

Royal Commission Response

Safe Affordable Housing

There is a lack of affordable safe housing for women post refuge. When woman come into refuge they have given up their current home to leave the perpetrator. After the crisis has passed, there are limited housing options to exit refuge: many wait many months for a THM (transitional housing management property) and often years for a permanent OoH (Office of Housing Property). Although children are linked into schools and child care temporarily whilst they are in refuge & THM woman are unable to resume their life fully as they do not know where they will be located. Women and children are in limbo for too long and they are therefore unable to fully participate in the community. . Currently the long waits mean that women and children are still being affected by the violence years later due to homelessness.

Although refuge encourages woman to remain in employment if safe to do so, a majority of woman have not been participating in the workforce because they have been caring for children, private rental is not an affordable, sustainable option for women on limited income.

Recommendation: More Office of Housing properties need to be available to woman & children escaping Family Violence so that there are shorter waiting times. This would enable a better continuum of care and be less disruptive to the ongoing recovery and well- being of the woman and children.

Woman without Permanent Residency (PR)

There is an access & equity issue for woman without Permanent Residency entering the system; many women are turned away due to their immigration status. Without PR, woman are not eligible for any government subsidies; Centrelink, Child Care, Medicare, OoH, legal aid, ESL or counselling. As a service we are only able to support a limited number of women without income.

Refuges are unable to support numbers of woman without PR, because of the cost of full support. It often takes many months sometimes years to acquire PR (depending on immigration visa status) and in the interim a refuge bed is not available to woman fleeing Domestic Violence. Homelessness affects the flow through of clients into crisis accommodation, so less people are able to access this valuable resource.

CASE Study Permanent residency

A young Vietnamese woman, 21 years old, came to refuge in mid-2012 referred; she had no PR or income.

She was bought from Vietnam, and immediately put to work on a farm on arrival. She was working long hours and living in shared accommodation with other workers. Her husband took her pay to use for his for gambling addiction. She was very isolated, spoke very little English and was unaware of services available.

She was referred by a GP into the FV system.

On arrival to refuge her spousal visa was cancelled (inability to prove legitimate relationship), decreasing her likely hood of ever receiving Permanent residency (PR).

Whilst in refuge she was referred to: GP, counselling, a neighbourhood learning Centre where she learnt computer skills, ESL (English Second language) which increased English literacy and her social connectedness.

Due to her PR status; she was financially supported with: food: accommodation, medical (had serious health problem), medication, transport, utilities, food, training, tribunal (to appeal immigration status), training and counselling.

She successfully gained PR in 2014, after 2 years, she is now residing in Office of Housing, studying and working part time.

Gender Specific Services Maintained

The exclusivity and safety of refuges have been maintained successfully for decades. Due to the “high risk” nature of the work the addresses have and had to remain secure.

Women who have been in crisis following a Family Violence incident need to be supported by a women’s service, with an understanding of the underlying issues. Due to the expertise of the staff, women do not have to repeat their story several times. Refuges are in the best position to provide safety and sanctuary whilst clients are addressing their immediate needs and exploring options for their future.

If Secure Refuge was not kept exclusive: the safety of woman and children could not be guaranteed, breaches of security create greater risks to woman and children’s safety that could lead to death. The smaller the service the better able to manage confidentiality and ensure secured locations are maintained. Our refuge has remained secure; whilst accessing other services and referral points to assist woman and children successfully re-join the community and live free from violence.