



Engender  
Equality

# Annual Report 2020-2021

"Initially it was a support to stay alive, to find a way to keep moving forward, to see that life had the potential to be better. Engender has provided a safe space, to allow me to discover that I deserve basic human rights, that despite being brought up educated and loved that this relationship filled with abuse was not something that I chose or was at fault for. Engender has provided me an opportunity to dream of a normal happy existence."

– Stacey

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## Vision

Tasmanians living free from violence

## Mission

We apply deep expertise through:

An **individual** approach with trauma-informed counselling and services.

A **community** approach with workplace training, psycho-education groups and public forums.

A **systemic** approach with education, research and advocacy.

A **social** approach – promoting policy awareness and improvement.

## Respect

We acknowledge, with deep respect the palawa people, the traditional owners of lutruwita (Tasmania/Van Diemens Land). The palawa people belong to the oldest continuing culture in the world. They have lived in union with Country for many thousands of years. We express gratitude for their custodianship and stand with palawa people in the declaration that sovereignty remains unceded.

**Engender Equality is funded by the Department of Communities Tasmania.**



## Chairperson – Kat Induni

On behalf of the Engender Equality Board and staff it gives me great pleasure to present the organisation's Annual Report for FY2021. Despite Tasmania largely avoiding COVID-19 lockdowns, the aftermath of the pandemic remains, particularly with respect to family violence. Central to the Tasmanian Government's response to family violence, Engender Equality have continued to advocate for people affected by family violence and deliver our counselling services, education and training.

This year our Board and staff attended a strategic planning day in Launceston and developed our new strategic plan. Engender Equality has grown in staff numbers after securing further Covid-19 related government funding.

Our treasurer Karen Hind (a chartered accountant) has worked closely with Alina Thomas, our CEO to ensure our financial systems and budget remain on track and to assist in future forecasting for the organization. I thank both of them for their time and efforts with this project.

Our board is skilled and focused on the future growth of Engender Equality and I thank each director for their efforts this year.

Alina Thomas has worked exceptionally hard, along with all the staff, to address our continual increased demand. Alina also continued her work as a sought after spokesperson in the media, as well as an advocate in the corporate and government spaces. The Board are truly motivated by Alina's passion and commitment to gender equality and the eradication of family violence.

Similarly, we would like to sincerely thank all the staff at Engender Equality, who have consistently worked very hard to provide support and services to so many. The knowledge and power you provide in your work is exemplary. Thank you for prioritising the wellbeing of those engaged with Engender Equality and continuing to have a positive effect on so many Tasmanians.



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## Impact: Parenting and Children – Jenny

Jenny has observed her children's behaviour settling gradually since she separated from their father, however they return from weekend visits with him 'worse than ever'.

The children in this family have witnessed their father's coercive control and abuse toward their mother. His parenting also bears the hallmarks of the coercive control he used against her. He is authoritarian, rigid, unemphatic and unpredictable. They have established a trauma bond with him, he being the one who harms them, and then soothes them. They are eager to forgive and gain his approval to receive the kindness.

Jenny is also presenting with complex trauma, experiencing chronic poor sleep, hypervigilance and anxiety associated with hyperarousal. She also experiences numbness and a sense of detachment from her body as the weekend she has to send her children to their father approaches. She expresses a sense of intense powerlessness to protect them.

The therapeutic relationship developed through counselling at Engender has provided relational healing for Jenny, who described a renewed sense of trust and self-empowerment.

Now understanding the trauma response as a survival mechanism, Jenny has experienced increased self-compassion, patience and hope for her children and an increased sense of ability to cope.

She developed a repertoire of strategies for self-regulation and co-regulation to bring herself and her children within their window of tolerance.

She enrolled her youngest in childcare with a trauma informed private provider to provide opportunity for him to form attachments with the carers, and an opportunity for her to attend to her own needs and aspirations.

Jenny's sense of increased confidence in her own decision making and self-worth has supported her decision to return to study at TAFE.

## 'Unmet need' in family violence service provision – Elinor Heard

An ever-present dilemma for Engender Equality, and for the family violence service sector more broadly, is the thorny question of how to capture and express the issue of 'unmet need'. While all stakeholders agree that there is far greater need for family violence support within the community than there is service capacity within providers, unmet need is understood and defined differently across the range of agencies responding to the problem, and is variously discussed under banners such as 'under-reporting' and 'barriers to help-seeking'.

From Engender's perspective as a specialist provider, unmet need includes the following:

- Women and children who have escaped or are trying to escape abusive and violent relationships;
- Individuals caught in chronic cycles of abuse who may not recognise what they are experiencing as violence as a result of disproportionate tolerance thresholds, diminished agency and self-worth;
- Individuals experiencing violence who may be unable or feel unable to access support as a result of their sexuality, disability, cultural background or religion, past criminality, substance use, sex worker status, immigration status, employment status/social standing, relationship to a member of the police or other government representative;
- Individuals who may be aware that they are using violent and abusive behaviours but are hesitant to seek help or advice due to shame and fear of punitive responses;
- Individuals and families who have made contact with support services but remain on waiting lists for active assistance.



In relation to the final point, it is essential to note that even with the addition of State and Commonwealth funding boosts allowing Engender to expand our service delivery throughout 2021-21, the Tasmanian community has more than absorbed our additional capacity to deliver family violence support.

The importance of responding to victims of family and domestic abuse in the help-seeking moment is well established by research, as is the fact that the absence of timely responses means the help-seeking window may close for that individual, sometimes permanently. The risk for individuals and families who have contacted services and are awaiting family violence support is a constant anxiety for organisations such as Engender, and must be confronted by the sector and Government alike.

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## Impact: Lateral Violence – Natasha

Natasha has a Police Family Violence Order (PFVO) protecting her from ex-partner Robbie, who is known to police for family violence and a range of other offences across the state. Robbie has breached the PFVO seven times and charges are pending.

Natasha stopped reporting breaches after a while, feeling there was no point, and also because of how some police officers treated her.

Robbie has recruited people in community to harass and intimidate Natasha to the point where she cannot walk down street without people yelling threats at her, even while walking her child to school. She has had things thrown at her, has been threatened with knives, people have approached her house, attempted to break in and thrown objects at the window, all of which have created fear and intimidation.

Natasha took in housemates to help pay rent on her private rental property. These people ended up stealing from her. She evicted them in the interests of safety for themselves and their child, but this meant she could no longer afford the rent. Natasha was offered a place to stay by a male neighbour which she accepted, but after waking up with him in her room on two occasions she has been forced into a local homeless shelter.

Natasha has expressed her wish to engage with Engender to process her trauma, commencing with stabilisation and development of self-regulation skills, along with co-regulation skills to connect with her children and create a sense of safety. However, while she experiences housing insecurity, Natasha's immediate needs and those of her children must be prioritised.



## Advocates for Change – Tess Moodie

We are proud to be in our third year of providing the Advocates for Change Program for victim-survivors who are passionate about engaging in advocacy to bring change to systems and services that impact victim-survivors and the prevention of violence. It is vital that the voices of victim-survivors are recognised as vital expertise in influencing decision making, legislation, policy design and service delivery. Providing opportunities for authentic engagement and co-design are imperative to the design and delivery of supports and services in a fully informed, trauma-informed way.

The program has grown over the past three years, going from a program that relied on volunteers and social work students, to now having a part-time project coordinator, Tess Moodie, who was one of the original Advocates.

The program currently consists of 28 victim-survivor advocates and is in the process of adding to the team in November, 2021. The program provides a platform for the voices of victim-survivors to share their lived experiences, but also expand and translate that lived experience for bringing change and contributing to the prevention of violence.

The program provides opportunities for advocates to engage in public speaking, media advocacy, consultation and providing input into policy, practices and law regarding family and sexual violence.

Over the past 12 months the advocates have engaged in the March4Justice event speaking alongside Grace Tame, lobbied for legislative change regarding non-fatal strangulation, spoke at Candlelight Vigils around the state, presented on National panels, participated in advisory and consultancy for the next National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children, made submissions to the Disability Royal Commission and featured in various print, online and television media.

This highly innovative program continues to passionately and deeply challenge the cultural drivers of family and sexual violence using an intersectional lens with these aims:

- Use a community mobilisation model built on the value of lived experience voices. This strengths-based approach is recognised as an important technique for communities that are marginalised and often denied a voice in decision making.
- Challenge social norms and practices that support or condone violence against women using local activism.
- Target the condoning of violence and other antisocial behaviours, while also promoting and respecting community self-determination.

Advocates for Change are inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive and empower women who have experienced family violence and sexual assault to be part of decision making, drive new initiatives and to claim ownership of the program.

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## Impact: Pregnancy and Parenting – Cass

When Cass was 13 she was sexually assaulted by her mum's boyfriend. The abuse spanned four months before her mum found out.

In Cass's second year of college she met Jared through a friend. On Cass's 18th birthday Jared proposed and Cass was happier than she'd ever been. She moved out of her mum's house into Jared's place. Six weeks before the wedding Cass discovered she was pregnant. She was shocked but excited. Initially Jared was angry, he punched a hole in the wall, was physically threatening to Cass and told her she was stupid for getting pregnant.

Jared told Cass she couldn't put on any weight before the wedding, he didn't want people knowing Cass was pregnant and she was already looking heavy. And he said she had to stop crying so much, it was bad for the baby and people would think she wasn't coping.

Cass gave birth to twins and a year later sought support from Engender.

Cass met with a specialist practitioner regularly over the next few months. The practitioner recorded that Cass presented with hypervigilance, insomnia, increased startle response, decreased concentration, numbing, disordered eating, shame and self-blame – symptoms consistent with the experience of repeated and ongoing interpersonal trauma. The practitioner also recorded that Cass was a loving and capable mum, showed great resilience, and was effectively managing her own and the kids' safety on a daily basis at home.

Cass said she wanted a better life for herself and the kids but that she was afraid of what Jared might do if she left him. Engender is working with Cass to support her to take steps towards greater independence and to plan for a way to safely leave Jared when she feels the time is right.

## CEO – Alina Thomas

Engender recognises partnerships as a critical element in the development and delivery of family violence services. Building on this value has been a highlight of the 2020-21 period. After launching our Stakeholder Engagement Framework, Engender was delighted to consolidate existing relationships in the sector and build meaningful relationships with broader support services.

Primarily motivated to increase inclusion and reduce barriers to service access, Engender's specialist practitioners have delivered a thriving and highly successful outreach program. Positioning our workers at locations where there are intersecting issues has allowed us to support otherwise under-resourced communities, improving safety and trauma recovery. Outreach locations include the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (Hobart and Burnie), Acton (Burnie), Ravenswood (Launceston), Chigwell Child and Family Centre (Hobart) and Jordan River Services (Bridgewater).

We partner in order to:

- 1. Collaborate** – partner with stakeholders for the development and delivery of jointly agreed initiatives or programs.
- 2. Include** – strive to dismantle barriers to services, knowledge and decision-making forums for populations who have been systemically excluded.
- 3. Inform** – participate in knowledge sharing networks, research and consultations in support of research projects, specialist services, government inquiries, etc.
- 4. Empower** – supporting our stakeholders in their actions that address family violence across the social ecological model.
- 5. Advocate** – share knowledge and expertise about family violence, our work and the perspectives of victim-survivors.

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<p><b>We co-locate our primary services with:</b></p>	<p><b>We deliver service based counselling in partnership and on-location with:</b></p>	<p><b>Our key referral partners:</b></p>	<p><b>Our major collaborations are with:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteering Tasmania, Hobart</li> <li>• Catholic Care, Devonport</li> <li>• Yemaya, Launceston</li> <li>• Australian Childhood Foundation, Burnie</li> </ul> <p><b>We have area-based counselling clinics at:</b></p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ulverstone Neighbourhood House</li> <li>• Jordan River Services, Bridgewater</li> <li>• East Devonport Community House</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Hobart and Burnie</li> <li>• Child and Family Centres:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Chigwell</u> Fortnightly counselling and Shark Cage</li> <li>○ <u>Ravenswood</u> Fortnightly counselling and Shark Cage</li> <li>○ <u>Acton</u> Fortnightly counselling</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Don College, fortnightly counselling</li> <li>• Jireh House, 3 weekly counselling clinic</li> <li>• HOPES Incorporated, counselling</li> <li>• The Bridge, fortnightly counselling and Shark Cage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (FVCSS)</li> <li>• Safe Choices</li> <li>• Australian Childhood Foundation</li> <li>• Women’s Legal Service Tasmania</li> <li>• Youth Family Community Connections (Integrated Family Support Workers)</li> <li>• Safe at Home Lawyer</li> <li>• Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre</li> <li>• Chigwell Child and Family Centre</li> <li>• Acton Child and Family Centre</li> <li>• Child Safety Service/Intensive Family Engagement Service (IFES)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors for Violence Prevention (MVP) with Hobart Women's Shelter, Women’s Health Tasmania and Women's Legal Service Tasmania</li> <li>• Headspace, NW Coast</li> <li>• No to Violence</li> <li>• White Ribbon Australia</li> <li>• Our Watch</li> <li>• Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee (DVCC) in each region</li> </ul>

## Training and Education

Engender Equality has four staff trained to deliver psychologist Ursula Benstead's evidence based program called The Shark Cage®. We deliver The Shark Cage® program to groups of women who have experienced sexual assault and/or family violence in their lifetime. Child and Family Centres and other accessible sites have proven highly successful Shark Cage partners due to their existing relationships with families in their neighbourhoods. Over this year we have delivered Shark Cage with St Helens Child and Family Centre, The Bridge (Salvation Army), Chigwell Child and Family Centre and tagari lia Child and Family Centre in Bridgewater.

Over 2020-2021 we announced the launch of two significant training packages for Engender Equality.

The **Family Violence Masterclass: Expert Insights from Research and Practice** and **Breaking the Trap: Working with Clients Experiencing Coercive Control** are aimed at frontline services (staff and managers) to build skills and awareness of the complex presentations of family violence. Delivered from the position of a specialist family violence practitioner, the training packages explore insights from research and practice to improve service response and promote victim-survivor safety.

**Breaking the Trap** is accompanied by a comprehensive toolkit and is designed to support human service workers who are working with people experiencing coercive control. A series of accompanying videos recorded by Torna Pitman are available on the Engender website and YouTube channel and are being promoted throughout the sector.

Additionally, in 2020-2021 we have delivered training and workshops to the Australian Association of Social Workers, Family Law Pathway Conference, Family Relationship Centre, Family Violence Counselling and Support Service, Serenity House, Circular Head Aboriginal Centre, West Coast Service Providers, TASCROSS, Youth Family Community Connections, Communities for Children South Partners and the Alcohol Tobacco and Drug Council, amongst others.

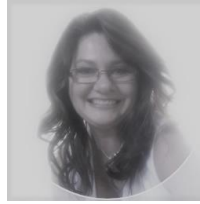


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# The Governance Board



Katryna Induni (BA LLB)  
Chairperson



Carol Bergman-Wells (MBA)  
Secretary



Karen Hind (CA, BComm, FAICD)  
Treasurer



Kathryn Thomas (DipTeach)  
General Member



Orla Baker (BA BTeach)  
General Member



Hon Ruth Forrest MLC - Independent  
Member for Murchison  
General Member



Alina Thomas (BSSc Comm Serv, GDip  
WomenSt)  
Chief Executive Officer

# Thank you



**with our whole heart.**

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