



McAuley Community  
Services for Women  
A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy

2019-20  
**ANNUAL REPORT**



OUR VISION:  
**ALL HOME SAFELY**

## Our vision

# All home safely

Women and children are safe, supported and empowered to achieve their highest potential: all home safely.

## Our mission

Creating a world that enables women and children to participate in society on their own terms through innovative services, advocacy and a caring community ... so violence and homelessness can be eradicated.



## Our values

### Community

Women and children coming to McAuley feel that they belong and have the confidence to join other communities

### Hospitality

Everyone is met at McAuley as an equal and made to feel at home when they are there

### Compassion

McAuley will respect where women and children come from, and they will be heard and listened to with dignity

### Justice

Women and children have the right to live at home safely and free of fear

## Message from our Chair and CEO

It is impossible to look back at the past 12 months without reflecting on the enormous shadow that COVID-19 has thrown across the Victorian community, and how it has affected our ability to support women and children.

Our challenges went beyond the logistics of managing ever-changing and sometimes complex government guidelines. The very core of our approach has always been about social connections, a sense of community and individual empowerment; all things curtailed by the nature of the virus. It has been jarring for our staff to don masks and impose restrictions on what women can do.

The pandemic has at the same time sparked innovation and creativity as we trialled new approaches, many of which may continue when the virus subsides. Despite the impact of the virus we have also supported more women and children compared to 2018–19. Even in the midst of lockdown, 14 women supported by McAuley moved into brand new, permanent accommodation.

Our Ballarat service enabled us to accommodate more women who were homeless. We learnt valuable lessons from this ambitious undertaking – our first expansion outside Melbourne. Our hope that women living there might also be able to volunteer or work at the adjacent aged care facility Mercy Health had mixed results, with mental health challenges and criminal records posing considerable barriers to employment. Emerging signs that the concept of a multigenerational neighbourhood was beginning to blossom were also unfortunately interrupted by the COVID-19 emergency and the need for the aged care facility to lock down to visitors.

This year we were especially proactive in our advocacy efforts, contributing to inquiries on homelessness, family violence and employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. We sought women's views on what they wanted governments to know. The answers were often simple and direct: 'There needs to be more houses.' They also told confronting stories of loneliness, isolation and fear, frustrating battles to get help, and how much McAuley's support meant to them. In the words of one woman when she finally arrived to the safety of McAuley House: 'At last I can breathe.'

The value of McAuley's approach was further confirmed in monetary terms by a Deloitte Access Economics study finding there was a positive return on investment for every dollar spent by McAuley; an outcome Deloitte viewed as 'astonishing' given the women involved had multiple, complex and long-standing issues.

Our approach was further validated by a consultation with stakeholders. One particular comment resonated: 'McAuley staff provide dignity in their services, with genuine care and compassion for their clients. They go above and beyond to ensure clients are well looked after, and strongly advocate on behalf of the clients.' In a challenging year such as this, there can be no better endorsement of the continued efforts of our amazing staff, Board and volunteers and no better way to show that the generosity of our supporters is making a real difference. We thank you all for this...while hoping that the year ahead presents just a few less challenges for us to overcome!

**Dr Sonja Hood**

Chair

**Jocelyn Bignold OAM**

Chief Executive Officer

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## About McAuley's approach: All home safely

McAuley Community Services for Women helps women and children who have faced family violence and homelessness to take control of their lives.

We support women and their children to be safe from family violence by providing 24/7 crisis support and temporary accommodation.

The women needing support have experienced, or are at immediate risk of, serious harm: through physical and emotional violence, threats, sexual assault, and stalking. We work alongside them to plan their move towards a life free from violence.

We also operate McAuley House, Footscray, Victoria's first purpose-built accommodation for women who are homeless, many of whom have also experienced family violence. It is a place for rest, recovery and reconnection, as well as a welcoming community hub.

This model has been expanded into Ballarat.

### Family violence, women and homelessness

Because we work at the intersection of family violence and homelessness, we know the experiences of the women we support are complex and multi-layered. They include mental and physical ill health, isolation, poverty and unemployment. These issues overlap and co-exist, meaning one-size-fits-all models – or efforts to tackle one issue at a time – are bound to fail.

### Our response: services that fit together

Our approach puts each woman at the centre of support regardless of when she first receives our services, the complexity of her need, or recovery time. We bring together health, legal, employment and recreational responses. We recognise the strengths of the women and children who come to us and foster their resilience in creating a new future.

### The right help at the right time

Our approach addresses all the factors that keep women trapped in cycles of homelessness, family violence and mental illness. We know that help with those underlying problems is essential for our work to have a lasting impact.

We help women and children navigate from a place of trauma to safety, healing, confidence and hope.

## Section 1

# Our year in review

*People helped me like my own family. For the first time in this country I am not alone.*



## The women and children we support

**46**

Number of languages spoken

**84**

Number of women over 45 seeking help (Numbers continued to grow from 77 last year)

**69%**

Percentage of women who have a former diagnosis or recognised indicator of mental illness

**14%**

Percentage of women who had no income

### In our family violence support services:

**71%**

Percentage of children supported aged under 10

**73%**

Percentage of women who had depression or mental health issues at entry

**<5%**

Percentage of women supported in crisis care who ended up 'safe at home'

**75%**

Percentage of women who have experienced financial abuse

### In our homelessness support services McAuley Houses Footscray and Ballarat:

**56**

Number of women supported

**21**

Number of different nationalities

**245**

Average number of nights stayed

**25%**

Percentage of women who had slept rough in the month before presenting

**71%**

Percentage of women who had a former diagnosis or recognised indicator of mental illness

**61%**

Percentage of women who had also experienced family violence

## Highlights of the year

Increased support for women and children



**1392** women and children supported (**up 18 percent**)



**14** women who'd been homeless now living in brand new, permanent **accommodation**



**405 mental health sessions** delivered through a psychologist specialising in trauma and based at McAuley House

Advocated for women and children where they do not have a voice



Women were involved in developing **four submissions** to governments on homelessness and family violence

Reduced the likelihood of further crisis by supporting women in their community



**51% increase** in outreach services



**38** women now living in the community **continue to be connected** to McAuley House

Addressed the intergenerational impacts of family violence



Support for children attending court with their mothers was expanded and now available in **four courts**



**176 tutoring sessions** for children whose schooling was disrupted by family violence

Skills to avoid returning to unsafe living arrangements



**1425** interactions with our **Skills 4 Life** program



**20 group** programs offered per month



**\$218,204 in debt** owed by 79 women because of family violence **waived** through legal advocacy from our partner WESTjustice



**36** women supported into **employment**

## The impact of the COVID-19 emergency

In the first half of 2020 McAuley was challenged by COVID-19 in ways that could never be expected. As an essential service, our important work in providing safety and connection for women and children facing family violence and homelessness had to continue. All this was against a backdrop of disruption, anxiety and confusion within the Victorian community.

The pandemic's impact on those facing family violence and homelessness has been severe. In times of crisis, home is even less safe for those in abusive relationships. The very steps needed to contain the virus— restrictions on movement and isolation — will have heightened these risks, especially when other stresses such as unemployment and financial strain are looming. At the same time, it has been even more difficult for them to reach out for help.

Adapting to the virus presented extra challenges to our support model. Physical distancing guidelines meant less capacity to accommodate women and children who were endangered by family violence in our crisis and refuge services. Our playroom, where children could explore their feelings about violence they had witnessed, had to close, while nearby playgrounds were also off limits.

State-wide disruptions to schooling and education had even greater impact on those families affected by violence, who are already dealing with frequent moves and upheaval as they look to escape violence. Our children's education program, where volunteer tutors work with children to address this issue, had to be suspended, and our outreach work to women living in refuges or still in their own homes was also significantly affected.

Our Court Support 4 Kids program, which after years of advocacy was funded by government and extended into four courts

at the start of October 2019, was suspended after only six months of operation when courts closed. Because of its key elements — a court-based service responding to women and children presenting on any given day — it could not be adapted to an online model.

The effect of the virus was also difficult for previously homeless women living within shared spaces at our McAuley Houses. Many have past experiences of trauma, physical and mental illness, and struggled to deal with changed behaviours and routines needed to keep the virus in check.

Our popular community lunches had to be paused and the work of our valued volunteers was put on hold to protect their wellbeing at this time. Social inclusion and group activities moved to an online platform, so that women could join classes remotely via Zoom from the safety of their rooms. This also provided a continued point of connection for women now living in the community likely to have been particularly affected by lockdown and at risk of loneliness and isolation.

Moving these programs online had challenges given not all women are tech-savvy. There were also concerns about privacy from those who had experiences of violence or abuse. Our Skills 4 Life program worked to keep women engaged as much as possible and to overcome these challenges. Enterprising volunteers converted some classes to online, and a range of fun activities, such as movie reviews, yoga, trivia nights and art classes continued. In addition to remote group activities we provided many residents with art packs and isolation packs that include games, puzzles, and links to free virtual tours and activities such as zoos and museums. Some of these new ways of offering support are likely to continue when the COVID-19 emergency finally passes.

## New homes, new beginnings

Fourteen women supported by McAuley this year moved into a brand-new housing development in the heart of Footscray.

We developed a partnership with Unison Housing, who were transforming an old and dilapidated block of 17 small units into 54 brand new self-contained apartments. The 14 women, who had mainly lived in our McAuley Houses Footscray and Ballarat, are now living on two secure women's only floors, and have their own self-contained apartments as well as access to large communal areas and an outdoor garden.

The development is just a stone's throw from McAuley House Footscray, and support will continue for the women as they build their new lives. They will be in a familiar neighbourhood and able to remain connected with social and skill development activities, as well as ongoing support with mental or physical health issues.

Each of the women has previously been homeless, and in most instances their homelessness has been linked to family violence as well as mental illness and social isolation. Their journeys to independent

living have been possible because during their time of support from McAuley, the full range of issues they have faced have been tackled.

For women with these challenges to become ready for independent living has taken a long time, and they have shown remarkable strength and resilience to keep working to overcome

them. Having access to health and mental health services, and the opportunity to learn or regain skills and independence, have been essential in their journeys to wellness and new futures.



## Natalie: 'Now I never have to leave'

'Are you kidding me?' was Natalie's\* first response when she was contacted by McAuley housing worker Carolyn and asked if she would consider moving into the new apartment complex.

After years of transient housing and homelessness, she still can't get her head around the idea that she now has her own place and can, at last, make long term plans.

It's another step forward in her long journey of recovery from mental health challenges, homelessness and debilitating physical injury.

Natalie had been a circus performer, traveling extensively until developing a severe hip injury associated with her role doing hula hoop and juggling. Multiple surgeries and interventions failed to help her cope with the physical demands, and she realised she was no longer loving it, had given it a good go, but now needed to stop.

She'd never really had stable housing over that time and ended up living in a share house. With the loss of her identity and the sense of community associated with the circus, she found herself getting more and more depressed and isolated. With little help and no clear diagnosis, Natalie felt more and more that everything was too much and overwhelming, and she attempted to take her own life.

Devastatingly, while she was in hospital recovering, her flatmates delivered another blow by kicking her out. Effectively homeless, she stayed for four weeks in the mental health facility until a friend offered to let her stay on her couch, while a referral for McAuley House was made.

Natalie identifies as queer, and was worried that her sexual orientation would be a problem given that McAuley is a faith-based

organisation. She was reassured in her first contact with us that this would definitely not be an issue, and within a few weeks, moved into a room of her own at our McAuley House in Footscray.

'The room was so beautifully set out for me when I came. There were toiletries, pyjamas and my bed was made,' Natalie recalls. 'At last I felt I could breathe.'

In the first week, Natalie mainly just slept, and was grateful to be left to adjust at her own pace. She loved the beautiful and light-filled spaces, and the sunshine coming through the stairwells was one of her favourite things.

'Everything felt like a gift, but I didn't have to 'deserve' it,' she says. 'I was already putting pressure enough on myself...I didn't need pressure from anyone else if I was having a bad week.' The support was gentle but always there. 'If I said I hadn't felt able to ring a doctor, someone would say: "How about I make the call for you?" My progress was slow but I really appreciated as well that no one kept expecting a lot of gratefulness all the time – it's tiring!'

Natalie was aware that: 'I might be living in the nicest women's shelter – but I'm still homeless.' As she says: 'How can you not be depressed if you are homeless, and poor.'

After a year living at McAuley House, Natalie moved into transitional housing. She was still aware of the vulnerability of her housing situation and the lack of security, so the offer to move to the Footscray development was 'amazing. It was already a beautiful apartment, but now I can start making it my own, and do things like buy furniture. I still can't get my head around the idea that I never have to leave!'

\*not her real name

## Generosity through the generations



Maddie (front) with McAuley staff and the welcome packs

A socially-minded grandmother in Adelaide, concerned about the impacts of COVID-19, who put up a \$5000 challenge for the best pitch from her children and grandchildren on ways to stimulate their local economy ...

A 13-year-old girl with real empathy for women who are homeless, and boundless energy and enthusiasm to make things happen, who saw the opportunity to support both local businesses and women in need ...

Fourteen women supported by McAuley who'd been homeless, and faced a multitude of other challenges, but were now ready to move into new permanent homes, and a future that is exciting but just a little scary.

They were the key elements which magically came together when Maddie Hogan put together a successful 'bid' for her grandmother's generosity: a plan to add lovely finishing touches which would transform the McAuley women's new accommodation into welcoming homes.

Even when she was only 11, Maddie had taken notice of the issue of homelessness when she saw a young woman who was sleeping rough and began wondering what more could be done. She saw her grandmother's 'grant' as an opportunity to do something that would make a difference.

When her grandmother awarded her the grant, Maddie set to work, approaching local businesses for their support.

The brief was clear, to put together a pack of items to make women feel nurtured and supported. Soon the family home was overflowing with the results of her endeavours: hand-made cushions, throw rugs, candles, pot plants and more awaiting the day that the women were due to move in. Maddie's enterprising spirit and negotiating skills had stretched the \$5000 further; convincing local businesses to provide discounts of \$3695.

Felicity Pringle, McAuley's Head of Fundraising, Marketing and Advocacy said: 'We're honestly at a loss of how to thank Maddie for the incredible deed she did for us. We know how special and very rare Maddie and her family are. This kind of selfless generosity and effort is not something many people see in their lifetimes. We're thrilled we were the ones to witness at first hand the difference one very motivated and unique teenager can make.'

## ‘Making time’: COVID-19 no barrier to our dedicated volunteers

When two new volunteers came on board to help us last year – one with a law degree and the other a doctor – you probably wouldn’t have predicted that they’d end up running Bollywood classes.

But Jacqueline and Sadunee, two friends who despite very busy lives wanted to run a monthly activity for women living at McAuley House, were open to the idea that simply having fun was the best way of making a difference. Joining in with light-hearted and joyful Bollywood sessions has been enthusiastically embraced by several women. They have continued to offer the classes – via Zoom – since COVID-19 ‘threw a spanner in the works.’

Before this disruption, their first popular event was to run a pampering session and beauty night, which was very popular, with one woman saying; ‘I’ve never had a facial before.’

Since lockdown they’ve gone on to offer an online trivia night which, as well as being a huge amount of fun, sparked a friendly rivalry between McAuley Houses in Ballarat and Footscray. Despite some challenges in forming teams in lockdown environment, there was plenty of laughter; and quiz-

master Jacqueline was even asked if she could please sing her music-related questions.

As to why these two women, with hectic careers, can somehow find time to volunteer with us, both agree that it’s about giving back. Sadunee, a doctor who is passionate about women’s health, had often encountered women who’d experienced family violence, and wondered ‘what came next’ after injuries healed and they went home. The two women also agree that it benefits them, just as much as the women.

‘You learn to make time, and instead of stressing about a deadline, you realise there are people dealing with real problems. It’s eye-opening, but it’s also rewarding,’ says Jacqueline.

They’re both committed to keeping up their sessions since seeing the impact of these activities on women’s morale during the tough lockdown period – and McAuley recognises and appreciates their efforts, and those of all our volunteers who give their time, to make a difference.



Volunteers: Sadunee (left) and Jacqueline

## Section 2

# Keeping women and children safe from family violence

*Thank you for my safe place*



In Victoria, family violence-related incidents increased 6.7% in the last 12 months to the highest on record: 88,214 incidents

COVID-19 had a marked impact on our service delivery to women and children endangered by family violence. Our capacity at our crisis and refuge services was reduced because of the need for social distancing, and we were unable to do face-to-face appointments with women needing our support.

We also noticed flow-on effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Even fewer housing options were available because of lockdown. We received fewer outreach referrals over that time, confirming a concern that many women will find it difficult to reach out for help as perpetrators are home 24/7. Immigration processes for those women with citizenship or visa issues are taking longer because of restrictions on face-to-face interviews.

We continued to highlight the importance of more women returning home safely, through submissions to the Australian and Victorian governments. We urged the community as a whole to challenge why the most frequent outcome of family violence is women and children fleeing, with all the associated adverse consequences of unstable housing, disruption to employment and children's education, and the loss of friendships and local networks.



## Safety for those endangered by family violence

### Crisis accommodation



132 women and 134 children supported

68% of women have a former diagnosis or recognised indicator of mental illness

28% have no income

92% of women had lived in short term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting, and 3% had been sleeping rough

53% are from a culturally diverse background

We operate crisis accommodation for women and children who need to immediately escape family violence. The women needing our support have experienced, or are at immediate risk, of serious harm: through physical and emotional violence, threats, sexual assault, and stalking. Our crisis house is accessible 24/7, and provides secure and immediate accommodation, typically for seven to ten days.

Experience of family violence: risk assessments of women arriving at McAuley crisis accommodation

FELT ISOLATED

**90%**

SAID THEY HAD THOUGHT OF SUICIDE

**44%**

HAD BEEN CHOKED

**55%**

WERE PREGNANT OR CARING FOR NEWBORN

**26%**

HAD BEEN PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED WHILE PREGNANT

**24%**

HAD CHILD PROTECTION INVOLVEMENT

**40%**

HAD CITIZENSHIP OR RESIDENCE ISSUES

**22%**

BEEN THREATENED WITH DEPORTATION BY THEIR ABUSER

**21%**

### Our refuges



**33** women and **45** children supported

**65%** of women have a former diagnosis or recognised indicator of mental illness

**12%** have no income

**85%** had lived in short term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting and **3%** had been sleeping rough

**53%** are from a culturally diverse background

Our refuges provide longer-term safe accommodation for families escaping violence who are still at risk and have nowhere else safe to go. The average length of stay was 65 nights.

### Outreach work



**150** women and **192** children supported

**65%** of women have a former diagnosis or recognised indicator of mental illness

**6%** have no income

**10%** had lived in short term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting and **2%** had been sleeping rough

**41%** are from a culturally diverse background

We are also able to support women who are living in refuges, transitional housing or home. This year saw a significant increase in this important preventative work, with the amount of women and children supported increasing by 51 per cent.

### Giving children a voice



**338** children supported alongside their mothers who were dealing with family violence

**27%** were aged under two

**73%** are fearful of the perpetrator of the violence

**10%** have suicidal ideation or self-harming thoughts

We provide direct support to children who have experienced and witnessed family violence. Sixty-four per cent of these children have themselves experienced physical, verbal or psychological harm from the perpetrator.

We have a playroom with a specialist children's worker. Through art, play and conversation, a child's feelings about what has happened in their family can be explored.

We focus attention on improving the bond between mothers and their children, which has often been damaged by the violence. To rebuild the mother-child bond, we encourage mothers to attend the playroom alongside their children.

*Myself and my three kids fled from my ex. It was really hard to get help and leave but him hurting my three-year-old was the last straw.*



## Court Support 4 Kids



**587** children supported in family violence proceedings

**712** children supported in other court proceedings

**412** women supported in family violence proceedings

**453** women supported in other court proceedings

After hearing from women that they sometimes abandoned efforts to get intervention orders because of a lack of childcare options, we developed a program, Court Support 4 Kids, to fill that need. A trained children's worker is based at court, providing support, play and distraction for children, while their mothers focus on getting legal protections in place.

Courts are unsuitable environments for children, and their presence in a place that is crowded, noisy and intimidating, makes it hard for mothers to attend to the legal issues. Hearing details of family violence incidents can also be traumatising for children.

Since 2014 this program had been funded by philanthropy. This year we were able to secure 12 months funding from Court Services Victoria to continue our work in Sunshine and to expand the program to Ballarat Magistrates' Court and Melbourne Children's Court. The funding also enabled the continuation of the program in Geelong Magistrates Court by our partner Bethany Community Support. The closure of all courts in March 2020 because of COVID-19 meant the program was suspended. The program has now secured another 12-month contract to continue in 2020-21.

While primarily targeted at those attending court because of family violence, many also attend for other court matters, and our workers have noticed that family violence also emerges even where it is not the primary reason of presentation. This provides opportunities for early referrals. Our workers also notice there is a relatively high number of children with special needs attending, which may indicate it is harder to source alternative care for these children.

*Thank you for my safe place.  
Thank you for my freedom.  
But most of all thank you for  
my life. a life I now know  
can be mine.*

## Bridging the educational divide

Seventy two percent of children supported by McAuley have experienced significant disruption to their education when they leave home with their mothers to escape family violence. We provide a tutoring program supported by volunteers, to help children who are otherwise at risk of falling behind at school.

This year 176 tutoring sessions were provided by eight volunteer tutors who helped 17 children. The program was suspended due to the impact of COVID-19 in March and an evolution to an online service, which could be rolled out across Victoria, became our focus.

My tutor is very funny. We meet every week and we learn a lot and play games. I have learned about where the West Coast Eagles are from and I like to answer quizzes and play AFL. (Aged 12 years)

My tutor comes to our home. I have learned about Aboriginal people and I like to play maths games. (Aged 6 years)

I like to make up words and I learned that boringness is a word. (Aged 8 years)

My tutor is a good teacher. We play games and sometimes read. I have learned English and I would like to read, speak and write English. (Aged 13 years)

I would like to learn about robots. (Aged 6 years)



## McAuley Works: employment support

Our employment support program McAuley Works provides intensive help to obtain meaningful, paid employment for women facing multiple disadvantages in getting work. This program is funded by Jobs Victoria. The women we support have experienced family violence, homelessness, mental and physical illness, and frequently have very limited work histories because of these challenges.

To our knowledge there are no other Australian family violence organisations offering an employment service as part of their suite of supports to get a woman's life back on track.

Economic independence and the financial security associated with work can be a springboard for leaving a violent relationship. While women remain financially dependent on men who are violent, they are less likely to leave them. Women can find themselves in a vicious cycle where their financial independence may be the path to freedom from violence, but the violence may prevent them from becoming financially independent.

The likelihood of other consequences that women typically face when they leave violence — poverty, homelessness, health issues, and effects on children—is also lessened if they can join or re-enter the workforce.

This year 95 new women registered with the program and 36 commenced work. This included 27 women with critical levels of family violence; 10 of these had below average employability, meaning they were unskilled, had not held a position in the previous year, and were only partly fluent in English.

McAuley made a submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Disadvantaged Job Seekers arguing for recognition of the importance of this intensive support for women endangered by family violence. We highlighted the need to recognise the unique challenges facing women who may have to keep moving to escape their abuser. We also gave evidence before the Committee's hearings in Melbourne and Ballarat.

*I'd like to thank you guys that supported me and my baby. Since I married my husband, I forgot what is happiness and I lost myself until I finally got out of there.*

## 'Feeling blessed' – Amrita's story

It's a common enough workplace event – sharing a birthday cake with office colleagues.

But it was a ritual that meant a lot to Amrita\*. It signified another huge step in her transition: from a woman who'd lived with the terror of family violence and endured physical assaults during pregnancy, to holding a role as a popular and respected employee.

Our employment support service McAuley Works assists women such as Amrita to find and get a job – a way out of violence and a chance to build a new and more secure future.

Amrita's caseworker Lorraine says: 'In my first meetings with her she was still in a state of fear and anguish. She'd lived in refuges and there had been countless intervention order breaches. She also had two young children and was still traumatised and uncertain about what the future could bring.'

Amrita has a degree in accounting, but she was totally committed to getting any kind of work. When a job opportunity as a receptionist/administration assistant arose, she wasn't put off by the fact that it was an hour's drive from her home. She aced an interview in McAuley's Boardroom and a week later was offered the role.

McAuley's support didn't end there. Lorraine picked her up for a practice run from home to work, mapping out the best routes, train station, and traffic timings. Amrita was thrilled when they arrived at her new employers to find that it was right next door to a Sikh temple. 'It was meant to be,' Amrita said, asking Lorraine to come into the temple with her.

'It's fair to say it was a successful day all round,' Lorraine says.

Amrita started in a 25-hour-a-week role, welcomed with open arms by her new workmates. It didn't take long to be promoted to full-time Office Manager. Her colleagues held her in such high esteem that they sent her flowers to celebrate. Not long after, it was Amrita's birthday, and she prepared a cake to celebrate her milestone with her workmates.

The birthday could have been a sad one. Her husband attempted to ruin it by sending her the divorce papers the day before. There were tears from Amrita but when the day arrived she asked herself: 'Why should I have to be sad?' Seeing that her children were, as kids usually are, happy and excited, she says she 'dared herself to celebrate'...and concentrate on how much her life had changed and a new feeling that she was 'blessed.'

\*name changed

## Legal help to address economic abuse



**79** women and 124 children

**150** debt related issues and **140** other legal issues

**\$218,204** debt waived

**\$7222** in compensation received

Economic abuse is overwhelmingly prevalent in violent relationships. Women are frequently denied access to money, embroiled in frauds committed by their partners, or coerced into signing agreements for contracts or loans they don't want or don't understand. Many women trying to leave violent relationships discover they are deeply in debt, and have no idea that they owed large sums of money. These debts often make it impossible for women to move on.

Many women struggle to locate the right help, or, overwhelmed by the many other issues they were dealing with, left it too late to seek help. This meant debt and stresses had compounded and became more complex to unravel.

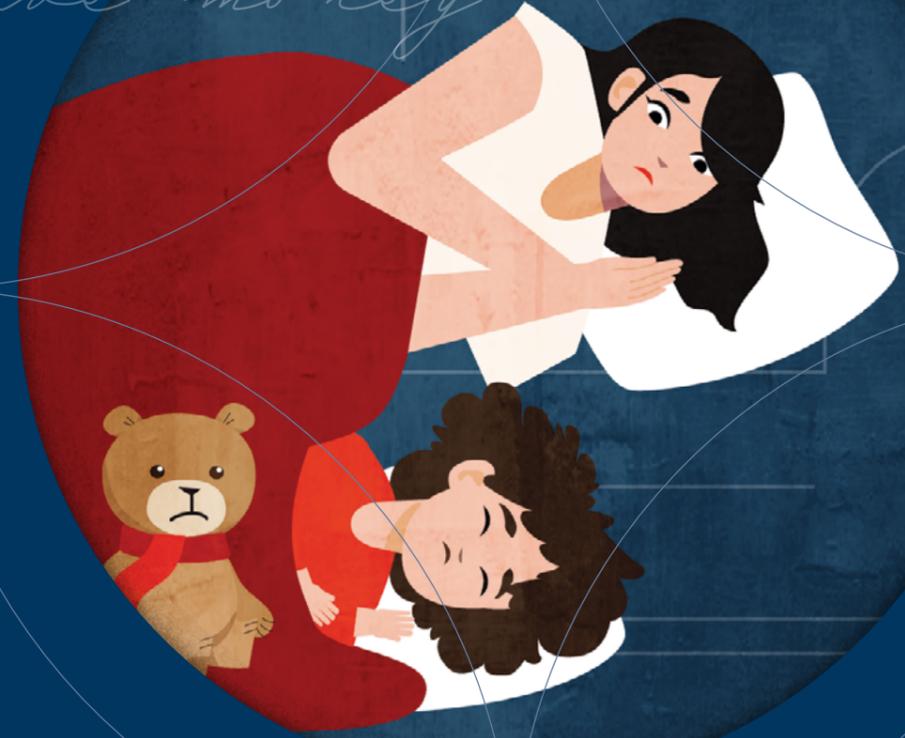
To respond to this pressing need, WEstjustice and McAuley established a legal outreach service based at McAuley House. Many women have other messy legal problems, such as family law matters, divorce, intervention orders, Victims of Crime Compensation (VOCAT), tenancy, social security, banking and consumer issues, insurance and fines. WEstjustice's legal and financial counselling expertise has been vital in untangling these issues.

This year also saw WEstjustice arrange for \$35,367 worth of infringements to be worked off under a 'work and development program'. This scheme is a therapeutic alternative to payment of fines, meaning a person who engages with a registered health practitioner can have \$1090 in fines worked off per month. This is a great alternative for those who are experiencing considerable hardship paying off their fines on a meagre Centrelink payment, and with McAuley House's psychologist and Bolton-Clarke nurse both accredited for this program, it is readily available to all those supported by McAuley.

## Section 3

# Support for women who have been homeless

*I was constantly hungry and thirsty. I had to walk everywhere, to try and save money.*



In Victoria last year, family violence was the cause of 44% of requests for homelessness support, compared with 38% nationally.

This year saw an increase in the number of women able to be accommodated because of the opening of a second McAuley House in Ballarat. Challenges related to COVID-19 were especially difficult to manage in our two McAuley Houses which have communal living, and requirements for isolation were hard for the high proportion of women who are dealing with mental illness.

McAuley made two submissions to homelessness inquiries conducted by Commonwealth and Victorian governments. These brought to life the stories and experiences of women in their own words. Women told us about being unsafe, tired, cold, afraid and hungry; of the pain of separation from their children; of being turned away in the middle of the night; of the frustrations of an overloaded homelessness system that hinders and frustrates as much as it helps. We highlighted the fact that family violence is the main driver of homelessness and gave our perspective on how systemic failings and shortcomings when women leave violent relationships too often means they end up homeless. Our CEO and a woman who had first-hand experience of being homeless also appeared before the Victorian Inquiry.



## Integrated support for women who have been homeless



**42** women accommodated in Footscray (average stay 181 nights)

**14** in Ballarat (average stay 111 nights)

**23** are mothers

**62%** were from a culturally diverse background

McAuley Houses in Footscray and Ballarat provide safe and stable longer-term accommodation for women only, unique in a service system which often favours 'rough sleepers' and is geared towards male homelessness. They are designed to promote the dignity and wellbeing of the women who live there, all of whom have been homeless.

For many women, their journey can only start when they have had a chance to rest and recover. A significant number of women supported in these two Houses have had long histories of trauma, sexual assault, childhood trauma, family violence, mental illness and other complex health needs. At McAuley

House Footscray for example, 31 per cent of women had been hospitalised over the previous year.

This year an on-site psychologist conducted 405 mental health sessions with women. The ready availability of her support within the House, and her expertise in understanding trauma, was praised as especially important by women who involved in consultations for McAuley's submissions; however, several said a cap on the number of sessions that can be provided is often unsuitable for the complex and long-standing issues they have experienced.

Thirty-four women who were previously homeless and supported by McAuley remain connected to the House, continuing friendships with each other as well as knowing support is at hand if things change. McAuley also supports an additional 21 women living in transitional housing.

*I never slept through the night. I was constantly vigilant of everyone who walked by, worried they would take me with them or hurt me.*

## Rebuilding self-confidence: Skills 4 Life



1425 interactions with Skills 4 Life

20 programs offered on average each month

57 attendees per month at McAuley House Footscray

Through our Skills 4 Life program, we provide personalised programs, training, social connection and skills development to rebuild a woman's self-confidence. The program also addresses the issue of isolation — a well-known public health issue.

Women supported by all our services, and former residents of McAuley House, have the chance to learn skills and connect with others. The program promotes independence as well as encouraging women to take care of themselves and their health and well-being, with activities such as pampering sessions, discussion groups, art activities and financial literacy classes.

## Food 4 Life

A Food 4 Life program means women living in McAuley House Footscray can be involved in all aspects of planning and cooking meals. As they have been homeless, in many cases they have been unable to shop for and prepare their own meals for extended periods of time. Sometimes they've lost skills and confidence in the kitchen.

Being involved in putting together and sharing meals brings back some of the pleasures and comforts of food, which may have disappeared in the struggle simply to survive.

For this reason, the large and welcoming communal kitchen has always played a central role in the life of the House. It was designed as a place for gathering and celebrations. With many women supported by McAuley born overseas, the House has often seen many multicultural feasts on display as women showcased their own country's cuisine and shared what traditional foods mean in their culture.

Celebrations that were especially popular this year were Eid and meat-free week, each attracting 60 attendees. At our community Christmas, we welcomed over 100 people including more than 30 children.



## With a little help from our friends

Like so many other aspects of community life, COVID-19 threw up a few challenges for the Food 4 Life program. Physical distancing made aspects of this program impractical, and our usual food donors had other huge demands on their services.

However we were keen to keep the meal selection and range of available ingredients as fresh, nutritious and appealing as possible, though still affordable.

The solution was an arrangement with McAuley, Victoria's Government House, and not-for-profit vegan restaurant Lentil As Anything. Working together meant beautiful fresh produce from Government House's vegetable gardens could be collected by a volunteer from McAuley, then delivered to Lentil As Anything where it is transformed into delectable ready-made meals.

Women who choose to independently prepare their own meals in a second kitchen were also able to make use of the selection available.

We thank both Government House and Lentil As Anything for their generosity, which has continued throughout the COVID-19 emergency.



Lentil As Anything crew members Maxim (left) and Pankaj (Right).

## Our supporters and partners

*I wouldn't be sitting here today if not for McAuley*



### Our volunteers

Volunteers are absolutely essential to McAuley's work. Around 116 people contributed their time during the year to support our work, continuing the program's growth in recent times.

Despite the impact of COVID-19, we received 248 expressions of interest compared to 120 the previous year. As of the end of June 2020, we had 71 volunteers available. Unfortunately a consequence of the pandemic was that we had to suspend many of our volunteer operations.

Volunteers are usually a highly visible and dynamic part of McAuley. They can be found preparing meals, helping the gardens at McAuley House thrive, carrying out administrative tasks, driving around to pick up donations, or bringing their life skills and expertise to activities as diverse as meditation and financial literacy classes, trivia nights and Bollywood.

This year we were unable to thank our volunteers in person during Volunteer Week, but we showed our appreciation by dropping off surprise 'thank you' pampering gifts to their doorsteps.



Our pampering packs for volunteers.

### A Good Lunch was actually great!

A Good Lunch held on 29 August 2019 at Zinc Federation Square turned out to be a 'great' lunch in more ways than one. Over 280 guests gathered for bubbles to enjoy a delicious two-course fundraising luncheon at Zinc at Federation Square. More than \$20,000 was raised and the spotlight placed on the growing problem of older women becoming homeless.

Our MC was Van Badham, who busted some long standing myths with facts and real stories about the fastest growing homelessness group in Australia - women aged 55 and over. McAuley Board member Matt Tilley helped keep the event entertaining as well as informative.

This was our major fundraising event for the year, and was organised by an enthusiastic committee of McAuley supporters: Theresa Dyer, Clare Collins and Karen Dynon.



Van Badham kept the event lively as well as informative.

# Thank you

We are so thankful for the generosity and encouragement of our individual donors, philanthropic supporters and businesses. Without them, the level of support we provide to women and children would be significantly reduced.

We are especially grateful for the donations received through our COVID-19 appeal. With so many Victorians significantly impacted by restrictions, we were humbled with the outpouring of concern and generosity from our loyal – as well as many new – supporters.

Once again this year, the philanthropic community have supported us in developing new unfunded programs. Our regular donors and workplace givers provide consistent, reliable and regular income, so vital in continuing our work.



## Sisters of Mercy

The ongoing support and encouragement provided by so many individual Sisters – as well as the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy Australia and Papua New Guinea – provides us strength and great pride in the work we do to continue the legacy of Catherine McAuley. We are grateful for their unfailing support, interest and enthusiasm about McAuley's Mission.

## Program and in-kind supporters

150 Clarendon Apartments  
Aesop  
ALDI Ballarat  
All Green Nursery  
Balancea Apartments  
Ballarat Aquatic and Lifestyle Centre  
Ballarat Community Health  
Ballarat Magistrates' Court  
Berry Street  
Bethany Community Support  
Big Group Hug  
Bolton Clarke  
CC Management Consulting  
Deloitte Access Economics  
Department of Health & Human Services  
Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions, Jobs Victoria Services

Fare Share  
Federation University  
Fitted for Work  
Foodbank Victoria  
Footscray Community Bike Hub  
Footscray Library  
Good360  
Government House Victoria  
Heizzo Distribution  
Helping Hands Mission – Community Food Pantry  
Impact for Women  
Lentil As Anything  
Magistrates' Court of Victoria  
Lort Smith Animal Therapy Program  
Man with a Van  
Maribyrnong Aquatic Centre  
Melbourne Christmas Trees  
Melbourne Magistrates' Court  
Mercy Health  
Mercy Place Ballarat  
Mister Nice Guys  
Moonee Valley Family Violence Network  
Next Steps  
North West Melbourne Primary Health Network  
Rec West  
Reclink  
Reconnect  
Safe Steps  
Scottsburn Nursery  
Second Bite  
Share the Dignity

Sinapse  
St Kilda Mums  
St Vincent de Paul  
Sunshine Magistrates' Court  
The Reject Shop  
Two Good  
Unison Housing  
WestCASA (Western Region Centre against Sexual Assault)  
Western Emergency Relief Network  
Western Family Violence Case Management  
WEstjustice  
Women's Health Grampians (CoRE)  
WRISC Ballarat  
Yarraville Community Centre  
Yve Apartments

## Philanthropy and business donors

All Souls Opportunity Shop  
Allens  
Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch)  
Australian Super  
Baker Foundation  
Barr Family Foundation  
Blue Sky Foundation  
Bunnings Group  
Campbell Edwards  
CARI Foundation  
Court Services Victoria  
Estate of Barbara Joan

Nielsen  
Family Safety Victoria  
Frank Montagnese Foundation  
George Perry Trust  
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust  
JB Hi-Fi  
JB Were  
Jenkins Foundation  
Leo Halpin Trust  
Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation  
Magistrates' Court of Victoria  
Melton City Council  
NAB  
NWMH Junior Medical Staff Partnership Group  
Perpetual Trustees – George Perry Charitable Trust  
Rotary Club of Keiler  
Royal Park Ladies Golf Club Inc  
Scanlon Foundation  
Sisters of St John of God Ministries  
Soroptimist International – Melba  
The Australian Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, Victorian Charitable Works Trust No. 2  
The Orloff Family Charitable  
The Queen's Fund  
The Wood Foundation  
Toorak Opportunity Shop  
VCF – George Perry Fund – Catholic Welfare  
Women in Super

## Schools and education

Academy of Mary Immaculate  
Avila College  
Catholic Regional College Sydenham  
Footscray City College  
Highview Christian Community College  
Kingswood College  
Loyola College  
Mercy Education  
Methodist Ladies' College  
Northern College of Arts and Technology  
Our Lady of Mercy College  
Padua College  
Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School  
Sacred Heart College Geelong  
St Francis of Assisi Parish Mill Park  
Twelve Batmi Thirteen Barmi

McAuley Community Services for Women is supported by:



# Our organisation and financial performance

*During winter I couldn't feel my fingers or toes because it was so cold*



## Governance: Our Board

### Dr Sonja Hood, Chair

Dr Sonja Hood is CEO of Community Hubs Australia, a national network of school based sites working with women and pre-school children, generally from non-English speaking backgrounds.

### Ella McPherson

Ella McPherson is Chief Operating Officer of the Victorian School Building Authority. She has had a number of roles in the public sector including in education, health and human services, human rights and community development.

### Matt Tilley

Matt Tilley has been a Melbourne radio broadcaster for over 25 years and was introduced to our organisation through MC'ing our events, before joining the Board in 2016. He currently works as the Chief Communications Officer for Foodbank Victoria.

### Bridgid Connors

Bridgid Connors is Chief Human Resources Officer with Monash University, an organisation committed to social justice and human rights. Bridgid has always worked in areas that serve to positively impact community wellbeing and improve social justice for all.

### Dr Anita Morris

Dr Anita Morris is Family Violence Principal Practitioner at the Department of Health and Human Services. She was an expert witness at the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

### David Whelan

David Whelan is a senior executive with Macquarie Group Limited with over 20 years' experience in a diverse range of finance, risk and commercial relationship roles across various listed ASX companies.

### Michelle Cotter, Deputy Chair

Dr Michelle Cotter is Principal at Avila College in Mount Waverley. Leading a Catholic school community for global citizenship in the 21st century resonates powerfully with the story of Catherine McAuley.

### Angela Scaffidi

Angela Scaffidi is Managing Partner and Head of Change at Senate SHJ. She designs, implements and measures change programs for clients in the public and private sector. She has won a range of state, national and international awards for her work in communication.

**We thank former Board members Mark Birrell and Sr Christine Coughlan, rsm, for their contributions to the McAuley Board in 2019–20.**

### Sr Joan Doyle, rsm

Joan brings a great commitment to pastoral care, education and social welfare. In 2008 she was awarded an OAM for helping establish services for families on the outskirts of Lima Peru.

### Rob Scenna

Rob Scenna is Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Church Insurance. He has more than 20 years' experience in financial services, management consulting and aviation.

## Our financial performance

### Profit and Loss Statement

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
State Govt Funding	4,361,745	3,787,154
Donations/Bequests	2,644,722	1,501,509
Rent Received	263,269	215,068
Interest Received	63,160	99,804
Miscellaneous	55,683	74,427
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>7,388,579</b>	<b>5,677,962</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Employee Benefit Expenses	5,054,211	4,134,080
Depreciation & Amortisation Expense	235,742	139,452
Program Resources	653,380	371,449
Occupancy Expenses	396,641	455,750
Administration Expenses	495,671	432,627
Finance Charges on Lease Liability	8,724	0
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>6,844,369</b>	<b>5,533,358</b>
<b>OPERATING PROFIT (LOSS)</b>	<b>544,210</b>	<b>144,604</b>

## Our financial performance

### Statement of Equity

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Retained Earnings at beginning of Financial Year	3,783,763	3,639,159
Entity Profit /(Loss)	544,210	144,604
Retained Earnings at the end of the Financial Year	4,327,973	3,783,763

### Balance Sheet

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Cash & Equivalents	4,984,466	4,665,512
Receivables	19,183	247
Other Current Assets	313,307	220,582
<b>Non-Current Assets</b>		
Investments	1,325	1,640
Property Plant & Equipment	469,637	587,971
Intangible Assets	176,544	
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>5,964,462</b>	<b>5,475,952</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Payables	919,466	1,316,576
Provisions	534,320	375,613
Lease Liabilities	69,319	
<b>Non-Current Liabilities</b>		
Lease Liabilities	113,384	
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>1,636,489</b>	<b>1,692,189</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>	<b>4,327,973</b>	<b>3,783,763</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Retained Earnings	4,327,973	3,783,763
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>4,327,973</b>	<b>3,783,763</b>



## Our foundations

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Catherine McAuley opened the doors of the 'House of Mercy' in Dublin, Ireland, in 1827. Her dream of providing disadvantaged women and children with housing, education and religious and social services – enabling them to find a brighter future – had become a reality.

Catherine founded the Sisters of Mercy in 1831. Led by Mother Ursula Frayne, the Sisters of Mercy first arrived in Australia in 1846. Thirty years ago, the Sisters of Mercy established Regina Coeli (now McAuley House) followed by Mercy Care (now McAuley Care) in 1988.

In 2008 Regina Coeli and Mercy Care services were combined to form McAuley Community Services for Women and expand the Sisters of Mercy's commitment to women and children and social justice.

Today, Catherine's founding spirit and ethos continue to live on at McAuley Community Services for Women.

McAuley Community Services for Women  
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[mcauley-community-services-for-women](https://www.linkedin.com/company/mcauley-community-services-for-women)