



BALLARAT
FOUNDATION

IMPACT IN ACTION

Mental Health: Mum's Thrive



29.3% of people feel lonely, 25.8% higher than the Victorian average



Ballarat citizens are 34% more likely to seek help for mental health



Suicide rate in Ballarat is 40.7% higher than the Victorian average



Long term mental health conditions in youth is 55% higher in Ballarat compared to Victorian average

For women and children experiencing homelessness, safe housing is only one part of recovery. At the Salvation Army Ballarat transitional housing site, approximately 95 per cent of families are survivors of family violence. Many mothers arrive in crisis after prolonged exposure to trauma and are focused primarily on keeping their children safe and cared for. Their own wellbeing is often secondary to immediate survival needs.

Recognising that long-term recovery requires more than accommodation, the team at Karinya Support Services identified the need for a program that supported mothers to rebuild confidence, wellbeing and connection in a safe and supportive environment.

Program response

In response, the Ballarat Salvation Army team developed Mum's Thrive, an eight-week outreach program designed to support mothers through a focus on safety, self-acceptance, healthy relationships and self-care. The program creates space for participants to reflect on their own wellbeing, often for the first time in many years, while building practical strategies to support recovery and family stability.

The program also encourages peer connection between women living within the transitional housing environment, helping reduce isolation and build supportive relationships between participants.

In their own words

One participant, a mother of seven who had fled a violent household, described Mum's Thrive as the first time she had allowed herself to "pause and breathe." Through the program, she learned practical strategies to improve sleep and establish calmer household routines. As her own stress reduced, she noticed positive changes in her children, who responded to the increased stability and consistency at home.

Another mother reflected that prioritising her own wellbeing changed how she approached daily family life. She began preparing more nutritious meals and replaced reliance on takeaway food with shared activities such as nature walks, helping both her and her children feel more connected and present.

Alongside these individual changes, the program began fostering stronger relationships between participating mothers. Women started supporting one another through shared wellbeing goals and activities such as attending the gym together. Staff observed that these growing peer connections appeared to reduce tension and conflict within the housing environment, replacing isolation and stress with empathy, encouragement and mutual support.

Outcomes

Foundation Outcome 2 - Increased community connection and cohesion

Mum's Thrive is supporting improved wellbeing and social connection for women experiencing trauma, homelessness and family violence. Participants reported increased self-awareness, healthier coping strategies and improved emotional regulation, contributing to calmer

family environments and stronger interpersonal relationships. The program is also fostering meaningful peer connection within the transitional housing environment. Through shared experiences and mutual support, participants formed supportive relationships that reduced isolation and encouraged empathy, trust and encouragement between residents.

An emerging outcome has been the development of informal peer support networks beyond the formal program structure. Mothers began supporting one another's wellbeing goals and participating in shared activities together, demonstrating stronger community connection and increased social cohesion.

The improved social connection led to an unexpected outcomes of less neighbourhood conflict, which is common in close quartered transitional housing.

Why this matters

Women experiencing homelessness and family violence often face layered challenges that extend beyond housing insecurity, including trauma, social isolation and poor mental health. Programs such as Mum's Thrive recognise that recovery requires opportunities for healing, connection and personal agency alongside practical support.

While still in its early stages, Mum's Thrive demonstrates how trauma-informed and relationship-based approaches can strengthen wellbeing, foster connection and create safer, more supportive communities within transitional housing environments.