
 was originally established as a Citizens Advice Bureau has grown into one of the largest stand-alone and secular distributors of Emergency Relief (material aid assistance) in our region. Our mission is to continue providing people who live, work or visit  with a high quality service to meet their social, emotional and physical well-being.

As an Emergency Relief provider one of our main functions is to provide vulnerable clients with material aid assistance (i.e. food, vouchers, payment assist with utilities, accommodation, medicines and other miscellaneous costs of living).

However, access to Emergency Relief (ER) such as those listed above isn't the only reason people access our service. For many people experiencing disadvantage we act as an entry point for people seeking advocacy, information and referral.

Our 80+ volunteers contribute more than 13,600 hours towards supporting vulnerable people in our community each year. A review of our statistics over past few years through our 'issues' reporting has shown an increased demand in people requesting material relief and access to supports due to instances of Family Violence.

While we do not claim to be a specialist service in the space of Family Violence we do work closely with community legal services, and family violence workers in terms of providing referral and ER brokerage to assist both women and men experiencing FV in our community.

Following is just a snapshot of our statistics, case-studies and anecdotal feedback relating to clients experiencing FV, legal and income related issues.

Issues Reporting (statistics)

(2013)

- Domestic Violence: 83
- Family Relationship Breakdown: 110
- Legal: 388
- Income/Bills/Financial: 1437





(2014)

- Domestic Violence: 99
- Family Relationship Breakdown: 120
- Legal: 473
- Income/Bills/Financial: 1458

At the end of April 2015 we have already had 35 recorded instances of people seeking Emergency Relief due to a combination of factors that include DV. We have also had more than 60 instances of ER provided, that are in part attributed to Family breakdown. At the current trajectory 2015 will see a further spike in both areas.

Issues Reporting (anecdotal)

In some instances, the presenting issue for someone at our service is material aid but quite often we come into contact with people who for the first time disclose instances of FV. Our staff and volunteers will engage in supportive listening and do our best to encourage clients to engage with an appropriate support service. This includes offering to make monitored referrals.

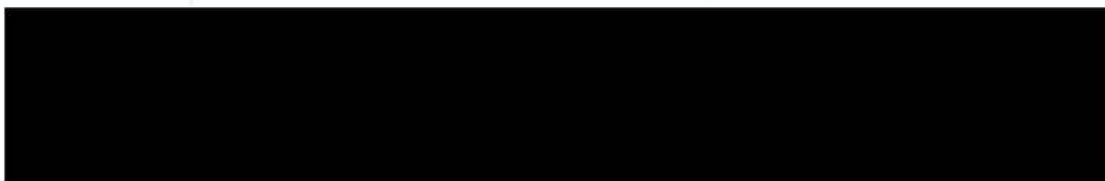
Quite often clients do not feel ready to engage with other services, and are more focused on addressing other immediate needs such as food relief. For some clients, safety is viewed as a secondary need (and/or) that they have reached out to a service before but hadn't felt adequately supported.

Some of our clients also disclose that they are concerned about the repercussions of reaching out to a service and are more interested in maintain the status quo.

Police and government data show that [REDACTED] is a hot spot for reported instances of FV. [REDACTED] would also like to bring it to the attention of the Royal Commission that our community is also a hot spot for unreported instances of often severe and entrenched FV.

Main areas of concern include:

- Availability of appropriate accommodation, both emergency and long term.
- Linking our clients into FV services for more intensive support is difficult – both in terms of client perceptions of services and the availability of services.





- A lack of education within the broader community with regards to supports and pathways for those experiencing DV.
- Instances of not just spouse on spouse violence but perpetrators can be within the immediate family unit (brother, sisters, fathers, mothers etc.)
- Instances of FV that relate to not just the physical but also emotional, financial and complexity of some FV situation etc.)
- Appropriate support for children, access to free/affordable counselling
- Issue of relocation – social issues, anxiety, and mental health impacts.

As an Emergency Relief provider, [REDACTED] acts as a last safety net for some of our communities most disadvantaged, people that are often less likely to feel safe in reporting FV and have trouble identifying what it is. ER services such as ours have a duty to make sure we are supporting these clients, which often includes providing repeat instances of material aid – such as food, vouchers.

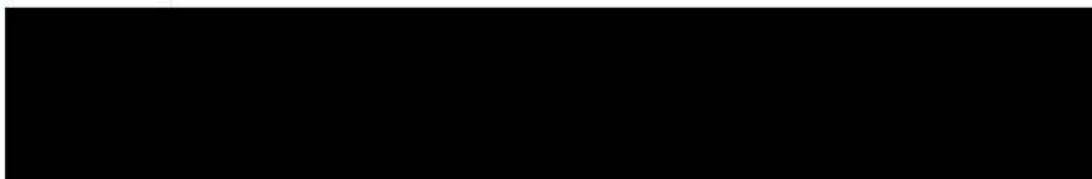
More recently we have been providing support to a mother and three young children who are being terrorised by an ex-partner. Having already been re-located once before and re-settling her children at a nearby school, the ex-partner has managed to come back into contact with the family. [REDACTED] continues to assist with ER such as petrol and food while a court date is pending.


Fuel costs have resulted from the mother and her children being too afraid to stay at their home some nights due to threats being made by the ex-partner. She therefore regularly packs up the children and travels more than an hour to a friends place.

As a part of the 2014 Federal Government budget cutbacks more than 30% of Emergency Relief funding was cut from ER providers. Despite these cuts, we would like the Royal Commission to know that we will continue to do our best (with the resources at our disposal) to support the victims of FV who are and aren't ready to report their situations.

Case Study


[REDACTED] yr old male, sole parent of two children aged [REDACTED] years, referred to financial Counsellor by emergency relief assessor at [REDACTED]






Family in crisis as a direct result of unresolved drug & alcohol issues resulting in family violence (male partner and children subjected to physical abuse)
Sole source of income is derived from a Centrelink Newstart Allowance plus Family Tax Benefit A & B for the two children.

PRESENTING ISSUES

Father presented to Community Support in  in need of emergency relief, very stressed and in severe financial hardship. Multiple and unresolved debt and Sherriff's Office had issued a 'Notice to Vacate Property' as a result of lender taking legal action for non-payment of mortgage arrears upon demand.

There was little or no equity in the property at the time the client presented for assistance and without employment the property was not financially sustainable going forward. The Sherriff had contacted the father to arrange the eviction date being the following Friday.


Mother has unresolved chronic issues with mental health, drug & alcohol abuse and still suffers these problems to this day. Intervention Orders currently in place that prevent the mother having access to the children. Currently she has only very restricted access to the children and communicates with them via SMS.

Father expressed his concern that his children had been living at the property for the past  yrs and was very concerned as to how they would cope with losing their family home. He was concerned that having to move them out in to an unfamiliar environment at this time would be very disruptive.

He had spent a lot of money in legal costs to secure the safety and sole custody of children and sited this, along with loss of income due to parenting responsibility's, as the major causative factor in him losing the family home. He was felling defeated and despondent about this capacity to provide for his children going forward.

Financial Counsellor provided full financial assessment, presenting client will all relevant information and options to resolve his debt going forward. Client decided to petition for Bankruptcy once the residue debt from sale of property was known and FC would provide assistance as required to lodge his application.

FC also provided advocacy with the lender and with the Sheriff's Office, providing Family Court documents that clearly verify family violence and requesting that eviction date be held off until a full financial assessment had been carried out to





access sustainability of mortgage going forward and more time granted for client to vacate property when it became clear that this was clarified.

This was granted and the client was given further time to prepare to vacate the property. Important to note at this time that client and his children are now living with his elderly father, the living situation is far from ideal and the family will have to find alternative accommodation as soon as possible.

20/05/15

