



Our Approach

McAuley Community Services for Women supports 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 support and temporary accommodation.

The women and children we 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 in Footscray and Ballarat, providing accommodation and support for women who have experienced homelessness, many of whom have also experienced family violence. A place of rest, recovery and reconnection, McAuley House provides wrap around support and is a welcoming community hub.

mcauley.org.au

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 her recovery time. We bring together health (mental and Physical), legal, financial, accommodation and recreational responses.

We also recognise that children's pain and trauma is unique and different in nature to that of their mother and requires a specialist response.

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.

Over the last few years, McAuley has been leading a project to further an approach to family violence called 'Safe at Home.' This would transform the default system where women 'escape' violence and become homeless: instead they are supported to stay home or in their communities safely, while ensuring accountability for the person using violence.

Safe at Home offers, through systems change, a new model, with early intervention and rapid responses, for whole of household support. Not only does this approach move away from victims being saddled with all the disadvantages of leaving - including the loss of communities, schools and workplaces etc - but would significantly reduce homelessness across Victoria.

In Victoria, family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women (AIHW, 2021). Our current systems are designed to support victim survivors to escape violence by leaving the family home. This means women and children in secure housing may not be offered the choice and support to stay in their home when their safety is threatened: instead, many escape into over-burdened emergency accommodation and refuge services with little hope of accessing affordable housing.

In 2022-23, 23,415 women and 13,294 children who had experienced domestic and family violence were assisted by homelessness services. and during this period, the average waiting time for priority applicants (including people escaping family violence) for housing was 20 months.

Towards a Safe at Home trial

McAuley has worked in collaboration with Meli and other sector colleagues to co-design a pilot of a Safe at Home approach in Geelong. The model is based on research into what works in other jurisdictions along with input from local professionals and people with lived experience, including victim-survivors and people who have used violence in the past.

The Geelong Safe at Home response is designed to be rapid, flexible, and will provide integrated supports that are tailored to the needs of the whole household including the person using violence. Households have access to support over a period of 24 months, allowing support to increase or decrease depending on their changing needs.