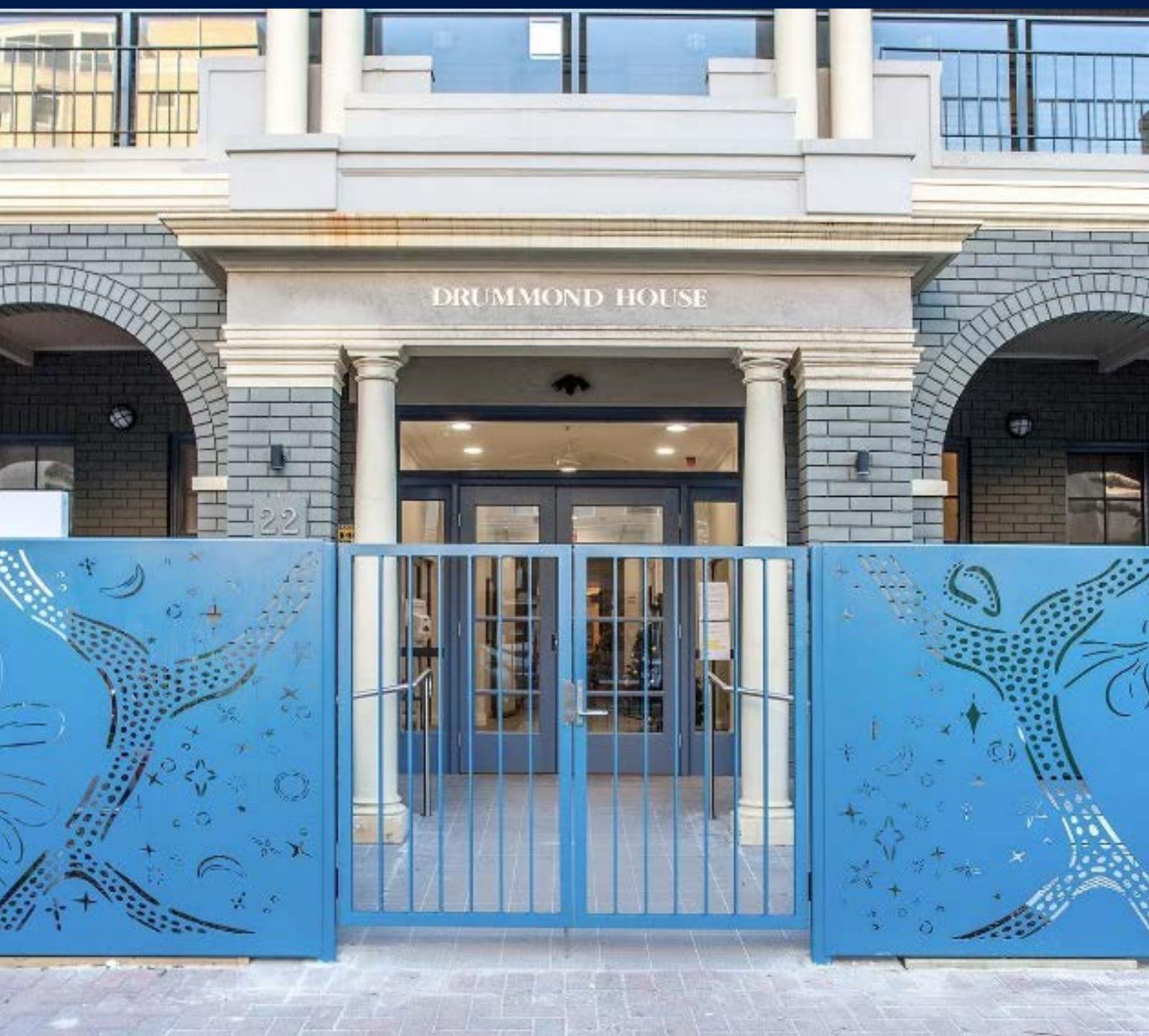




Royal Far West
Children's health, country-wide

Manly Pop-up Safe House

September 2021





Executive Summary:

As a result of COVID last year, Royal Far West (RFW), in partnership with Women & Children First (WCF), repurposed its accommodation facilities in Manly, to a pop-up Safe House. The accommodation provided short term crisis services and case management for women and children experiencing homelessness due to domestic and family violence and was funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

The initiative proved very successful, providing safe accommodation and respite for more than 100 women and children, over six months from July to December. Over 80% of clients then went into stable housing. The pop-up Safe House also provided case management to clients, and linked residents to necessary support services for mental health, rehabilitation, drug and alcohol services, counselling, legal aid, housing, and financial supports. In addition, children were enrolled at Manly Village Public School, Mackellar Girls High School and The Round House Day Care Centre

Follow-up with residents shows that after six months, more than three-quarters of the women surveyed, reported that their current housing situation was stable at least for the next 6 months.

Positively, 90% of those surveyed felt safe in their current housing situations and over half of the women surveyed are still in the same exit accommodation.

An important component of the initiative was the inclusion of women on temporary visas. The COVID pandemic has significantly impacted women on temporary visas who are often casual employees; have lost their job, and have no income and housing. The inability of women and children holding temporary visas to access Centrelink entitlements or financial assistance from the Government often reinforces a cycle of homelessness. They are unable to access childcare subsidies, Centrelink benefits or transitional or social housing,

The Safe House initiative highlights the need for a benevolent style of accommodation for women on temporary visas, including dedicated full-service wrap around short term crisis accommodation services. It also shows that women and children on temporary visas, especially those leaving partners due to domestic and family violence, require the same rights to social welfare and social housing as permanent residents of Australia.

Other key learnings from the initiative show it was successful in providing women and children with essential respite to regroup financially and emotionally and plan for a more positive future.

This is critical, given recent research by Domestic Violence NSW shows services across the state are struggling to meet increased demand during lockdown, with waitlists increasing. The survey, in July 2021, found nearly three-quarters of services in NSW were facing increased demand during the coronavirus outbreak, with over 80% reporting increased complexity of cases.

This report also highlights the need for children of women experiencing domestic violence to be able to access quality stable education, whether at pre-school or primary level, to ensure every effort is made to break the cycle of homelessness – so that intergenerational trauma or inequity is not repeated

Jacqueline Emery - CEO, Royal Far West

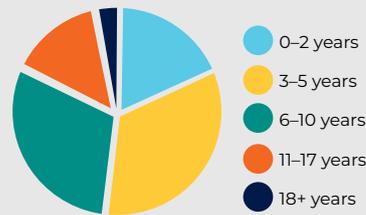
Overview:

The Safe House service was a partnership between RFW and WCF, funded by the DCJ. It opened on 13 July, 2020 and closed on 21 December, 2020. In addition to providing safe accommodation, the partnership delivered quality wraparound support and strategies to enable women and children to successfully transition to stable and safe housing, whilst receiving a unique opportunity for short term respite and healing in an idyllic setting at the iconic Manly beach.

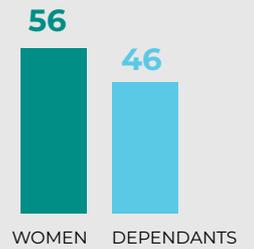
Key outcomes achieved during the 6-month pop-up include:



Dependants by age



Client Profile



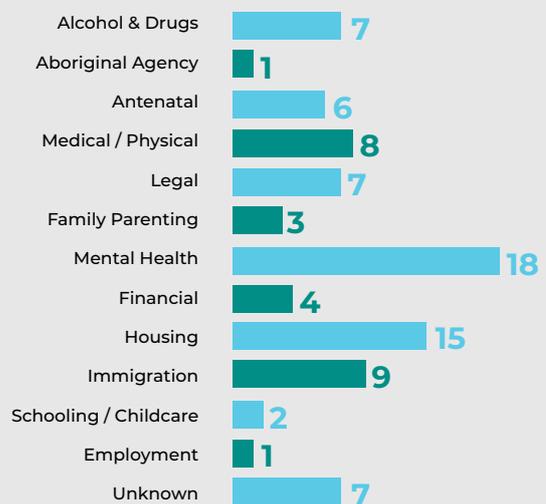
Over the July to December period the Safe House accommodated 56 women and 46 dependants. Adults ranged in age between 18 to over 61 with most clients aged between 31 and 50. Most dependants were aged between 3-10.

Of the 56 arrivals, 29 were single women and 27 were women with children. Of these, 49 were experiencing homelessness due to domestic and/or family violence. The remaining 7 women were homeless for various reasons and were accepted for shorter intake periods as referring agencies required crisis accommodation and Drummond House had good availability of rooms.

The average length of the client's stay in the Safe House was 57 days. The longest duration of stay was 161 days, with the shortest being one day.

WCF provided a full case management service for the clients, with the aim of helping each client to achieve a stable and safe outcome upon exiting the service. Almost all clients participated in active case planning. Support needs were high as more than half of the women had multiple support requirements and were referred to a range of support services whilst in residence, and were also connected to services closer to where they relocated.

The main supports required included:



Case study:

Josey is 28 and is living in Australia on a New Zealand Visa. She has 3 children; 4, 5 and 6 who were all born in Australia and are therefore Australian citizens. Josey has lived in Australia for 13 years after having an arranged marriage at 16 years of age.

Josey is not entitled to what permanent residents or Australian citizens are entitled to.

She has been a victim of domestic violence from the father of her children and is now the sole parent. She has been hospitalised countless times; with broken bones including fractured ribs at eight months pregnant.

The pop-up Safe House is the 8th refuge for her and her children. She currently receives rental assistance of \$50 p/w and is unable to work as she has no childcare or support for the children.

Other refuges take a percentage out of Josey's income. The Safe House is the first with free accommodation and food, which Josey said was really helpful. This gives Josey the opportunity to save money to pay off any debts she has and seek employment or training. Women on temporary visas also do not receive a reduction in TAFE fees and must pay the full cost of the course.

Josey's options are limited. She is not entitled to public housing. Two of her children were enrolled at Manly Village Public School during her stay and her youngest child attended the Roundhouse Day Care due to the brokerage provided to arrange and pay for these supports.

Josey wants some stability in accommodation. Josey exited the Safe House on 16th December 2020 to private rental.

The inability of women and children holding temporary visas to access Centrelink entitlements, transitional or social housing, or financial assistance from the Government often reinforces a cycle of homelessness. They are unable to access childcare subsidies and therefore work to afford private rentals.



A parent from the Manly pop-up Safe House (name and image have been de-identified to protect the privacy of the family)

A pop-up Safe House staff member explains,

They [temporary visa holders] are not entitled to Centrelink. Their children could however be born in Australia and be Australian Citizens however have no rights to access any form of child support. It just has such a knock-on effect. If the child is not able to get the childcare subsidy, mum can't work for five years until that child goes to school so she's stuck in the cycle until the child is able to go to school. But financial aspects are the main factor. We also have people on student visas who have large fees to pay but no income to even feed themselves or their children. So those may be the biggest factors for temporary visa holders.

Learnings

1 **The women were assisted in recovering from trauma**, due to the respite afforded by the therapeutic location of the Safe House by Manly Beach, which also assisted children in enjoying the normalcy of making friends and playtime.

2 **The ability for women to choose the location of their accommodation was important.** Single women tended to prefer a location close to employment and distant from the perpetrator. Women with older children preferred minimal interruption to education, therefore wanted to stay close to their children's schools. Women with younger children, were more flexible around schooling, however, preferred to be located close to family and social connections and support. In some cases, these factors were more important than proximity to perpetrators.

3 The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic recession has also **increased the number of women holding temporary visa's presenting to the service** because they have lost their job, have no income and can't afford their rental or their partner has lost their job and family violence has escalated.

4 **There is a need for a completely benevolent style of accommodation for woman on temporary visas.** The inability of women and children holding temporary visas to access Centrelink entitlements, transitional or social housing, or financial assistance from the Government often reinforces a cycle of homelessness. They are unable to access childcare subsidies and therefore are unable to work to afford private rentals. The period of the Safe House allowed some of women on temporary visas to save for bonds and seek new employment whilst their children were in free childcare.

5 **Some of the women with children on temporary visas that accessed the Safe House were reliant of NGOs for support.** However, as these are normally charities, the supports are often short term and not sustainable. Two residents in this group were completely reliant on Red Cross payments of \$400 per week to support themselves and their children. One of these women, with few options available to her, also obtained transitional housing through the NGO, Bonnie Support Services.

6 **Enrolling children into schools and childcare is an essential** part of the service but that requires existing good relationships in the local community and an adequate budget for brokerage.

Recommendations



Logistical Considerations:

- **Location of future pop-ups is an important decision.** As seen from referrals, there is greater need in Western Sydney, however there was still enough demand for the pop-up on the Northern Beaches and the additional restorative benefits of the location supported recovery.
- **Providing all women escaping domestic and family violence with some choice on the location** of crisis and transitional accommodation is important due the location of the perpetrator.
- **Any new pop-up Safe Houses should have an adequate establishment time of approximately 12 weeks** to meet occupancy targets to ensure best possible cost efficiency.
- Pop-up Safe Houses should consider timing of exits. To minimize stress and ensure best possible housing outcomes, allowing approximately 8 weeks for exiting and avoiding the Christmas and New Year shutdown period when many support services are closed.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Women:

- **Women and children from CALD backgrounds require targeted and specialised services** to prevent barriers to accessing domestic and family violence refuges such as the Safe House. This includes consideration of location, community connections, and higher support needs to address multiple needs such as migration law advice, and legal support. This is in addition to CALD trauma-informed support for victim/survivors of domestic and family violence.

Temporary Visa Holders:

- **The Commonwealth Government needs to act immediately to enable women and children on temporary visas,** especially those leaving partners due to domestic and family violence, the same rights to social welfare and permanent social housing as permanent residents of Australia.
- **Until this occurs, temporary visa holders require urgent financial support,** therefore emergency payments to temporary visa holders should be extended indefinitely until equal access is available and the prohibitions on their access to transitional or emergency housing lifted. The NSW Government should provide an additional childcare funding package for women on temporary visas, to enable women who are able to work to enter the private rental market.
- **There should be consideration provided to women on temporary visas** escaping domestic and family violence to be exempt from the condition of employment that requires Australian Citizenship.
- The complex migration and legal issues faced by women on temporary visas, results in the need for high level support to navigate these systems at the same time as recovering from trauma of domestic and family violence. **Funding for supported accommodation should be an option for women on temporary visas** for as long as required, but particularly in the initial periods of leaving a violent relationship.
- **A dedicated full-service wrap around short term crisis accommodation services is a potential interim solution for women on temporary visas** due to the complex legal, financial and employment challenges they face, as long as transitional arrangements into Government funded supported accommodation is available on exit.

About the Manly Pop-up Safe House:

The Manly pop-up Safe House opened on 13th July 2020 and closed on the 21st of December 2020. The service, fully funded by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), provided short term crisis accommodation services and case management for women and children experiencing homelessness due to domestic and family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This formed part of the Federal and NSW government funding package to address domestic and family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

The services were provided by Royal Far West (RFW), a private children's charity and specialist health service, in partnership with Women & Children First (WCF), an existing domestic and family violence and specialist homelessness service.

The RFW accommodation facility, known as Drummond House, in Manly NSW and its associated staffing, was repurposed because of COVID-19, into a Safe House for a 6-month period to respond to increasing numbers of metro families experiencing homelessness because of domestic and family violence. Previously, it was a guesthouse for country families visiting RFW for specialist paediatric health services, but it became unsafe to bring country families to Manly due to COVID-19,

The Safe House was to accommodate up to 34 families or 88 people at any one time. At least 10 women on temporary visas were identified as a primary target group for the service.

The Safe House provided:

- secure and appropriate accommodation, meals, and housekeeping
- support services to transition to stable accommodation and address other needs
- private transport for schooling and recreation activities for adults and dependants
- support to achieve a housing outcome
- reasonable actions to minimise the risk of residents becoming entrenched in the homelessness cycle.



The Safe House provided safe quality accommodation and respite for 102 individuals (57 women and 45 children), over the contract period of July to December 2020. The average stay was 57 days and 82% of clients achieved a stable housing outcome at the completion of the term, despite the complexity of the cohort including temporary visa status for 13 women and many of the residents with significant mental ill health.

In addition to linking residents with necessary support services, the team connected with Manly Village Public School, Mackellar Girls High School and The Round House Day Care Centre to facilitate enrolments for the children in residence. This provided respite and enabled the women to proactively work with their caseworker, access other supports and go to work or seek employment. It also provided respite for the children who, while continuing school or day care were able to enjoy the normalcy of making friends and playtime

In addition to achieving positive client outcomes, the establishment of the Safe House enabled a significant asset in Drummond House to be repurposed after being rendered vacant due to COVID-19 and ensured the security of employment for 15 staff that have many years of experience in supporting vulnerable country families from across NSW.



About Royal Far West

Royal Far West is Australia's only national charity dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of country children.

Established in 1924, Royal Far West is one of Australia's most enduring and respected charities.

We specialise in supporting children's developmental, mental and behavioural health so they can reach their full potential. We work to address service gaps and support our most vulnerable families and communities, we help 'the system' go further.

Culturally sensitive and community-focused, we are nimble, adaptive and go where the gaps are, to ensure no country child is beyond our reach.

We support:

Rural and remote children's developmental, mental and behavioural health so they can reach their full potential. We provide multidisciplinary health, education and disability services for country children

aged up to 12 at our Centre for Country Kids in Manly, via telecare and through community outreach.

Our multidisciplinary team consists of 90+ paediatric clinicians, including psychiatrists, paediatricians, psychologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other allied health professionals.

We build capacity:

Of country families, health professionals, educators and communities to support children in need through partnerships with preschools, schools and other providers to improve access to services and improved outcomes for country kids.

We give voice to the needs of country children:

We harness our knowledge, expertise and relationships to give a voice to the needs of country children and to advocate for equitable access to services and outcomes.



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