money and little support.

The family violence began as soon as the family arrived in Australia. Samira was controlled and abused by her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law, and interrogated and punished if she went out.

One day, Samira's husband threatened to kill her. She knew that her life was at risk if she stayed or tried to leave. Samira made the decision to call Safe Steps for support.

Samira and her children spent 10 nights in Safe Steps' crisis accommodation and received help to establish a Centrelink income for herself and her children.

Samira was also referred to the Australian Federal Police human trafficking program because of the slavery and servitude she had been subjected to at home. Samira and her children left Safe Steps to enter long-term refuge accommodation, where they are now living safely.

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



## The serious shortfall in crisis accommodation

Safe Steps works with a number of crisis accommodation providers across Victoria to prioritise and coordinate access for victim survivors who are at high risk of family violence, including managing access to refuges through the Refuge Portal.

Due to limited refuge places, Safe Steps has developed strong partnerships with a number of motels to provide emergency accommodation and safety for victim-survivors who must leave their home immediately and where no refuge beds are available.

This now includes partnerships with more than 25 motel owners, working with them to create an environment which as best as possible supports the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors escaping family violence. Currently 10 of these motels also welcome victim-survivors with pets. We are very grateful to the motel owners and their staff who have shown great care, compassion, and flexibility in their service to victim-survivors during the year. This has

“I really appreciate the great help you are providing me and my girls. Honestly I am speechless and in tears now because you have saved my life and my girls too.”

*Victim-survivor assisted by Safe Steps*

included their support for victim-survivors needing to self-isolate by delivering food and personal items and meeting any other needs, within the constraints of public health restrictions.

While motels are providing this much-needed service for victim-survivors of family violence, it is critical that more supported accommodation and refuges that are staffed by specialist family

violence support workers become available. We recognise that while government has invested in the redevelopment of communal refuges and the construction of ‘Core and Cluster’ refuges, there is still a critically short supply of emergency accommodation. Demand continues to exceed capacity, contributing to greater risk for those in need of immediate safety.

## Desperate housing shortage

Insufficient affordable housing is the most significant barrier to women establishing a safe future free from family violence.

It often results in victim-survivors returning to unsafe situations through lack of other viable options. Social and community housing is in short

supply and private rental options are out of reach for almost half of the victim-survivors who access our crisis accommodation because they do not have an income. In 2020/2021 about 30 per cent of victim-survivors were referred to homelessness services.

## CASE STUDY

# STELLA & DAMIAN'S STORY

When five-year-old Damian\* arrived at crisis accommodation with his mother Stella and three siblings, the whole family was unsettled by the sudden move. But Damian found it particularly hard because he lives with autism spectrum disorder and is non-verbal. Damian was upset by the unfamiliar environment and loss of his routine. After a sleepless night for Stella and Damian, and a noise complaint from the next room, it was clear Damian needed extra support.

Damian already had an NDIS plan, but inquiries with his NDIS-accredited agency revealed his funding was exhausted. Another solution was needed quickly. The Safe Steps Disability Liaison Officer engaged a support worker using Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative funding. This initiative provides rapid access to crisis support funding for victim-survivors with disabilities.

Stella and her children soon moved into medium-term refuge accommodation. Damian still needed support and disability support worker Jane started within a few days.

Stella was delighted that Damian quickly settled. “Damian really loves having Jane around,” Stella said. “He holds her hand and gives her hugs, which is just wonderful.”

The Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative funded support continued for four weeks. Stella’s case manager liaised with Damian’s NDIS support coordinator to get urgent plan funding in time for Jane to become a regular support.

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



# Protecting the adored family pet

Fears of leaving a treasured pet behind – or that the pet will be harmed – can impact on a woman's decision to leave or stay with a perpetrator of family violence.

Recognising this, during 2020/2021 Safe Steps strengthened and broadened its capacity to support victim-survivors with pets.

Partnerships with PETstock, RSPCA, Lort Smith, Jim's Dog Washing and many of our emergency accommodation providers meant that pets of all types were able to stay with the women and children who loved them. A cherished pet is an enormous comfort and point of stability for women and children at a time of major trauma in their lives.

While dogs and cats were the most common pets, there were also reptiles, birds, rabbits, ferrets and ducks. Food, bedding, toys and vet care (if needed) were provided, as well as appropriate accommodation and additional cleaning costs.

During 2020/21, Safe Steps supported more than 300 pets to stay with their owners in crisis accommodation or to be looked after by the charity Unforgettable

Creatures. More capacity is needed; during 2021/22 we will be working to increase the number of partnerships, accommodation options and the overall resources available.

A special thank you to the Lois Bryson fund, the Charles David Fund and the Myer Community Fund for their generous support of our *Pets in Crisis* program.

**“It meant a lot to us to arrive to find a comfy dog bed and bag of food in the room. I would not have been able to leave if I had not been able to bring [my dog] with me and this has made the whole experience easier for us both.”**

*Feedback from victim-survivor*

## Our refuge accommodation

Use of our existing supported accommodation, Trish's Place, was significantly restricted during 2020/2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic and essential repairs.

The property was used by women and children requiring isolation, either because they were COVID-positive or had been exposed to a positive case. From August to November 2020 we assisted 11 victim-survivors who received public health care and family violence support.

From December 2020 we accommodated one family at a time at Trish's Place, with support provided via telephone rather than face-to-face. Over the year, Trish's Place supported 60 victim-survivors.

The refuge provides face-to-face intensive family violence support to women and children in a communal living space. It is particularly important for victim-survivors who do not have permanent residency, providing support and services that may not otherwise be available.

### Building a safe space

Safe Steps' new purpose-built refuge is due to be completed within 2021/2022, after delays caused by COVID-19 lockdowns. This 'Core and Cluster' design of self-contained units replaces the traditional communal refuge model and provides much-needed additional space for women and their children to be safe from family violence.



Safe Steps CEO Rita Butera (right) at the Core and Cluster development with Tina Dimitriadis, Director of Operations (left), and Nicole Abdilla, Program Lead Supported Accommodation.

## 1800RESPECT

# A year of firsts

Safe Steps is a specialist partner with Medibank Health providing trauma-informed counselling support through 1800RESPECT, Australia's 24-hour national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service.

During 2020/2021 our specialist team provided 32,353 counselling responses – about 89 a day – which met 38 per cent of the national demand for counselling to the 1800RESPECT service.

This year, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and highly publicised social movements including the March 4 Justice emboldened more women to break their silence. Our specialist team provided trauma-informed counselling support to many callers who were making their first disclosure of sexual assault.

### Adapting to lockdown

With the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, the entire Safe Steps 1800RESPECT counselling team had relocated to working from home.

To support the team and their delivery of this specialist service, new robust IT systems were introduced to keep counsellors connected to each other, while always maintaining caller confidentiality. These systems allowed for real-time peer support, catch-ups, debriefing and informal supervision.

Regular external supervision supported counsellors to maintain their emotional and mental health.

We recognise that 'bringing trauma into the home' is an ever-present challenge for counsellors, made more immediate by working from home.

Many counsellors shared creative ways of disconnecting from working at the end of their shifts.

Maintaining connection with the team and between its members was an organisational priority. Strategies included fortnightly CEO Zoom meetings, monthly lunches (COVID restrictions permitting) and professional development on managing wellbeing and recognising vicarious trauma.

### Collaboration

In 2020/2021, 1800RESPECT partners and Medibank Clinical Governance developed an innovative resource to better support specialist counsellors.

Drawing on evidence-based practice, expertise, practice wisdom and most importantly feedback from specialist counsellors, the joint teams developed some valuable resources to provide guidance for new and challenging presentations.



Members of the 1800RESPECT team at a professional development day.

## VICTIM-SURVIVORS' FEEDBACK

“It's my first time seeking help. I did not feel judged and I was able to open up more than I intended. The counsellor showed a deep understanding ... she gave me connection and hope.

*Victim-survivor*

“By being able to phone 1800RESPECT at a time when I needed to speak to someone, you have helped me save myself. You understood and validated my distress so I knew I wasn't going mad.

*Victim-survivor*



**COUNSELLOR FEEDBACK**

“ 1800RESPECT acts like a lighthouse for the many individuals caught in the rough seas of trauma, domestic violence and sexual abuse. Sometimes we guide them to the safety of shore, and other times we simply act as a life jacket in their darkest times – to ensure they don’t submerge under the water. 1800RESPECT is a sisterhood of incredible and passionate women, who believe in what they do, care for each other, and make a difference in the lives of our callers. It is truly a privilege and honour to work here.

*1800RESPECT  
specialist counsellor*

“ The specialist counsellor gave me solid relevant practical tips, strength and courage. She heard and listened and clearly cared. I feel empowered.

*Victim-survivor*

“ Today’s session was extremely helpful. The guidance I received was beyond my expectations. Thank you for believing in me. I truly appreciate it.

*Victim-survivor*



**“** I experienced family violence growing up, and then partner violence in my 20s. I’m free and safe now and want to celebrate that [and] walk in solidarity with everyone affected by family violence.”

*Victim-survivor feedback*



## #Why we walk

On Wednesday 25 November, thousands of people in cities and towns across Victoria took part in small, local walks calling for an end to family violence.

This year’s 12th Walk Against Family Violence moved out of Melbourne’s CBD and Federation Square to become a ‘walk from home’ event with restrictions

and social distancing in place following Victoria’s three-month COVID-19 lockdown.

Our Walk ambassador, actor, director and comedian Celia Pacquola, promoted the event through mainstream media. An estimated 4,000 people from 300 city and regional locations walked on the day, wearing orange and posting to social media.

In Melbourne’s Treasury Gardens, a media event brought together the Minister for Family Violence the Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Lord Mayor Sally

Capp, Respect Victoria CEO Tracey Gaudry, Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner, Family Violence Command Lauren Callaway, Safe Steps CEO Rita Butera, and Survivor Advocate Geraldine Bilston.

The Walk was supported by Respect Victoria and the City of Melbourne, and coordinated with DVVic/DVRCV, Emerge and No to Violence. 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.





“ This is a cause very dear to my heart. It’s been almost a year since I left the violent relationship I was in and would love to help spread awareness and the amazing things Safe Steps does.”

*Victim-survivor feedback*



Survivor Advocate Geraldine Bilston (left) with the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon. Gabrielle Williams.

## Remembering Rekiah

In memory of her daughter Rekiah O’Donnell, who was murdered by her partner in 2013, long- time Safe Steps supporter Kerry Robertson arranged for a new mural to be painted in Sunshine, next to a primary school.

Kerry asked for Safe Steps’ logo to be included. “Hopefully the Safe Steps logo will be useful for women who pass by who may need help.” Artist Dan Robinson from Design Doctor gave a generous donation from his fee to Safe Steps.







## Lighting a candle

On Wednesday 5 May, we gathered online for the annual Candlelight Vigil to remember lives lost to family violence.

The YouTube premiere has been watched by more than 1,000 people. Introduced by journalist and author Jess Hill, the Vigil began with a powerful Welcome to Country from Aunty Diane Kerr. Geraldine Bilston, Phil Cleary, Grace Donato, Tarang Chawla and Sunila Chawla shared their devastating stories of loss, and their activism and determination to end family violence.

The Vigil included messages from Victoria's family violence, government and community leaders, as well as Safe Steps staff in 15 languages other than English.



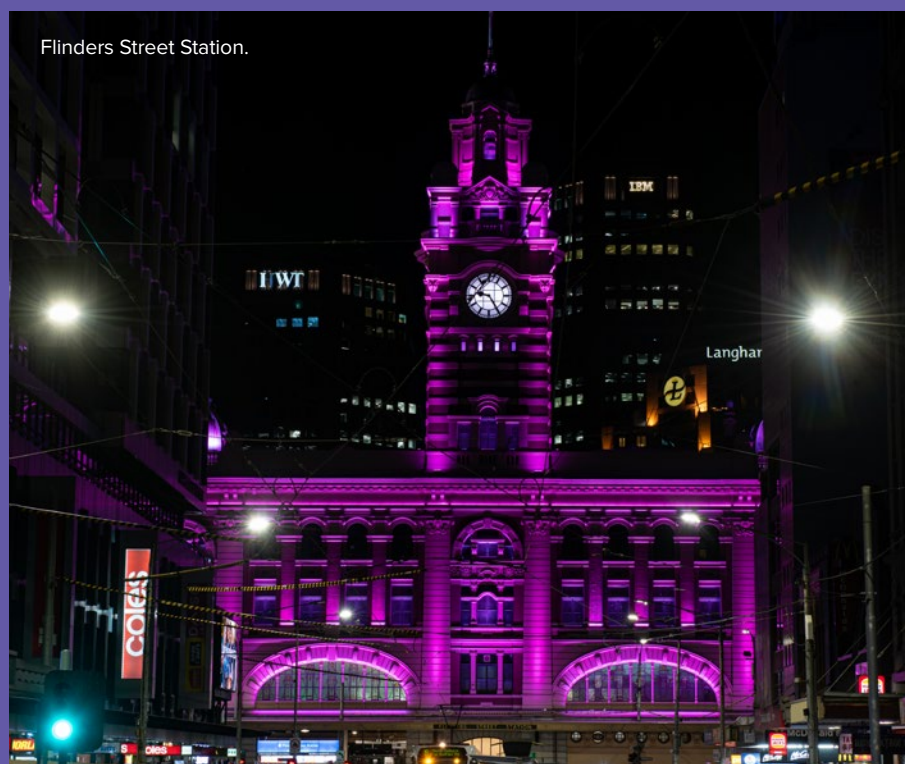
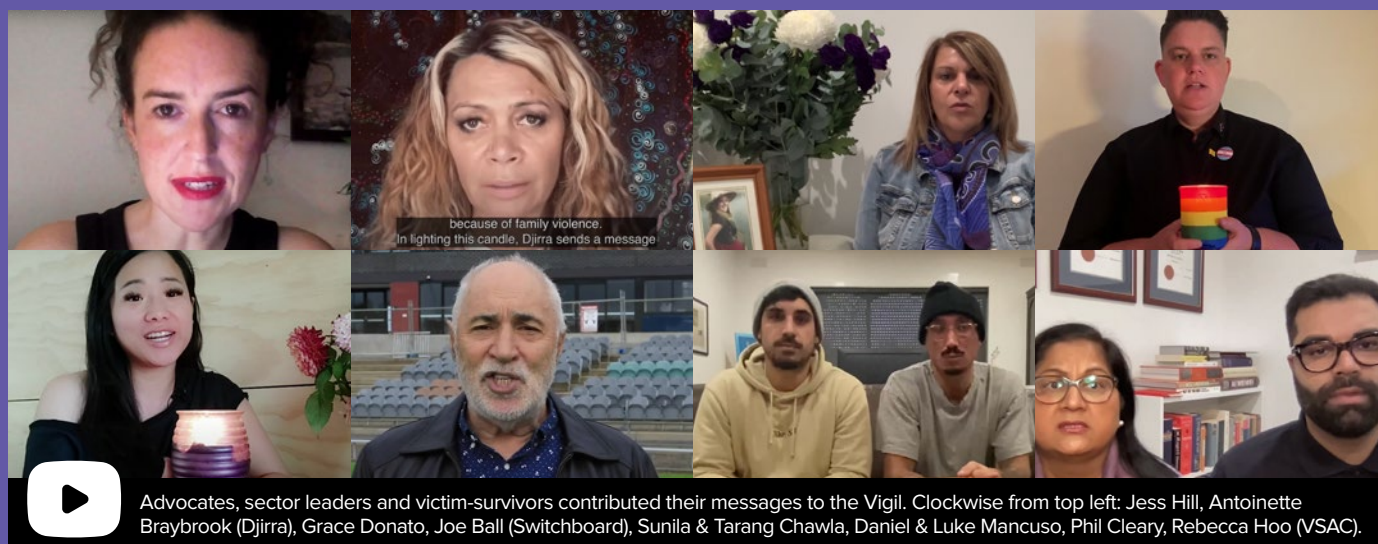
The digital board at Federation Square.

There was stunning vision of Melbourne and regional landmarks illuminated in purple for the event, and the Federation Square digital board displayed Vigil messages. The Vigil concluded with Mia Wray singing 'I am Woman'.

Traffic to our website increased by 180 per cent, with the potential reach through corporate and government sharing the Candlelight Vigil message exceeding 780,000.



EnergyAustralia Yallourn  
Photo credit: Yallourn North Urban Fire Brigade

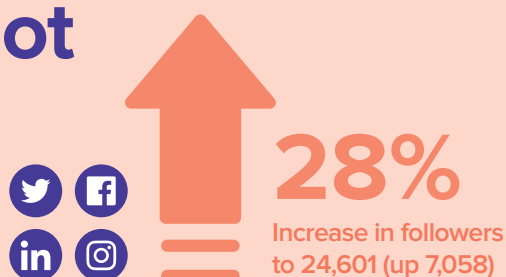


“ I am lighting a candle to celebrate women’s strengths, courage and right to safety.”

*Family violence advocate*

## Social media snapshot

Followers, engagement and impressions have increased in 2020/2021 across all social media platforms. Website traffic also significantly increased.



- ↑ 49,000+ engagement (likes, comments, shares)
- ↑ 1.7m impressions (number of times our content is displayed to users on the platform)

- ↑ 606 published posts
- ↑ Safe Steps website 33% increase in visits to 106,060
- ↑ 66% increased traffic to Safe Steps website from social media



Safe Steps aims to ensure that victim-survivors' voices are at the heart of social, legal and policy reforms.

## Lived experiences inform our policy and advocacy

Advocating for social change and influencing government reform are an important part of Safe Steps' role.

Our strong and effective advocacy means that resources to support victim-survivors are maintained and increased, laws are reformed, and attitudes to family violence change throughout society.

Our policy and advocacy activities are informed by the lived experiences of victim-survivors, particularly the women and children we support. In this way, Safe Steps aims to ensure that victim-survivors' voices are at the heart of social, legal and policy reforms.

Our advocacy priorities this year included calling on government to address the national housing crisis and enabling an increase in perpetrator accountability across the family violence response system. We highlighted the inequity of victim-survivors carrying the consequences of violence, resulting in lost income, education insecurity for children, and homelessness.

As the only statewide, 24-hour, seven-day-a-week crisis service, Safe Steps also plays an important role in sector development and reform.

The hundreds of calls received by our crisis service each day allow Safe Steps to immediately translate emerging practice issues into action on family violence reform.

This year, we contributed to the:

- Orange Door Improvement Plan
- Communities of Practice forums prioritising sector education

The hundreds of calls received by our 24/7 crisis service each day enable Safe Steps to immediately translate emerging practice issues into action on family violence reform.

- Rollout of the MARAM (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework) to prescribed agencies
- Review of roles and responsibilities in emergency accommodation, perpetrator accommodation and support services
- Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence program
- After-hours network systems changes

### Our community 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:

- Domestic Violence Victoria/Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
- 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

### Safe Steps also contributes to these key strategic committees:

- Family Violence Reform Advisory Group (Ministerial)
- Homelessness Advisory Committee (Ministerial)
- Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee (Ministerial)
- National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence
- Not in My Workplace – Against Sexual Harassment Committee
- Victorian Women's Housing Alliance
- Disability and Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative (DFVCRI) Project Advisory Group

Visit [safesteps.org.au](https://safesteps.org.au) for a full list of our community partnerships.





### Over the past year Safe Steps:

Advocated for more affordable and safe housing options for victim-survivors

Continued to advocate for women on temporary visas experiencing family violence

Worked with Victoria Police to improve responses to victim-survivors, including primary aggressor training and approaches to non-physical forms of violence

Included more crisis accommodation for victim-survivors with pets

Gained extended funding for our Disability Family Violence Crisis Response Initiative

Contributed to law reform on sexual assault, non-fatal strangulation and coercive control

Contributed to the report of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor

Developed a new Survivor Advocate program that amplifies the voices of victim-survivors in our events and processes

Advocated for increased family violence brokerage funding

# Strengthening diversity, building inclusion and managing risk

Safe Steps continued to meet the high standards required in its quality and risk management performance.

We posted significant achievements in our continuous improvement of quality and risk during the year including:

- Developing and launching a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework to support our staff and to reinforce the welcoming, safe and respectful service we provide for our clients
- Working towards Rainbow Tick accreditation during 2021/22. The Rainbow Tick is a national program for organisations committed to safe, inclusive practice and service delivery for LGBTIQ+ people
- Launching an online incident management system to complement risk management processes. Staff can log incidents, which are linked to corrective actions and risk items. The system allows trends to be identified and analysed and ensures the Board is informed about incidents that may impact on Safe Steps

- Implementing business continuity planning, a risk profiling system and an internal audit system.

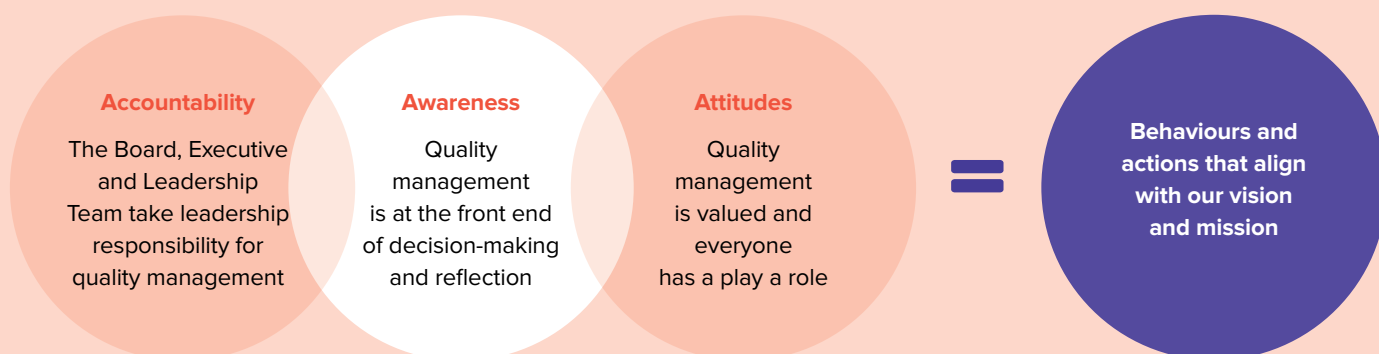
Safe Steps is accredited against the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) – Health and Community Service Standards. These standards focus on the way we develop and improve systems in areas such as governance, people and culture, compliance, sector engagement and partnerships, capacity building, diversity and inclusion, consumer participation and some aspects of service delivery.

We are also accredited against the Human Services Standards (HSS), which comprise key elements of service delivery set by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.

Safe Steps' risk management system provides a quality and governance framework that meets the Australian Standard for Risk Management. The system aligns with Safe Steps' strategic directions, MARAM (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework) and key legislation.

Our new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework supports our staff and reinforces the welcoming, safe and respectful service we provide for our clients

## The Safe Steps quality culture



# Building a supportive culture

Our passionate and committed staff play a crucial role in delivering services to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. At Safe Steps, we care for our staff and strive to provide a supportive and responsive culture.

A full year of the COVID-19 pandemic challenged many of the processes for staff health, wellbeing and engagement. With staff working across the office and from home, new technologies were essential in maintaining connection and communication.

Staff adapted quickly to the new ways of working. We introduced COVID-safe measures and supports including personal sanitiser products, extra cleaning, on-site meals, assistance with transport and wellness activities.

**“At Safe Steps I feel safe to openly express myself, my gender identity, and know the frameworks we work under support me to do so.**

## Initiatives in 2020–2021

A new careers portal, Turbo Recruit, was implemented, attracting a more diverse field of candidates and building our candidate database

Extra online learning enabled more staff to take part in professional development activities. There were more than 600 enrolments in units and 31 online courses completed

Our HR information system ELMO streamlined induction practices, which are now paper free

Payroll processes went through detailed internal and external audits to ensure data integrity

## Investing in our tech future

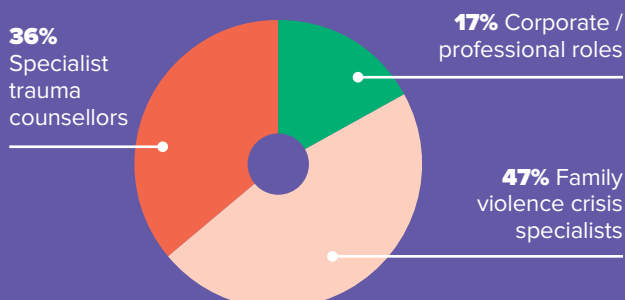
A major IT project during 2020/21 has enhanced security, business continuity and reporting

We completed the migration of our systems to a secure, hosted cloud platform. This has minimised risk in our business-critical applications and data

Safe Steps' ICT infrastructure is now monitored 24/7 and any system failures or cyber security threats can be identified and acted on immediately. Higher-level security parameters provide greater protection for the organisation and its sensitive data

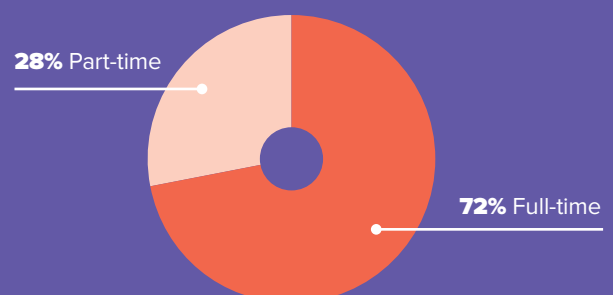
The new infrastructure also adds extra layers of governance and oversight, aiding Safe Steps' data and privacy management compliance

## Professional groups



## Our staffing

The Safe Steps workforce is made up of 123 staff.



# Financial statements

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME – FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2021	2021 \$	2020 \$
Revenue	20,737,631	18,236,130
Employee benefits expense	(12,286,242)	(11,335,658)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(412,811)	(413,631)
Client direct relief	(4,140,001)	(4,059,093)
Consultancy expenses	(758,028)	(600,649)
Marketing and publicity expenses	(79,310)	(49,166)
Occupancy costs	(418,180)	(266,281)
Telephone expenses	(270,648)	(262,958)
Other expenses	(295,372)	(307,047)
Motor vehicle expense	(22,931)	(23,723)
IT expenses	(420,477)	(198,307)
Printing and stationery expenses	(6,206)	(13,505)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>1,627,425</b>	<b>706,112</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income / (loss)</b>		
Unrealised gains / (losses) from financial assets	111,483	(64,312)
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>1,738,908</b>	<b>641,800</b>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION – AS AT 30 JUNE 2021	2021 \$	2020 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>		
<b>Current Assets</b>		
<b>Cash and cash equivalents</b>	<b>7,648,863</b>	<b>7,904,658</b>
Trade and other receivables	1,506,025	1,553,744
Other financial assets	523,470	393,769
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>9,678,358</b>	<b>9,852,171</b>
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	375,067	304,552
Right-of-use assets	140,917	800,910
<b>Total Non-Current Assets</b>	<b>515,984</b>	<b>1,105,462</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>10,194,342</b>	<b>10,957,633</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	1,538,310	1,663,693



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION CONT. – AS AT 30 JUNE 2021	2021 \$	2020 \$
Lease liabilities	196,617	190,071
Employee benefits	843,310	640,229
Other financial liabilities	1,675,684	3,554,158
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>4,253,921</b>	<b>6,048,151</b>
<b>Non-Current Liabilities</b>		
Lease Liabilities	–	656,159
Employee benefits	94,023	145,833
<b>Total Non-Current Liabilities</b>	<b>94,023</b>	<b>801,992</b>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>4,347,944</b>	<b>6,850,143</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>5,846,398</b>	<b>4,107,490</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Reserves	122,548	11,065
Retained Earnings	5,723,850	4,096,425
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>5,846,398</b>	<b>4,107,490</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 2021.

### Report on the Financial Report

The accompanying financial statements, which comprises the Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2021 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 2021.

We expressed an unmodified audit opinion on that financial report in our report dated 29 September 2021.

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 2021 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  
29 September 2021



## 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 & SUPPORTERS

Adore Beauty	City West Water	Jack and Hedy Brent Foundation	Price Family Foundation
AGL Energy	Codesafe Solutions	Joel Strickland Photography	RizeUp Australia
Allens Linklaters	Design Doctor	Kerryn Robertson	Sally McKay
Australian Community Foundation	Development Victoria	Latrobe City Council	Sensory Oasis for Kids
Baw Baw Shire Council	Dymocks Children's Charities	Lois Bryson Fund	Shameless Podcast
BlueScope Steel	EastLink	Melbourne Observation Wheel	Sweater Club
Blueprint Studio	Energy Australia	Metro Trains Melbourne	Shine Wing Australia
Break Up Boss	Ereshkigal Foundation	Myer Community Fund	Spectrum Productions
Brooke Lynne Foundation	Federation Square	Myer Altona DC	Transurban
Celia Pacquola	Gandel Philanthropy	Myer Frankston	Unforgettable Creatures
Charles David Foundation	Godolphin Australia	Naylor Stewart Ancillary Fund	Victorian Government
Chrysalis Foundation	Goldsmith Family Foundation	Paul Ramsay Foundation	Victoria Legal Aid
City of Melbourne	Healesville Distilling P/L	Persephone Foundation	Wellington Shire Council
City of Melbourne Bowls Club	Hickory Constructions		Westbourne Shire Council
City of Port Phillip			YiaYia Next Door
			Zenith Interiors
			Zeus Marketing

## THE CANDLELIGHT VIGIL 2021 – OUR THANKS

Aunty Diane Kerr | Cathy Oddie | Coralie | Djirra | DVVic/DVRCV | Family Safety Victoria | Geraldine Bilston  
 Grace Donato | The Hon. Gabrielle Williams, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence | The Hon. James Merlino, Acting  
 Premier of Victoria | InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence | Jess Hill | Luke & Daniel Mancuso | Mia Wray  
 Mushroom Records | No to Violence | Phil Cleary | Priscilla | Rebecca Hoo | Respect Victoria | Safe Steps family  
 violence crisis specialists | Safe Steps 1800RESPECT trauma counsellors | Sally Capp, Lord Mayor of Melbourne  
 Sunila & Tarang Chawla | Switchboard | Transgender Victoria | Universal Music | Victim Survivors' Advisory Council  
 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency | Victoria Police | Women with Disabilities Victoria | Our Watch



Transurban illuminated the Bolte Bridge in purple for the Candlelight Vigil.

**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)

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**Family Violence  
Response Centre**