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BSAFE PILOT PROJECT 2007-2010

Bsafe offers an intervention to **prevent** further violence and enables women and children to remain in their **own homes** and **communities**.

A partnership between
Women's Health Goulburn North East
and the Victoria Police



Australian
**CRIME AND VIOLENCE
PREVENTION**
Awards
2010 National Winner

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An Australian Government Initiative

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Executive Summary

Bsafe has changed lives and very possibly saved lives. It has given women and their children escaping the unrelenting persecution of violent partners the chance to lead normal lives. Bsafe has cost little and achieved much beyond the scope of its initial intent as a pilot project. It has become both a reality and a symbol of women and children's resistance to violence, and a vital resource in their quest towards real security and peace of mind.

In my own professional journey in Australia and the United Kingdom, I found the issues of family violence and homelessness, whilst very similar, distinct to each region and place. The same can be said about the journey for each woman and child who experiences homelessness as a result of family violence. While each has a unique story to tell, grief, loss and trauma are ever present. What remains the same for victims of violence is the importance of 'home' and with that, a sense of belonging and community. For women and children this sense of home and community is critical in their journey away from, and resistance to, abuse and to their creation of a life free of violence.

Initially it was hoped Bsafe would enable women and children to remain safely in their own homes. Within months, the resounding response from women was that it allowed them to go out into the community and lead a 'normal' life. Prior to accessing Bsafe, women and their children were too scared to leave their homes. Women weren't able to get their mail, children weren't able to participate in sport, and for some, shopping was impossible, particularly in smaller communities. Women were legitimately scared for their lives and lived this fear every second of every day.

Some women believed they would be murdered. For many, Bsafe was pivotal to changing the dynamics in their lives - the dynamics of fear and hyper-vigilance. Bsafe gave them the choice to stay in their own homes and communities and enabled them to resume a life of normality. Bsafe became essential as they attempted to resist the violence, threats and abuse that remained constant and unrelenting. One woman said *'Bsafe enabled me to breathe again.'*

For family violence and sexual assault workers, Bsafe offered a product that alerted police while validating women's own concerns for their safety and the safety of their children. Bsafe became a significant component of the workers' risk management and safety planning with women. By the conclusion of the pilot the referral process was so entrenched that workers continued to refer eligible women who desperately needed a Bsafe kit, despite the project having concluded with no possibility of new referrals being accepted.

Collated data from women, workers and police proved the success of Bsafe with a reduction in physical assaults and a decrease in Intervention Order breaches.

Bsafe was successful in so many ways; it improved the physical and psychological health of women and their children and had a profound impact on homelessness. It was effective for a diversity of women with varying needs; Aboriginal women, rural women, women with disabilities and women with limited English language skills.

For many of these women and their children, Bsafe was a deterrent to violent ex-partners and a mechanism of swift access to the law and justice.

With funds from the Integrated Family Violence Services (Hume Region) Managers' Alliance, thirteen desperately afraid women, assessed as high risk, remain reliant on the units for their safety and peace of mind. These women can continue to access the Bsafe service for only a further six months.

The strength of the women involved in the pilot cannot be underestimated. They chose to remain in their own homes, or relocate to a home of their own, with the added security of Bsafe, in spite of great risk to their lives.

Bsafe is poised for expansion statewide. Structures are in place, as women and workers wait for access to this cost effective resource that makes the difference between insecurity and fear and safety and a normal life. It is critical that Bsafe is made available to rural women in particular, but ideally to all Victorian women and children experiencing family violence. We invite governments and philanthropists to invest in the future and make a real difference.

As one woman commented, *'How much does my life cost'?*

Rachael MacKay
Bsafe Project Coordinator
Women's Health Goulburn North East

1. Introduction

What is Bsafe?

Bsafe is a personal alarm system and risk management option primarily for people escaping family violence and sexualised assault perpetrated by intimate partners. Bsafe utilises VitalCall / Chubb Security who supply two types of products - a water-proof pendant that operates via the home telephone line that can be activated within the area of the victim's home and garden, and a 'mobile unit' which is similar to a mobile phone. The mobile unit is used where there is mobile coverage and allows Bsafe clients increased autonomy and security when out in the community.

When either device is activated an alarm is sent to the 24 hour VitalCall¹ response centre that immediately alerts 000 for a police response while continuing to monitor and record the call and what is happening in the home. Such recordings can later be used as evidence for court proceedings. The option of a prepaid mobile phone is available to clients without a phone to assist referral agencies in maintaining contact with them.

Background to the Bsafe pilot project

The Emergency Safety Kit, now known as Bsafe, was a Victoria Police initiative developed within the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network.² During a Rotary study exchange trip to Sweden in 2003, Victoria Police Sergeant Peter Milligan observed a model where safety kits were being utilised by family violence victims still at risk of further violence. Believing that the concept could effectively operate within the Victoria Police, in 2006 the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network trialled the emergency safety kit in Benalla Rural City. Four women escaping intimate partner violence were involved in the trial with 23 accompanying children.

The trial showed that the women and their children were able to remain in their own homes. The women reported that having the kit provided them with an extra sense of security; they felt reassured that their concerns for their safety were being taken seriously and that the response by police would be timely. Women also reported that their perceptions of safety significantly increased once they had access to the kit.

¹VitalCall is a personal emergency response service that provides services within Australia 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days of the year.

² Established in 1989, the Benalla Family Violence Prevention Network draws membership from a diversity of government and non-government organisations who work in partnership with the aim of preventing family violence in Benalla, www.familyviolenceservices.com.au

Following the success of the trial, in 2007 Women's Health Goulburn North East, in partnership with the Victoria Police, secured three year funding from the National Community Crime Prevention Programme for a Bsafe pilot in the Hume region. As the regional women's health service with clearly established relationships with the integrated family violence service system, Women's Health Goulburn North East was ideally placed to coordinate the project in partnership with the Victoria Police.

The Hume region in geographical context

The Hume region is one of eight Department of Human Services regions in Victoria. Located in Victoria's north east, the Hume region comprises nearly one-fifth of the state and covers an area of 40,427 square kilometres. The region is geographically varied and includes Alpine areas, some relatively remote farming communities and the major regional centres of Wodonga, Wangaratta, Seymour, Benalla and Shepparton. The City of Greater Shepparton is home to one of Victoria's largest Indigenous populations outside of metropolitan Melbourne. The City of Greater Shepparton is also home to an increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, many of whom have come via refugee and humanitarian programs.

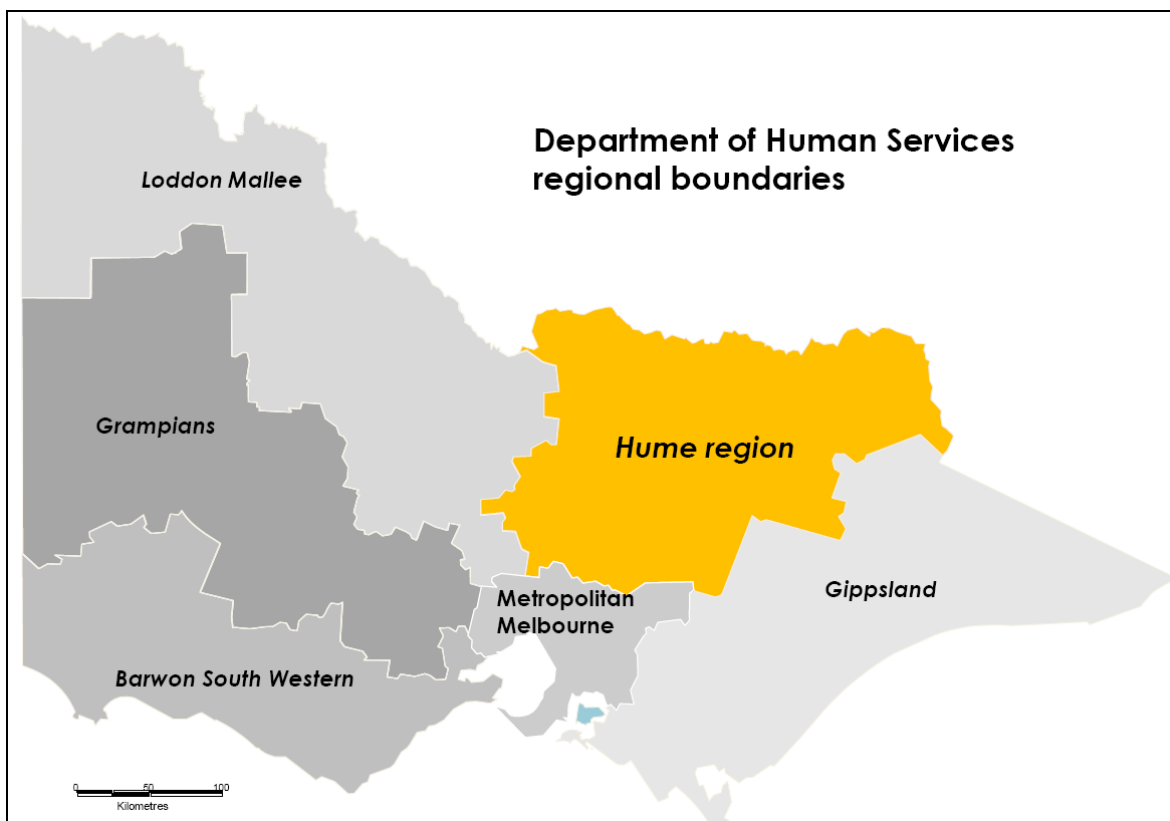


Figure 1: The Hume region: the geographical area where Bsafe was piloted.

Who is Bsafe for?

Bsafe's eligibility criteria require victims escaping family violence and sexualised assault to:

1. Reside in the Hume region, as this is where the project was piloted;
2. Have an Intervention Order (IVO) that excludes the perpetrator from the victim's premises; and
3. Be at risk of the IVO being breached.

The third eligibility criterion is determined through the use of the Family Violence Comprehensive Risk Assessment tool that participants complete with a family violence or sexual assault service worker. This tool is designed to assess the level of risk posed by the perpetrator through the victim's own assessment of their level of risk, evidence-based risk indicators and the practitioners' professional judgment.³

How does Bsafe work?

The Bsafe unit is assigned and specifically programmed for each client by VitalCall. If a client was to relocate, VitalCall would need to be notified so that the unit is reprogrammed to the new address. Once a referral for a Bsafe kit is made:

- the VitalCall installer contacts the client to make a time and date to install the kit
- the installer demonstrates the product and assists the woman to test the product (Women are required to test calibrate their Bsafe kits once a month to ensure that they are working correctly), and
- a password is set up.

If the client does not want the offender to be aware of the alarm, the system will be set up so that the operator will not speak when the alarm is activated and the police will be notified of the need to respond immediately.

Once the button on either unit is activated:

- the VitalCall Response Centre will respond immediately and the client is able to talk to the operator
- the client's details are instantly displayed on the operator's call centre screen (including name, address, the number of resident children and that the call is family violence related)
- the client will be asked to state their password.

³ Family Violence Coordination Unit (2007) *Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management: Supporting an integrated family violence service system*, Department for Victorian Communities: Melbourne, p. 65.

If the password is not provided, the police will be contacted and notified of the need to respond immediately. (Clients using the mobile unit not at their residential address must notify the VitalCall operator of their location for the police to respond⁴).

All kit activations are recorded. Transcripts of calls made to VitalCall and the police can be made available for legal testimony.

What does Bsafe do?

Bsafe provides an effective, integrated, multi-agency response that improves the safety and autonomy of victims of family violence and sexualised assault whilst increasing detection and accountability for those perpetrating such violence.

The Bsafe project has two key objectives:

1. To reduce homicides, assaults, sexualised assault and recidivism relating to family violence by funding the Bsafe kit and service to provide an additional level of support and service to victims of family violence so they can safely stay in their own homes and communities.
2. To strengthen the relationship between the police, family violence, and health and community sectors and the community.

By meeting these objectives Bsafe has:

- Improved safety and security for victims of family violence and sexualised assault
- Reduced fear of crime
- Improved response and risk assessment
- Reduced the incidence of family violence within the community
- Facilitated early intervention and arrest of repeat offenders
- Supported victims within the judicial system
- Increased levels of security relating to safety within the home and the community.

What Bsafe is not

Bsafe is not designed to operate as a crisis response based on two key rationales. Firstly, clients must have an IVO in place. Safety planning and other security measures are essential and it is crucial that women are provided with the time needed to make an informed decision about whether staying in the home is a safe and desirable option.

⁴ VitalCall is currently exploring the possibility of the mobile companion having GPS tracking device installed in it so that, when activated, women would not have to provide details of their location for a police response.

Secondly, installation is not immediate as kits must be specifically programmed for individual clients⁵ which can take one to two weeks. The immediate risk posed by some perpetrators, particularly following child custody court hearings or release from prison, is so serious that crisis accommodation, refuge support or temporarily staying with friends or family is necessary.

Bsafe should be seen as one of a range of tools that can be drawn on. Because of the timeframe between assessment, referral and installation it can't be seen as a crisis option... it's complimentary to a number of other interventions, it's not the only intervention. (Bsafe Coordinator)

Evaluation

Bsafe's development and direction was shaped by key issues and findings. Informed by action research methodology,⁶ there were several opportunities presented for incremental evaluation through the Bsafe steering committee and feedback from women and key stakeholders. The issues and concerns raised in two structured reflective workshops further supported this process. Methods of evaluation included:

- Comprehensive Risk Assessment Tool (CRAF) – information was collated about women and their children and the perpetrators' use of violence against them. This included demographic information and the evidence-based risk and vulnerability rating of 67 of the 72 women who participated.
- Questionnaires - completed voluntarily by participating women, after three and six months with a kit and when they exited the project. This provided qualitative and quantitative data.
- Interviews - data was collected through one-to-one, semi-structured telephone interviews with five women by the Bsafe project coordinator.
- Reflective workshops - conducted with Bsafe's key stakeholders in 2008 and 2010. Key enablers and barriers to the project's success were identified in both workshops. Barriers were rectified to strengthen the pilot's ability to meet its

⁵ Kits are specifically programmed for individual clients which means that when a kit is activated a client's individual details such as address, the specifics of the IVO and how many children reside at the property come up immediately on the VitalCall system.

⁶ Action research methodology, as stated by Rory O'Brien (1998), is a process of "learning by doing" - a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again.

objectives and be responsive to the needs to women and their children escaping violence.

- Key stakeholder questionnaires - provided feedback after the three year pilot project concluded.

This report is based on the findings from the Interim Evaluation Report 2010 and the Final Evaluation Report 2011 online at www.whealth.com.au.

The term 'sexualised' assault is used throughout this report as the preferred use of language. The term 'sexual' assault implies that this form of assault is a sexual act and therefore a mutual act. We maintain that sexualised assault is an act of violence. Bsafe is informed by the notion that rape and other forms of sexualised assault are deliberate, unilateral acts of violence.⁷ We continue to use the term sexual assault in relation to workers and services (i.e. sexual assault worker) as this is their preferred title.

Please refer Appendix 1 for project definitions of family violence and sexualised assault.

⁷ L. Coates and A. Wade (2004) 'Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations, Journal of Family Violence, vol. 22, p. 512.

Veronica's story

[Before Bsafe] there was quite a lot of physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, there was pretty much the whole lot. I was getting hit, punched, yep, like physically beaten up ... There was two separate partners. They just both happened to be domestic violence perpetrators. The first one was ten years and I was married. Then the next relationship I was in for 5 years ... I found out that there was actually drug abuse in his history, and then I found out after [it ended] that he was actually on drugs as well at the time of our relationship.

[The violence] started off not daily, but once every now and then, and then it became once a week. It just all depended on how much he was using or what the situation was. With the first relationship the only way I was able to get out - because he was really controlling and ... he had me tied up several times - was just by chance I was able to run out the house and someone called the police for me ... When I had to be taken to the school to pick up my two kids I was severely unrecognisable.

The first one, he was in jail for the five years during the second relationship. So when he got out, and the other one was very angry, I had to run from him and hide. So I was actually running from two different people and it was quite scary. So I've had to move completely out of the area ... I've heard that someone may know what area I've been in and that was quite alarming and so I've moved several times.

I've probably moved about six or seven times in the past couple of years. And so the last incident we had I was in my new house and either I was to look for another place to live or seek help from [Domestic violence service]. They were able to put me onto this Bsafe, so I was able to stay at home and feel a little bit comfortable instead of having to run again.

My two older children, they're having a few issues dealing with it ... the youngest one, he hasn't seen too much but has still seen the fear in the older children and that we've had to be moving all the time. He's quite unsafe ...

but since we've had this Bsafe he's felt a little bit more comfortable. [My ex-partner] he's threatened to kill me and my son. He's been straight up ... It's his son and he said that he was going to kill him. So that's the main reason we got [Bsafe] to keep him safe because he made direct threats to both of us.

Bsafe takes the edge off. I'm able to sleep. Before I had it I wasn't able to sleep. I was quite anxious. I didn't feel comfortable being at home by myself. It just brings my anxiety levels down. It just gives us that sense of safety in our own home. Not having to sort of watch and listen to every single noise. To know that if something happens we've got an option ... [Before] I had no options at all.

[It's helped me] get back to normality, just to be like everybody else and not having to move all the time. I was able to actually settle in this house, more so than the other houses that we've been in. And I've actually been able to unpack all my boxes, because usually we don't unpack our boxes because we just think its going to be a matter of time before we move again. So this is the first place I've ever been in the last 10 years where I've actually unpacked every single box of mine.

[With Bsafe] I've been able to settle down and my son's able to make friends and socialise. So that's been a really positive thing, because the last few places that we've moved to, the kids haven't really been able to connect with any good sound friends or solid relationships. Now we've actually been able to slowly meet the community and feel a little bit safer.

[Without Bsafe] I'd have to make arrangements to move ... There's no way I could stay in a place without something. It's not an option because I'm not going through sleepless nights. I've just started to get my son to be more comfortable in his room, although he still sleeps with me most nights but he still doesn't feel comfortable ... I was able to start working with him saying 'Look we are okay, we just need to press a button and the police will be here' ... So its been a really positive thing.

2. Policy and practice context

Over the past decade, there has been increasing attention paid to the social and economic costs associated with men's use of violence against women and their children. The connection between family violence and homelessness among women and children is now clearly understood, as are the serious physical and mental health consequences of living with violence. In 2004, VicHealth found that intimate partner violence was the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years and was responsible for more of the burden of disease than risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking or obesity.⁸ A commitment to appropriate action to redress violence against women and children has occurred at both a national and state level.⁹

Over the past decade, Victoria has implemented a number of key reforms aimed at advancing 'Safe at Home' models through an integrated, multiagency approach to family violence. In 2002, the Victorian Government's *Women's Safety Strategy 2002 – 2007* was launched. It outlined the policy framework to guide government in the area of violence against women. In 2004, the Victoria Police introduced its *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*. The Code of Practice aims to increase accountability for perpetrators of family violence while supporting 'aggrieved family members to stay safely in their own homes.'¹⁰

In 2005, *Changing Lives: A New Approach to Family Violence in Victoria* outlined that the new approach to family violence would ensure women and children had greater support to assist them in staying in their own homes and communities.¹¹ In addition, reforms brought forth by the *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008* were designed to support women and children affected by family violence to stay in their homes, if they wished. The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* has made it easier for those experiencing abuse to adjust tenancy agreements and have the violent person removed from the home.

⁸ VicHealth (2004) *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, Victorian Health Foundation: Carlton.

⁹ Policy commitment at a national level includes The National Council Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children. In Victoria a raft of changes have occurred including VicHealth's prevention of violence against women initiatives, Victorian family violence service reforms and through a policy commitment outlined in *A Right to Respect*.

¹⁰ Victoria Police (2004) *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence*, The Family Violence Unit: Melbourne, p. 1, 1.2.

¹¹ Department for Victorian Communities (2005) *Changing Lives: A new approach to family violence in Victoria*, Department for Victorian Communities: Melbourne, p. 8

Safe at Home

As a risk management option that supports women and children to remain in their homes, Bsafe sits within and supports the 'Safe at Home' model. 'Safe at Home'¹² refers to a jurisdictional response to family violence that aims to have the perpetrator removed from the home while women and their children remain in the home in circumstances where it is safe, appropriate and desirable.¹³ This model aims to safeguard the 'autonomy and social support networks of victims; reduces the financial, social and health impacts; and ensures that perpetrators experience consequences for their violent actions.'¹⁴

The current Victorian policy and practice environment supports women and children remaining safely in their homes by removing the perpetrator. This has been crucial to Bsafe's success as it could not operate outside an integrated approach to family violence where community services, specialist family violence and sexual assault services and police are working together to support the safety needs of women and children escaping violence. Yet the bulk of literature on 'Safe at Home' approaches indicate that such models 'must only be an option for women assessed at low risk'¹⁵ of further violence. Bsafe is unique in this sense.

Bsafe is able to provide a service for high-risk women and children escaping family violence and/or sexualised assault who want to remain in their home. Until Bsafe, these women's needs have, for the most part, remained unmet. Unlike other 'Safe at Home' strategies (for example, Tasmania's Domestic Violence Strategy *Safe at Home*, and NSW *Staying Home Leaving Violence*) Bsafe has a 'product' in the sense of a tangible risk management option. The Bsafe kit provides women with immediate assistance through the ability to talk with a VitalCall operator. It also ensures that emergency calls made from these women are prioritised by local police who are required to be aware of the women's circumstances and that the women and their children are at high risk of life threatening violence.

¹² Or sanctuary schemes or staying safely at home as they are sometimes referred to.

¹³ The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit. p. 192.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵K. Crinall & J. Hurley (2009) *Rethinking Domestic Violence and Homelessness, Parity*, vol. 22, issue 10, pp. 1-2.

Family violence causes homelessness

Research shows that family violence is the greatest cause of homelessness among women in Australia.¹⁶ Escaping violence is the most common reason provided by people who seek assistance from specialist homelessness services.¹⁷ Women with children escaping men's violence who are able to find crisis accommodation 'often struggle to find long-term housing due to a lack of supply of suitable housing stock, discrimination, low income as a result of women's poorer labour market opportunities, the need to care for small children and the substantial cost of private rental accommodation.'¹⁸ For women and children, living in rural and remote areas, crisis accommodation and long-term housing options, including public housing and safe, affordable private rentals, are limited. For women and children, escaping violence further exacerbates their risk of homelessness. The pressure to find suitable and safe accommodation remains an ever present challenge in the Hume region and in other regional parts of Victoria.¹⁹

The Federal Government's report *The Road Home*, launched in 2008, acknowledges that homelessness experienced by women and children escaping family violence is different from other forms of homelessness as victims of violence frequently 'cycle in and out of homelessness.' The report calls for new strategies to 'keep victims of violence, mainly women, safer in their homes.'²⁰ Bsafe provides an added level of support and security that enabled 68 percent of women in the pilot project to remain in their homes, significantly reducing, if not eliminating, their risk of homelessness.

When women are supported to remain in their homes and communities they are better able to maintain social support networks, employment and educational opportunities and stability of care for their children all of which support them on their road to recovery.²¹

¹⁶ WESNET (2008) *A Safe Way Home!* WESNET's response to 'Which Way Home?' p. 2.

¹⁷ K. Crinall & J. Hurley, *op.cit.*, p. 5

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ A. Alexander (2010) 'The Family Violence Challenges for CALD women and women living in remote areas,' *Parity*, Vol. 23, Issue 10, December.

²⁰ Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008) *The Road Home: A National Approach to Homelessness*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra p. 7.

²¹ The National Council, *A Time for Action*, *op.cit.*

Bsafe significantly reduces the costs associated with family violence

Each year, violence against women, including family violence, costs Victoria \$3.4 billion. By 2021 the figure is expected to rise to around \$3.9 billion. A financial analysis of the cost of reestablishing a woman and her children escaping family violence, including costs associated with crisis accommodation, transitional housing and accessing long-term housing in the form of private rental,²² has been compared with a financial analysis of the costs of Bsafe. This includes the cost of a woman and her children having spent time in crisis accommodation and then returning home to have Bsafe installed.²³ This financial analysis conducted by Rural Housing Network Ltd is based on their cost calculation for 2011. It examines the costs associated with housing and support.

The cost analysis detailed in Table 1 and Table 2 is based on a woman with three children accessing specialist housing support in the Hume region. The cost of a woman with children who accesses crisis accommodation, refuge, transitional housing and then exits into private rental in the Hume region was estimated at **\$10,195.90**. For a woman and her children escaping violence **who do not return home**, there are also costs associated with replacing belongings and household goods (e.g. beds, lounge, fridge, children's toys, television, microwave etc) and/or storage costs. Replacing such items can cost thousands of dollars and would likely bring this total to approximately **\$15,000**. This figure also doesn't take into account the financial burden women often incur in relation to loss of income and productivity through to the inability to work or to honour back debts or repayments.

By contrast, the costs associated with a woman and her children who accessed refuge or crisis accommodation and then returned to their home with the added support of Bsafe, has been estimated at **\$3,755.12**. This figure includes the cost of temporary refuge and transitional housing for some Bsafe clients.

The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children has investigated the cost of violence against women and their children. They identify several cost categories when examining the associated costs. These include:

- Pain and suffering and premature mortality costs associated with the victims/survivors experiences of violence (without appropriate action will cost **\$7,530 million** in 2021-22)

²² For a further breakdown of costs see Appendix 2

²³ For a further breakdown of costs see Appendix 3

- Health costs include public and private health system costs associated with treating the effects of violence (without appropriate action will cost **\$863 million** in 2021-22)
- Production-related costs, including the cost of being absent from work and employer administration costs – lost productivity, lost unpaid work, retraining costs etc (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,181 million** in 2021-22)
- Consumer-related costs, including replacing damaged property, defaulting on bad debts and the cost of moving (without appropriate action will cost **\$3,542 million** in 2021-22)
- Second generation costs are the costs of children witnessing and living with violence, including child protection services and increased juvenile and adult crime (without appropriate action will cost **\$280 million** in 2021-22)
- Administration and other costs, including police, incarceration, court system costs, counselling and violence prevention programs (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,077 million** in 2021-22)
- Transfer costs, which are the inefficiencies associated with the payment of government benefits (without appropriate action will cost **\$1,104 million** in 2021-22)²⁴

Examining the impact that Bsafe has in relation to cost savings in these categories is beyond the capacity of this project. However, it could be assumed that the cost savings Bsafe has demonstrated in relation to housing pathways are applicable in other cost categories identified by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

²⁴ The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009) *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Canberra, p. 9.

Table 1: Costs associated with a woman and her children escaping violence **leaving** their home and accessing specialist housing support

Expenditure Description	Crisis accomm- odation 3 days	Refuge 6 weeks	Transitional housing 20 weeks	Transition to long term housing	Total costs
Accommodation costs	315.00				315.00
Pre tenancy cleaning			300.00		300.00
Transport	75.00	150.00			225.00
Set up food and essentials	171.00	162.00			333.00
Replacement clothing		300.00			300.00
Household set up		0.00	250.00		250.00
Bedding & linen			480.00		480.00
Depreciation on appliances			480.00		480.00
Children school re-location costs		1,200.00			1,200.00
Support worker time	490.00	1,050.00	1,820.00		3,360.00
IAP support worker time			323.75		323.75
Housing support time & administration time			648.00	180.00	828.00
Bsafe Pendant installation					
Bsafe monitoring cost					
Bsafe Mobile Companion installation					
Bsafe monitoring cost					
Connect and disconnect of utilities			150.00	75.00	225.00
Power & gas checks – COMAC		80.00			80.00
Laundry		70.00			70.00
Cleaning post tenancy		150.00	300.00		450.00
Maintenance/ Furniture		346.15			346.15
Removal costs				900.00	900.00
Bond loan				720.00	720.00
Rent in advance – HEF				720.00	720.00
Transitional housing rent foregone accommodation		630.00			630.00
Rent recovery - refuge / transitional		-240.00	-2,100.00		-2,340.00
Total cost for 1 client	1,051.00	3,898.15	2,651.75	2,595.00	10,195.90

Table 2: Costs associated with a woman and her children escaping violence being supported to **remain** in their home with Bsafe

Expenditure Description	Crisis accommodation 3 days	Bsafe Program	Total costs
Accommodation costs	315.00		315.00
Pre tenancy cleaning			0.00
Transport	75.00	75.00	150.00
Set up food and essentials	171.00		171.00
Replacement clothing			0.00
Household set up			0.00
Bedding & linen			0.00
Depreciation on appliances			0.00
Children school re-location costs			0.00
Support worker time	490.00	1,820.00	2,310.00
IAP support worker time			0.00
Housing support time & administration time			0.00
Bsafe Pendant installation		130.00	130.00
Bsafe monitoring cost		176.60	176.60
Bsafe Mobile Companion installation		200.00	200.00
Bsafe monitoring cost		302.52	302.52
Connect and disconnect of utilities			0.00
Power & gas checks – COMAC			0.00
Laundry			0.00
Cleaning post tenancy			0.00
Maintenance/ Furniture			0.00
Removal costs			0.00
Bond loan			0.00
Rent in advance – HEF			0.00
Transitional housing rent foregone accommodation			0.00
Rent recovery - refuge / transitional			0.00
Total cost for 1 client	1,051.00	2,704.12	3,755.12

3. Demographics

Bsafe clients – who are they?

Bsafe targets people in the context of intimate partner relationships and their children who are escaping family violence and/or sexualised assault. Over the three year pilot, a total of 72 women and 143 accompanying children lived in homes with a Bsafe kit. All bar one woman were escaping violence perpetrated by men they knew, including husbands, ex-partners or boyfriends and in one case, a schizophrenic brother. Another woman and her children were being stalked by the woman's mother.

The women were aged from their late teens to early seventies, with an average age of 35 years. Eighteen percent of participants were under the age of 25, all of whom had at least one child. The 143 children living with their mothers or step-mothers in a home with a Bsafe kit ranged in age from infants to late teens. Twenty-five percent of children were between 0 - 5 years of age, 45 percent were aged between 6 – 11 years and the remaining 30 percent were over the age of 11. For some of these children, exposure to violence had been a daily reality.

Race and ethnicity – how Bsafe crosses the cultural divide

In keeping with the demographic profile of the Hume region, the overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients, their children and perpetrators were Anglo-Australian. However, due to its ease of access, Bsafe can be invaluable to women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those with no or limited English language proficiency. A woman is not required to state her address or the nature of the emergency in order to obtain a prompt police response. Migrant and refugee women without permanent residency often experience difficulties accessing crisis accommodation as most family violence services are not funded to support these women.²⁵ Bsafe is an efficient risk management tool that assists culturally and linguistically diverse women and their children escaping violence to remain in the home.

²⁵ M. Athaide (2010) 'A Call for Justice Towards Immigrant women: Amending Australia's Domestic/Family Violence Provisions', *Parity*, Vol. 23, Issue 10.

Table 3: The ethnicity and nationality of women, children and perpetrators

	Women's ethnicity/nationality	Children's ethnicity/nationality	Perpetrators' ethnicity/nationality
Anglo-Australia	67	100	40
Aboriginal	2	10	5
Indonesian	1	1	-
British	1	1	1
Chinese	1	-	1
Serbian	-	-	1
Not recorded	-	31	24
Total	72	143	72

Bsafe – a tool for all abilities

More than 7 percent of Bsafe participants were women living with a disability or a range of disabilities. One woman had a hearing impairment, four women were visually impaired, three women had an intellectual disability and two women had a physical disability. Women with a disability are more than three times more likely than women without a disability to experience some form of intimate partner violence.²⁶ Research has also shown that women with a disability experience violence for more prolonged periods.²⁷ This is in part due to the fact that they have access to limited social and economic resources while experiencing numerous barriers to accessing services, that in turn limits their pathways to safety.

Bsafe supports women with a disability through the VitalCall system. VitalCall is a personal emergency response service that provides services within Australia 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. Originally designed to assist elderly residents to live independently at home, it also caters for people who have sensory and physical impairments. The reality for many women with a disability leaving violent relationships is that there is nowhere to go as women's refuges and housing services often lack the ability to meet basic physical standards for disability access.²⁸ Women with serious or long-term disabilities often have modifications to their homes, which makes leaving all the more complex and fraught.

²⁶ The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 75

Bsafe provides a risk management option that can support women with a disability to achieve safety at home.

Income and financial independence - creating a stable future

Financial insecurity was an ongoing reality for the majority of women and their children involved in the Bsafe project. Only 12 percent of women had any income; most of the women received Centrelink payments and some had no income whatsoever.

Longitudinal research shows that a victim of violence can have unemployment implications that continue for many years post violence.²⁹ Bsafe not only eliminates the financial costs associated with relocation and reestablishment but allows for the stability and sense of security essential to long term financial planning.

²⁹ S. Lloyd and N. Taluc, op.cit.

Erin's story

Abuse comes in many, many different ways. My relationship was based on control ... lots of yelling, anger, aggressive sort of behaviour. It did turn physical, which I never thought it would. It caused a great deal of stress, emotional turmoil, and fear I suppose. It's impacted on my children's wellbeing, emotionally, their behaviours as well. I'm very fearful for their development, again that stress weighs on your mind. Towards the end of my second pregnancy with my ex-partner I was told that anything I'm experiencing, my baby while in my stomach, was experiencing. You want your children to have the best start to life and the day he was born, he didn't have the best start to life, so he's been copping it from when he was in my stomach, and then to witness that behaviour after he was born, listen to the screaming, feel the tension come up, every time I got tense, he got tense and he got sick.

The turning point for me was when my then 3 year-old son laughed when his Daddy told me loudly that he was going to smash my nose through my face. And then my 3 year-old son laughed at that, and then he got in trouble for laughing and got told to come and say sorry to Mummy, as if he was the naughty one. To me that was like, it was a light-bulb, it was like, hang on a second, it's okay to threaten me, but it's not okay for him to laugh over such a stupid thing that shouldn't have taken place in the first place.

I stayed in my house ... My family violence worker told ... me about this kit that was available and I had hope that I could get resources [needed to stay in my home] but I was fearful. I had nowhere to go, I had no family in town, I only had his family in town, so to flee like that was a bit hard for me to comprehend because I have work and I'm a very committed person to everybody around me. So I did stay in my own home.

I've had numerous breaches [prior to Bsafe] ... He came to my house and that's where the violence escalated – where he was attacking me out in the street, where he threatened to kill me and he physically attacked me on that day and the children witnessed it all. From then he has appeared at my workplace, from the workplace he then did a threatening phone call at home. I've been very mindful of the fact that my children still have a father, he still has rights to being their father, and it's really hard, like you're going through a criminal system, a family system, an emotional system, and still dealing with the fall-out of a broken relationship. Mentally, physically, emotionally, you are beaten. He's still being charged but ... the process is taking so long to follow through.

You have the Criminal and the Family Law controlling it. So, you're going from one dominating, overpowering situation to another that you can't control. You can control your aspect of it, but it's out of your hands. It's a drawn out process which makes it so much harder. As I said to you previously, you don't get a chance to recover from being a victim. You're kept the victim.

I got the Bsafe Unit; it was brilliant for peace of mind. I mentioned the threatening phone call ... we'd only just had the unit installed and when the phone call came through, my eldest son had initially taken the call ... I've taken the phone off him, and we were talking, and it ended up being a very heated argument. When I've hung up the phone, my ex-partner had threatened to come up and you know, smash my head in again. And my eldest son had heard my side of the conversation, and my youngest son, he actually was standing by my legs quite distraught because he could feel how I was feeling.

So when I've hung up the phone, my eldest son has gone 'What's going on? I feel really scared Mum' and so we did everything we had to , locked the gates, locked the cars, locked the house and everything like that, and I turned around and said to him, 'You know what, out of anywhere that we can be other than a police station right at this moment, we're in the safest spot.' And he just looked at me, and I said, 'We have the BSafe Unit, that is an extra security measure for us, that means that we just have to press this button, and the police will be here because we'll have that assistance, and it's all recorded'. He looked at me and I looked at him and it wasn't like 'Ok that's taken away everything that's happening', but it was like, 'We are okay here, we are safe here'. Don't open the doors and if he comes, and if starts doing whatever, press the button. It was a great feeling knowing that.

I can now leave my house. I'm not locked in my house which is what I did right up until probably getting the unit. I wouldn't go out anywhere, I wouldn't take my kids anywhere, whereas now I'll comfortably walk down the street and go, 'You know what, I'm not as scared as what I was, you can't hurt me and you know what – I've got help'. Bsafe says to him, I have more devices available to me than I ever have before and I will use them, and that's wonderful – that's a wonderful power for somebody who's been victimised and treated like crap most of their relationship. The unit has given me, as I've said quite strongly, a sense of freedom, a sense of ownership of my life. I can say the unit for me has been a life-changing experience, and to think that some women aren't eligible for it because of funding, that actually makes me angry. You know, like who puts a value on somebody's life like that. And again, it's all about politics, and all about government funding and that's wrong, because this is a person's life.

4. Victims' experiences of violence and the risk posed by perpetrators

The most dangerous time - post-separation violence

The period shortly after leaving a violent partner places women at a higher risk of homicide, stalking and serious sexualised and physical assaults.³⁰ Australian women experience much higher rates of violence from an ex-partner (36 percent) than they do from a current partner (only 10 percent).³¹ Women who experience violence from an ex-partner are also more likely to sustain injuries and feel their lives are in danger.³²

All 69 women who were escaping violence perpetrated by an intimate partner were at serious risk of further violence, making their attempts to achieve a life free of violence precarious. Eighty-one percent of women reported that their ex-partner had breached a previous or current Intervention Order. Alarming, 89 percent of women who had ended their relationship reported an escalation in the severity and/or frequency of men's violence, despite the fact that only 65 percent of women had recently separated from their partner. For many women, ending their relationship did nothing to cease the chronic and on-going nature of men's violence and the danger posed to them and their children.

Pregnancy – a further vulnerability

Almost one quarter of women identified as being pregnant or had recently given birth when they accessed Bsafe. Pregnancy is considered a time of increased risk given that most women who are subjected to intimate partner violence first experience violence during pregnancy.³³ Intimate partner violence during pregnancy has significant implications on maternal and infant health, including increased risk of premature labor, low infant birth weight, prenatal substance use, miscarriage and postnatal depression.³⁴ For women already experiencing abuse, pregnancy is a period when violence often intensifies.³⁵ Two Bsafe clients had miscarriages as the result of their ex-partners' violence.

³⁰ C. Humphreys & R. Thiara (2003) 'Neither Justice Nor Protection: Women's experiences of post-separation violence,' *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 156-214.

³¹ J. Mouzos and T. Makkai (2004) *Women's experiences of male violence: Findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey*, Research and Public Policy Series, No. 56, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

³² Ibid.

³³ A. Taft (2002) *Violence against women in pregnancy and after childbirth: Current knowledge and issues in healthcare responses*, Domestic Violence Clearinghouse.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid

Weapons and Violence

Over two-thirds of perpetrators were reported as having access to weapons with more than one-quarter using a weapon in their most recent violent attack against the victim. Perpetrators' access to weapons, particularly firearms, increases the risk of serious assault and homicide.³⁶ Women identified men as having access to, and in some instances using, a range of weapons, including household items, axes, knives, fire arms and explosives.

A history of violence is deemed an evidence-based risk factor that increases the likelihood of perpetrators committing further acts of violence, as violent men 'generally engage in more frequent and more severe family violence than perpetrators who do not have a violent past.'³⁷ Eighty-one percent of men were identified as having a history of violence other than family violence. The men had been incarcerated for crimes including common assault, assault with intent to cause injury, assault causing injury, aggravated assault, unlawful assault and armed burglary. The threat posed by their ex-partner's recent release or imminent release from prison prompted some women to access Bsafe.

Mental Health

Seventy-nine percent of perpetrators were reported as having some form of mental health issue, ranging from depression and anxiety to acute mental health disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Eighty-eight percent of women reported that the perpetrator had a drug and/or alcohol misuse or abuse problem, including alcoholism and addictions to drugs such as marijuana, amphetamines, crystal methamphetamines and anabolic steroids. Abusive men with alcohol or drug problems inflict violence against their partners more frequently and are more likely to inflict serious injuries than abusers without a history of substance abuse.³⁸

More than two-thirds of men had threatened or attempted to commit suicide. Suicidal threats or attempts by men using family violence are a risk factor for murder-suicide.³⁹ In addition, all 72 women identified that perpetrators were exhibiting coercive, controlling, obsessive and jealous behaviour towards the victim and/or her children; behaviours that have also been identified as evidence-based risk factors for victims being killed or almost killed.⁴⁰

³⁶ Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 73.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 61

³⁸ J. Mouzos and T. Makkai op.cit.

³⁹ Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 74.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 83.

Men's use of violence against women

The overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients had been subjected to severe and chronic violence. Eighty-one percent of women reported that the man whose violence they were attempting to escape had threatened and/or attempted to kill them. Some women reported that it was simply a matter of time before they were murdered by their ex-partner. More than three-quarters of perpetrators had attempted to strangle their victim. Strangulation is a common method used by male perpetrators to kill female intimate partners.⁴¹ For most women the abuse was unrelenting with 84 percent of clients reporting that they were being stalked by the perpetrator post-separation.

Sexualised Assault

Violence of a sexualised nature was a reality for many women, with 43 percent of women identifying that they had experienced a sexualised assault and/or rape by the perpetrator. This figure is higher than that identified by evidence-based research that shows that around one in three women who have experienced physical intimate partner violence have also been raped by their abusive partners.⁴² Of these women, two also disclosed that their ex-partners had also sexually assaulted their daughters aged three, six and eight years old.

Victims and Witnesses – the Children

More than half (57 percent) of women reported that the perpetrator had harmed or threatened to harm or kill their children. In the CRAF case detailing children's experiences of violence, high rates of physical violence were evident, as were the incidents of children forced to witness violence against their mothers and siblings.

Men threatening or attempting to abduct children from their mothers was recurrent in many Comprehensive Risk Assessments. Some women were terrified that their ex-partners would abduct their children. For example, two men had attempted to abduct their former partner's children, while one man succeeded in abducting his ex-girlfriend's son from childcare and then *'threatened to kill him by crashing his car into a tree.'* In addition, a further two men had threatened murder-suicide against their ex-partners and their children.

⁴¹ Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p 73.

⁴² J. Campbell et al, *Intimate partner violence and abuse among active duty military women*, Violence against Women, vol. 9, no. 9, 2003. pp. 1072-1092.

Cruelty and Control - Men's violence in other contexts

Threat of, or violence carried out against family members, was one of the many ways perpetrators attempted to control women. Two-thirds of men had harmed or threatened to harm or kill family members other than the women's children. Two women identified that their ex-partners had seriously physically assaulted their mothers, who were subsequently included on their Intervention Orders.

Cruelty to animals, particularly family pets, is a coercive controlling strategy often used by men who used violence. More than one-third (40 percent) of perpetrators had harmed or threatened to harm or kill pets or other animals. Many men carried out acts of cruelty and abuse towards pets, most often the family dog. More extreme and sadistic scenarios include one man dismembering a cow then leaving it in his ex-partner's car; while another perpetrator killed a litter of kittens and then told his former girlfriend that *'he enjoyed watching them die.'*

5. Women's accounts of violence and the impact of Bsafe

Throughout the three year pilot, Bsafe clients were asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire after having their kit for three months, six months and upon exiting the project. The evaluation questionnaires tracked breaches to the Intervention Order (IVO), kit activations and the police response to determine whether Bsafe had lead to a decrease in recidivism. Questions also related to victim's safety, housing circumstances and social support networks. This section explores women and their children's experiences of:

- Bsafe kits
- IVO breaches, kit activations and the police response
- Women's perceptions of why perpetrator violence decreased or ceased
- The impact of Bsafe on women and children's housing options
- The impact of Bsafe on women and children's perceptions of safety
- Bsafe as a risk management tool for children affected by violence
- Bsafe and women's connection with social support networks, and
- Bsafe and women's access to relevant support services.

The Process - Questionnaires

Of the 72 women who accessed Bsafe during the three year pilot, half (36) participated in the formal evaluation process. Of these women, 13 completed more than one evaluation form. Of the participants who completed no formal evaluation, three women weren't able to be contacted by family violence practitioners or police and hence their kits were eventually cancelled.⁴³

Women experiencing family violence are often involved with prolonged Family Law Court, child custody arrangements and criminal court matters. Their lives are complex, involving high risk situations and an all encompassing hyper-vigilance for their and their children's safety. Understandably, completing a questionnaire that arrives in the mail was simply not a priority for some women involved in the project.

For some women, violence related trauma was exacerbated through continually having to retell their and their children's story of violence – to workers, the police, at court or via a Bsafe questionnaire. Once safety was achieved, some women were less willing to recount

⁴³ Please note that none of these three women ever activated their kits. Family violence outreach workers and the police have attempted to contact these women to determine their safety, but as these women were no longer living at the registered addresses they could not be contacted.

their and their children's experiences of violence as it impacted on their recovery and ability to resume a normal life.

Deterring Perpetrators

Bsafe increases perpetrator accountability through the provision of a more effective and streamlined police response that increases the likelihood that men who use violence will be apprehended and charged.

For some perpetrators, Bsafe operates as a deterrent as the prompt police notification and response allows police to apprehend and charge offenders who continue to breach IVOs. Women who activated their kits when breaches occurred were more likely to report that perpetrator violence decreased or ceased. For many women, prior to Bsafe, IVO breaches involved serious physical assaults. Once Bsafe was installed, these breaches often became psychological in nature with perpetrators resorting to threats, intimidation and stalking, which over time usually ceased.

Bsafe is a highly effective risk management option that contributes to perpetrators receiving a swift and certain response from the criminal justice system. Bsafe has the capacity to function as both a deterrent for men who use violence and as tool to increase perpetrator accountability through the provision of a more effective and streamlined police response.

Table 4: Perpetrator breaches to the IVO prior to and during the Bsafe Project

*Insufficient information provided

*Insufficient information provided

	IVO breach prior to Bsafe	IVO breaches 3 months	IVO breaches 6 months	IVO breaches until exiting	Status of men's violence	Colour scale for men's violence against women and children
Angie	2	1	-	-	Decreased	Physical violence
Deb	3+	3+	-	-	Unchanged	Sexualised assault
Grace	2-3	0	-	-	Ceased	Threats and/or to kill
Kirsten	3	4	-	-	Increased	Stalking
Liz	1+	1	-	-	Unchanged	Treats/property damage
Lara	1	1	0	-	Ceased	Calling/texting
Sue	5	5	-	-	Unchanged	Technically not a breach
Gayle	3+	1+	-	-	Decreased	Violence not specified
Una	10+	0	-	-	Ceased	No response provided (-)
Melissa	3+	3+	-	-	Unchanged	No IVO breaches (0)
Kacey	3+	0	-	-	Ceased	
Sally	1	0	-	-	Ceased	
Ester	0	-	0	-	Unchanged	
Jacky	2+	-	1	-	Decreased	
Lynda	1+	-	0	-	Ceased	
Lucy	2+	-	1	-	Decreased	
Irene	3+	0	0	-	Ceased	
Rose	1+	-	0	-	Ceased	
Pamela	5+	-	0	-	Decreased	
Kerry	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Kathryn	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Elizabeth	3+	-	-	N/A*	N/A*	
Sarah	1+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Claire	7	1	0	-	Ceased	
Charlie	2	3	0	-	Ceased	
Millie	3-5	0	0	-	Ceased	
Nicola	0	1	4	-	Increased	
Cassie	6	3-4	0	-	Ceased	
Tina	0	0	0	0	Unchanged	
Anne	1+	0	0	0	Ceased	
Tess	3+	-	-	0	Ceased	
Phoebe	1+	1	-	0	Ceased	
Kylie	3+	-	2+	-	Decrease	
Tracy	1	-	0	0	Ceased	
Mary	2	1	0	0	Ceased	
Tara	1+	-	0	0	Ceased	

Reduction in breaches and violence

Thirty-six women responded to the Bsafe exit evaluation questionnaires with a majority stating that the perpetrator's use of physical violence had ceased totally. In many instances men's violence continued in the first three months of women accessing Bsafe, though there was a clear shift in the nature of perpetrator violence; in some cases serious physical violence ceased as psychological abuse and threatening behaviour continued. In many cases, this too eventually decreased or ceased.

Of the 27 women reporting a decrease in perpetrator recidivist offending, 16 reported that IVO breaches stopped entirely once Bsafe was installed.

Two women reported activating their kit during a breach - this led to both men being cautioned by police. One woman reported that IVO breaches subsequently ceased, while for the other, IVO breaches decreased and there were no further physical assaults.

There has been a decrease in the number of breaches ... [I activated Bsafe once] the police arrived within good time and were very kind to me as I was panicked ... The charges were dropped because they were unable to find him and I haven't had any trouble in a while. (Mary)

A timely police response is essential to the effectiveness of Bsafe. For two women whose violent ex-partners continued to breach the Intervention Orders, the quick police presence provided a measure of security and in one case the offender was arrested and held accountable.

One woman's ex-partner consistently breached the IVO both prior to and while she had Bsafe. He attempted to run her off the road and then threatened to kill her.

He followed me in the car. He followed me around the supermarket and told me 'I have a hole dug for you with a tunnel lined.' I live in constant fear. (Melissa)

Melissa activated Bsafe and the police responded promptly. While the breaches hadn't decreased 'at least the response was quicker therefore he has suffered the consequences of his actions.'

Women said the perpetrator's violence stopped because:

Once aware of the kit, not knowing what it is but that I have something, he keeps away. (Mary)

Just before he was released (from prison) we had the kit installed. I have only had to use it the once ... He heard the system being activated and he left within two minutes. So it's a deterrent to him. (Angie)

We have had no contact and a mutual friend told him that I have a Bsafe alarm, which I believed stopped the threats in behaviour. (Kathryn)

The prompt police response that Bsafe provided resulted in the police charging two offenders with breaching the IVO. Criminal justice proceedings to hold men accountable for their violent behaviour was the reason violence decreased and/or ceased for six women. In these cases, perpetrator accountability brought about through criminal convictions, prison sentences or sanctions through the Family Law Court were inextricably linked to the safety of these six women and their children.

Jail 3-4 months. (Kacey)

Jail/rehab periods contributed to the decrease. (Cassie)

Charged with assault, on good behaviour bond for 12 months. (Sarah)

For some women a combination of factors - including Bsafe, relocating to another community, securing an Intervention Order with more conditions, effective perpetrator programs in conjunction with drug and alcohol counselling - lead to men's violence reducing or ceasing.

Moved and getting new Orders and Bsafe has helped decrease incidents. (Una)

A prompt and decisive response to perpetrators of violence from the criminal justice system, accompanied by effective perpetrator programs and appropriate treatment and support for offenders experiencing substance abuse and mental illness are effective strategies for improving safety outcomes for women.

How women used Bsafe

Of the women engaged in the three year pilot, 28 accessed both the mobile unit and the pendant. Five women accessed only the pendant, while 38 women used only the mobile unit. The option of the prepaid mobile phone was used by only one client. Of the 36 women who completed a formal evaluation, 31 reported that the Bsafe kit was easy to use. Three women were unsure whether the kit was easy to use, while two women stated that the kit was not easy to use.

Women decided how to use Bsafe. Some informed the perpetrator of Bsafe and its purpose, others wanted the perpetrator to be caught and charged so waited for a serious breach to occur before activating their kit.

The latter of the two approaches appears to be less effective in decreasing breaches and ensuring women's safety, as men who use violence require a clear message each time they breach the IVO that the criminal justice system will hold them to account.⁴⁴ More research is needed to determine whether a perpetrator's knowledge that his ex-partner has a Bsafe device is a deterrent to his violent behaviour.

⁴⁴ The National Council, *A Time for Action*, op.cit

Bsafe keeps women and children safe at home

Bsafe allows women and children to stay in their own homes and communities and reducing the risk of homelessness and poverty.

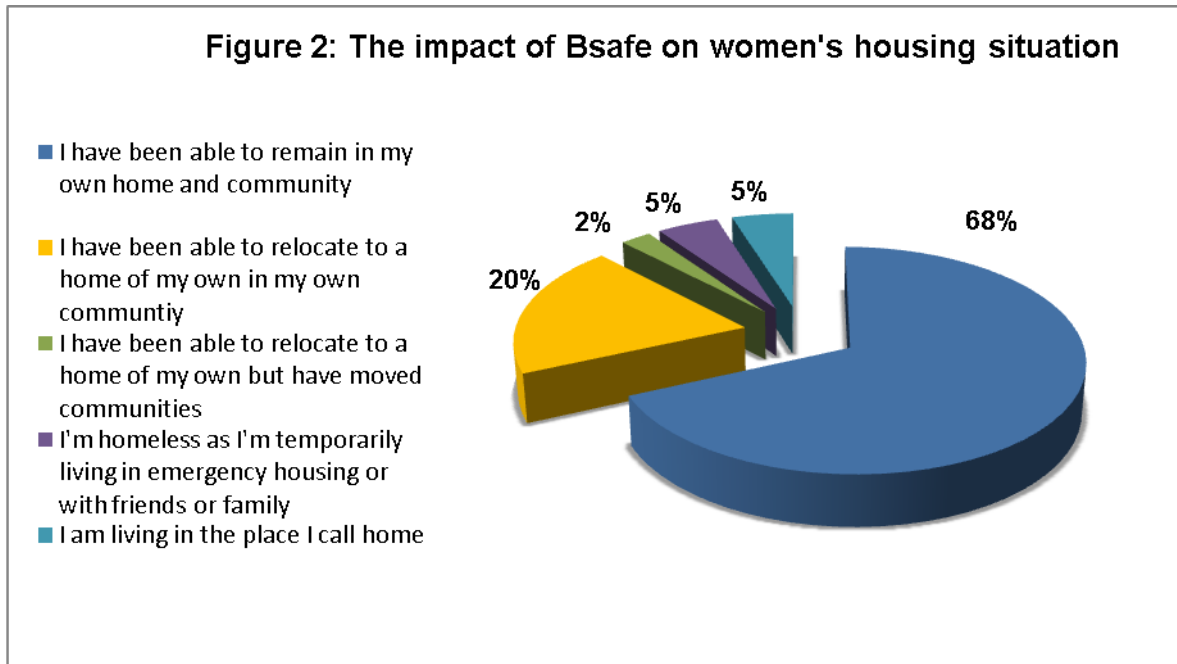


Figure 2 shows the impact of Bsafe on women and their children's housing arrangements. Sixty-eight percent of women reported that Bsafe's added level of security had allowed them and their children to remain in their own home and community. An additional 20 percent of women were able to relocate to a home of their own in their own community. For some, relocating to another house was the preferred option as some women didn't want to return to the property where they and their children had experienced violence.

Bsafe's capacity to support women to reestablish a life of safety in their local communities cannot be underestimated. The high rates of women and children who were able to remain in the family home are significant when compared with federal housing outcomes for women with children escaping family violence. Sixty-two percent of women involved in the project were able to remain in, or return to their own home despite their high risk status. Nationally, women and children escaping violence who access specialist housing services are more likely to exit into public housing than any other type of accommodation, with only nine percent of women returning to their own home.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2009) *Which Way Home: A New Approach to Homelessness*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, p. 35.

In addition to quantitative data relating to women's housing status, 14 participants provided accounts of the impact Bsafe had on their journey to secure safe and appropriate housing. Three women reported that the serious risk posed by the perpetrator meant that they had no alternative but to relocate.

He knew where I lived and I was constantly afraid he would come and kill me. I slept with my cupboards against the door and often felt vulnerable and helpless. I moved into transitional housing. I am in a safe place now and fortunately I was helped by the family violence service, the police and Rural Housing. (Millie)

I had to move right away from him to another town. (Sarah)

Three women relocated to a refuge or with their family due to the imminent risk posed by their ex-partners. After having Bsafe installed, two women and their children were able to return home, while the third woman with children relocated into a home of her own within their community.

I was in a safe house but now in my own place. I felt vulnerable at first but once getting the kit I felt a lot better knowing it was there. (Una)

I was in my own home but moved into emergency housing [then returned home with Bsafe]. (Lucy)

The risk posed by many violent men is so severe that women's refuges and other forms of crisis accommodation are essential to securing women and children's safety. Because Bsafe has a portable unit, women can take it with them when they enter a woman's refuge, safe housing, including transitional housing, or they can relocate to friends or family. Bsafe provides women and children with an added level of security and safety wherever they may be housed, either temporarily or permanently.

Risks of leaving home

For many women prior to Bsafe, fleeing their homes and communities had not secured their safety as perpetrators often maintained unrelenting acts of post-separation violence and intimidation. Some women, like Veronica, had relocated several times in an attempt to escape men's violence.

I've probably moved about six or seven times in the past couple of years. And so the last incident we had I was in my new house and either I was to look for another place to live or seek help from [Domestic violence service]. They were able to put

me onto this Bsafe, so I was able to stay at home and feel a little bit comfortable instead of having to run again. (Veronica)

The costs incurred by Veronica and other women reestablishing in another community, on numerous occasions, is in excess of thousands of dollars. This excludes the added costs of crisis services, accommodation services, legal services, income support and health and medical services that women and the community are forced to pay due to men's violence in the home.

Where to live – her decision

Two women commented that, despite being counselled by professionals, including police, to relocate due to the serious risk posed by their violent ex-partners, Bsafe had enabled them to stay in their own home.

Advised to move. Having Bsafe kit made it possible to stay. (Cassie)

I have been able to remain in my own home and community. The police would like me to move but I wanted to stay. (Tara)

Bsafe is a tool that supports women's right to self-determination in relation to where they chose to live and raise their children.

I stood my ground and am respected in the community. To be able to stay in my home with some better safety measures has been positive. (Tess)

We can sleep easier in our own home and we haven't had to move. (Mary)

[Bsafe has given us the] confidence to stay in our own home. (Kerry)

[Bsafe has] supported me in moving towns to get a fresh start. (Phoebe)

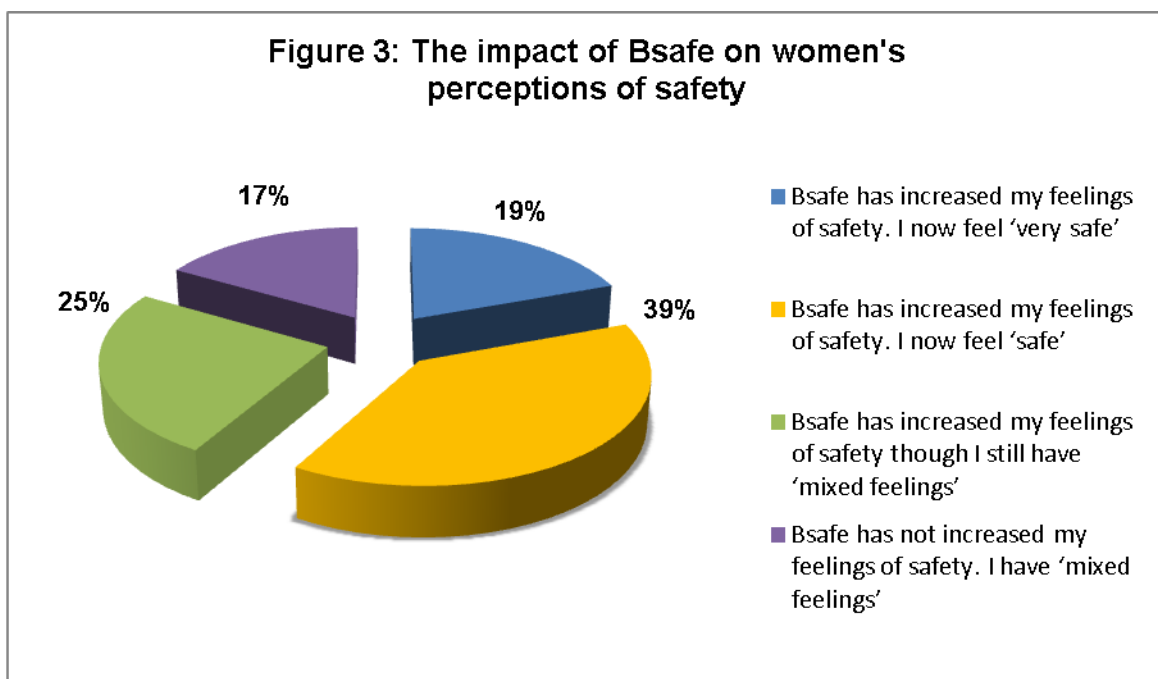
I was living out of town with my parents when I was feeling unsafe, but since I've had the Bsafe kit I went back to my own home. (Grace)

Despite this risk, for many women remaining in their communities, support from specialist family violence agencies, the police, other relevant services and family and friends - is crucial to their safety and the process of recovery. Bsafe provides an additional level of support and service enabling women and their children to remain in their homes and communities where they are better equipped to maintain social support networks, employment and educational opportunities, as well as stability of care and education for

their children. The cost, disruption and emotional distress of being forced to relocate is avoided.

How safe women feel with Bsafe

Bsafe aims to increase the safety and security for victims of family violence and sexualised assault. Women provided feedback about their perceptions of safety prior to, and during their involvement with Bsafe and rate these feelings on a scale of 'very safe', 'safe', 'mixed feelings', 'unsafe' or 'very unsafe.' Figure 3 depicts women's self-rated safety levels at the time they last completed an evaluation questionnaire.



The overwhelming majority of women reported that their feelings of safety had increased considerably following the installation of Bsafe. Fifty-eight percent of women reported that their perceptions of safety had increased to the point that they were feeling 'safe' or 'very safe'. A further finding has been the strong correlation between safety, kit activations and police response. Not surprisingly, women who activated their kit - either accidentally or due to a perpetrator IVO breach - and received a prompt police response were far more likely to report feeling 'safe' or 'very safe', when compared to women who had not activated their kit or who had received a poor police response.

Of the 21 women who reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' as a consequence of Bsafe, 19 provided further information about how the device had impacted upon their perceptions of safety.

Often when he was going off I'd pray silently for help.

I never stop worrying but it's nice to know that help will come. (Angie)

Before I had a Bsafe kit I was feeling scared that my partner will do something. But after I received the kit, it was easy to use, and I felt safe. (Esther)

I feel so much safer at home. (Lara)

Feeling safer in the house. It made [my children] feel a bit safer. (Kacey)

Bsafe increased feelings of safety by reassuring women that they were not alone and by providing them with the capability to act to ensure their own and their children's safety.

Having the kit won't stop him when he decides to come but knowing that I'm not alone and that help is a button away is very reassuring. (Mary)

Felt stronger to act, to take action. Felt like 'I'm fine.' Felt stronger in myself. (Phoebe)

I feel safer as I carry the Bsafe mobile with me everywhere. It is comforting to know I only have to flick a switch to let people know my daughter and I are in danger. (Sally)

Bsafe provides women with the safety to regain some normality in their lives and alleviates part of the hyper-vigilance required to keep them and their children safe from their violent ex-partners.

I still fear for my safety and of my new fiancée, as I don't know when he (ex-partner) is to be released. This is an ongoing fear I face everyday. At least with the Bsafe kit I know I can get help immediately. I do sleep better at night now. (Irene)

I don't feel like I need to pack us all up every time I feel threatened.

I can sleep at night. (Bsafe has) given me confidence... Police know the circumstances, know why and then I don't have to explain. Having to explain was initially difficult...To know that I didn't have to hide away... Significant impact on everyday tasks. Sanity. (Cassie)

I could go out and chop wood if needed when it was dark,

I wouldn't have done that before. I could arrive home at dark and unload my children. I wouldn't have done this before. Before I got the Bsafe kit I was basically

a prisoner in my home ... It changed my life, we could continue as normal, which was extremely important ... for us. (Lucy)

I used to feel unsafe walking around town not just from my ex but I was also worried about his friends and family but I'm starting to feel a lot safer. (Grace)

(Prior to Bsafe) I only had my mobile and often not much credit. Slept... fully clothed. Both of us (baby) slept together because we didn't feel safe, baby feels my reaction and doesn't feel safe... (Now I'm) more confident, safer, able to get police quickly. Sleeping quite well now and not wearing my clothes. (Charlie)

Better sleep, less worry. [My children] - they feel safer and happier. (Kathryn)

The sense of increased safety that Bsafe offered had allowed women to regain some personal strength and freedom in their lives post-violence.

As time passes you relax more though the possibility of his return is always in the back of your mind, even the kids bring it up now and again. The 'what if'. The Bsafe kit gave us back our strength and our lives. (Mary)

More freedom from my home. I now feel safe to walk my dog and ride my bike. I feel safer to go outside my home for work. I sleep better when it's beside my bed. (Anne)

I feel so much safer having Bsafe. Knowing how easy and efficient it is, having someone to contact immediately who contacts the police. This device has given me much more of a sense of freedom ... Completely life changing. (Nicola)

For one woman who had been living with the threat of her brother's violence for most of her life, the impact of Bsafe was profound. Not only did she feel as though her experience had been legitimised, but the kit reminded her of her risk status and assisted her to achieve safety.

It immediately raised my confidence in myself and knowing that I had support and a plan if anything went wrong. Just knowing that my circumstances are legitimised and that people care about my safety makes me have hope and feel safer. The kit reminds me about how important my safety is and prevents me falling back into bad habits that placed me in dangerous situations in the past. Being in a safe place can free up those areas of your life taken up by fear. Bsafe [has allowed] me

to feel safe and free my mind of fear. To think clearly made all the difference. I can manage my panic attacks. (Millie)

Nine women stated that while their feelings of safety had increased with Bsafe, they were still experiencing 'mixed feelings'. For women whose ex-partners' had breached the IVO, their feelings of uncertainty were a response to these men's extremely violent and unpredictable behaviour. Perpetrators' recent or imminent release from prison caused women considerable anxiety about their safety.

I had the security to feel safer at home. Knowing the defendant is at large and not being able to reinstate the IVO worries me. (Tina)

I'm a bit scared about when he gets out [of jail]... He's too unpredictable, but the Bsafe alarm makes a big difference because I know at least I can get help. (Claire)

I feel safe right now only because he is in jail. I feel very unsafe all the time when he's not in jail. Though my children are happier, feeling safer [with Bsafe]. (Melissa)

Feeling safe in one's home is a basic human right. Bsafe enables women and children to feel safe at home as most, if not all, of these women had lived in a state of 'intimate partner terrorism'⁴⁶ and had been overwhelmed with feelings of fear and anxiety.

Bsafe supports the complex safety needs of women and children escaping violence; this is one of the project's greatest strengths.

Violence and Children - Bsafe reduces risk, increases safety

The impact of violence in the home on children's health and wellbeing is profound. In total, 143 children were living in houses that had a Bsafe kit. The overwhelming majority of these children had been subjected to violence and/or witnessed men perpetrating what were often severe acts of physical violence against their mothers. The Bsafe system allows children to access a prompt police response without having to state their address or the type of emergency, as is required by the 000 call.

⁴⁶ M. Johnson (1996) Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57, (2), pp. 283-294.

Most of the children were aware that Bsafe was a safety mechanism. Many were taught by their mothers how to activate Bsafe if, and when, the perpetrator posed a threat.

My three girls are scared of their father ... [They are] too little to use it but the eldest has been informed of how to use [Bsafe]. (Sue)

They understand how it works and were glad we had it. (Tara)

They were told to press it [Bsafe] if anyone comes in the house without permission. (Pamela)

My 4 year old daughter is aware it's for emergencies and what to do. (Lara)

[My children] never asked any questions [about Bsafe] they just know it was for my protection. (Sarah)

My daughters understand why we have the kit. Knowing I can push a button without speaking and the police will arrive is a relief as I don't have to alarm my daughters of exactly what is going on plus it's definitely a faster response than dialing 000. (Jacky)

The children are aware if they push the button the police will come. (Gayle)

[My children] felt safe once explained and weren't tempted to push the button. When explained what it was for they slept better at night. (Lucy)

My son feels heaps safer with the kit knowing that(with) one push of the button we'd have the help of the police. (Lynda)

My daughter feels more secure and knows how to activate the Bsafe mobile, which gives her piece of mind. (Sally)

My kids have activated the kit on two occasions ... It was easy to explain to them how to use the kit. It made them feel safe. (Tess)

One woman spoke of how she used Bsafe to reassure children that they were now safe in their own home, which assisted in alleviating their anxiety.

[Bsafe] is reassuring for the kids. When we do get phone calls or he drives past, the kids turn into defensive mode I guess and I'm able to settle them by reminding

them of the system. They sleep easier knowing it's there and so do I ... They have pressed the [Bsafe] button once. I'm surprised they understand it's for emergencies only. If needed I am confident they would activate it. (Angie)

Women identified the helplessness many children experience in the face of men's ongoing violence. Bsafe provided children with a tool to assist them in getting help to ensure their own and their mother's safety.

To give them the knowledge that they can get help for themselves and they don't have to be in the situation where they can be hurt or I can be hurt. [So they are] very aware, stable in themselves. They could push the button and help would come. [It's given them] confidence to leave the house. (Cassie)

I was surprised how quickly they adjusted to having it. They understand what it is for and how to use it. They feel safer rather than inadequate as they can help mum ... It was reassuring to them ... that if we needed help it was there. (Mary)

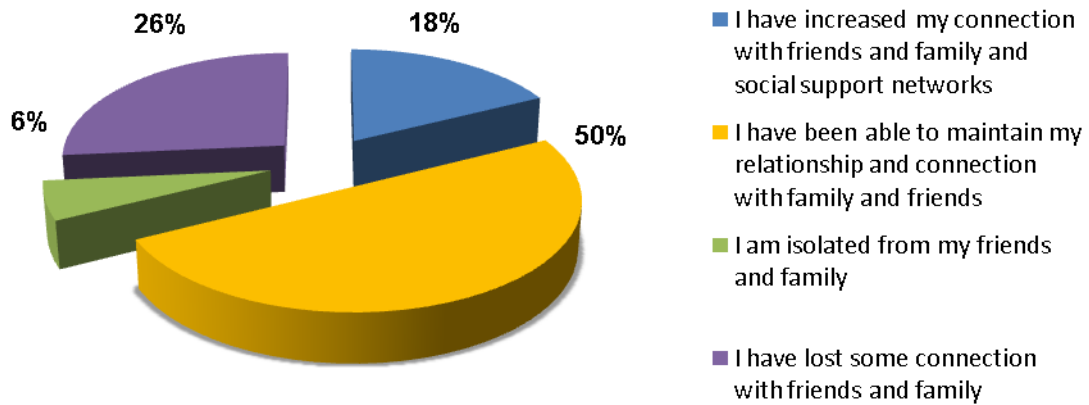
Cases involving children's use of Bsafe include a seven year old boy who activated the kit by pressing the wall unit button and shouting 'get help for my mum' after he saw the perpetrator at the front door. In another case, a woman's ex-husband had threatened to kill her and abduct their 12 year old son. In response to these threats, this child carried the mobile companion to school and at football training while his mother was safeguarded by the Bsafe pendant at home.

Most, if not all, of the children living in houses with a Bsafe kit have had their right to safety violated by men's violence. The risk of post-separation violence meant that many children continued to live in fear.

Bsafe allows women and children to resume a normal life

Connections to community, social networks, friends and family significantly impact on women and children's recovery from violence. Figure 4 shows the impact of Bsafe on women's social support networks. Of the 34 participants who provided information on this subject, 50 percent (17) of women reported that Bsafe had assisted them to maintain their social support networks and connection with friends and family. For 18 percent of women the added level of security Bsafe provided had enabled them to increase their connection with friends, family and/or their community.

Figure 4: Bsafe and women's social support networks



We have a better life now. We don't live in fear, we have family, friends and are involved with sports and community. I'm feeling connected to my friends and I'm hoping to return to TAFE in 2011. Without [Bsafe], moving on would have been harder and taken longer. (Mary)

Family violence undoubtedly impacts on women's ability to connect with their friends, families and communities. However, it would seem that by reducing men's violence and increasing women and children's sense of safety, Bsafe has supported many victims of violence to maintain or increase their connections with their social support networks.

Bsafe links women to support services

Bsafe provides women with a risk management option that offers an additional level of support through an integrated service response. Bsafe ensures that women and their children are supported by police, as well as specialist family violence or sexual assault services, who can assist with ongoing risk assessment and safety planning central to the project's success.

The support we receive is wonderful. The Bsafe kit completed the picture and reminds us that we are never alone. (Mary)

The police and services have been exceptional in their response and attitude towards me. I have to admit that I am at times overwhelmed by the level of support I am receiving but understand it's important. (Millie)

Reconnecting with [domestic violence service] after a period of not accessing services. Have felt fully supported, they are fantastic. (Kerry)

Lilly's story

I was in what you would call a volatile relationship in so far as it was just mental abuse at first, and that was just words being said. It started to get a little bit more physical, until my (then) ex-partner returned to the house and imprisoned me and basically abused me, and also raped me. He threatened to kill me on that evening in December. A counsellor at CASA mentioned about BSafe. I actually did return home prior to Bsafe being installed.

To me, an intervention order is only really a piece of paper is how I see it, you know, to keep him away. So the fear just intensified and I wasn't sleeping. I would go through what I'd probably call an obsession in so far as making sure everything was locked, you know I'd double, triple, quadruple check that everything was locked, windows were shut. I mean I just became more of a recluse in my own home. I am a strong person and I am fearing for my life because I knew that evening he was going to kill me and I think that kind of placated it. To be afraid in your home, to be afraid and not be able to sleep, it's just an awful feeling. Fear literally takes over from you.

In terms of moving house, I decided no, because why should I? I was the innocent party here, my daughter is at kinder – she's at an age where I don't want her to start all over again with new friends. I know she's very young – she can do that – but we have a great network of friends here, a lovely support group of people.

With the Bsafe, as I say, for me it was, it became my rock. My protection zone for now, I knew it was probably not going to be something that would in the long haul, but certainly it would start to allow me to gain back control and empower myself again. But most importantly, whilst I have a safety plan and an escape plan put in place, my daughter and I, and she's now just four and a half, and this is a very easy device for her to work with. We went through and we trained her into how to do this but you know if the BSafe device wasn't there, I do worry that if something happened to me, she couldn't maybe get help because, it's just something that I really worry about.

One of the things that I've lived in fear of is that for him to get to me the effective way in his eyes will be via our daughter, and that has always been of

paramount importance – not only my safety, but ultimately and most importantly is hers. I sat down with her and I explained to her that if at any time, Mummy couldn't be woken up or there was a problem with Mummy or you couldn't find Mummy for some reason or you were afraid, then basically you press the button, which is lit up. And I explained that if you press it, and there'd be a nice person at the end of the line who's there to help us.

Having Bsafe is just something that, she presses a button and every time I've made a call through VitalCall to have a test on it, they have been so remarkable, and so lovely as they answer the phone, that I always knew that if we were in a situation of danger that she would be quite happy to say 'Mummy, something's wrong with Mummy'. So yes, for me, it's an ultimate for basically retaining some sanity of not being in fear, and like I say, being in fear of your life. It's a horrible thing, it's takes over.

It's all about security, and feeling safe. Bsafe it helped me to sleep, 100 percent it did. I didn't really want anybody to know about Bsafe and for the reason that – I looked at it one way that I could make it known that I've got this which would be a deterrent - but at the same time for me it was a case that I don't want him to know that either its on my body or around me somewhere is this device that I could just press.

Last week I had a trial turning Bsafe off. I actually ended up having to go to a counsellor. I hadn't realized the true impact of the BSafe device until I actually disconnected, in so far as I just trialled moving it away. I realised that all of a sudden I felt exposed, I felt that I had no safety barrier, because the trial is coming up, I just felt very much at risk. The removal of Bsafe brings back loss of sleep and not coping very well. I started to not sleep. I'd fall asleep, and I'd literally hear everything. The wind's blowing something in the trees, and it then becomes a disruptive sleep, and then I can't get back to sleep.

I have this safety [with Bsafe]. It's just something that I can't explain. I started to actually feel safe because help was literally one button away, and I didn't have to then go through and explain who I was or where I was calling, you know, through the normal palaver. I think that's the huge difference between BSafe and just your normal telephone line with phoning 000. That's the difference between, in my opinion, saving a life or being in fear of your life.

6. Key Elements of Bsafe

Four key elements emerged as being essential to the successful implementation and maintenance of the Bsafe project.

The Bsafe eligibility criteria

People experiencing family violence in a range of family and family-like relationships were able to access Bsafe, including one woman who was terrorised by her schizophrenic son. During the project's first year it became evident that the parameters of the target group and eligibility criteria needed clarification. As a result Bsafe recipients must have an IVO with an exclusion clause that states the perpetrator is not allowed within a specified distance to the primary residence or workplace.

With a strong criterion we pick up the very serious cases. Everyone wants to know about the cases with the highest degree of risk. I know that all family violence has risk, but it gives Bsafe so much credibility to say that 'these are the cases more likely to end up as murders.' (Police officer)

The majority of women escaping violence perpetrated by intimate partners who access Bsafe, have shown a clear desire to emotionally, physically and often geographically disconnect from the perpetrator. The steering committee determined that Bsafe was unable to provide support for people wanting to maintain ongoing contact and a relationship with the perpetrator. Based on this rationale, the steering committee decided that people escaping intimate partner violence would be the project's target group.

Two women who did not fit the criteria were referred to Bsafe and were assessed on an individual basis which allowed for a degree of flexibility within the criteria.

The long term needs of Bsafe clients

It was originally anticipated that women and children escaping violence would access Bsafe for a period of between three and six months. This estimate was informed by evidence-based research that shows that women experiencing intimate partner violence are at the highest risk of being seriously injured or murdered during the initial stages of, or immediately after separation, particularly in the first two months.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Family Violence Coordination Unit, op.cit, p. 74.

We did have an expectation that women would have kits for a fairly short time. We were quite surprised that women were having them for up to a year and longer and are really reluctant to hand them back due to prolonged court hearings relating to Family Law Court and criminal proceedings due to the violence. (Bsafe coordinator)

Rarely did clients have their kits for less than six months, with most women accessing Bsafe for years. A small group of women had their kits for the entire duration of the three year pilot. The unanticipated period of kit access meant that a significant gap between the capacity of family violence services and women's support needs occurred. It became clear that while the family violence sector is primarily crisis-focused, women involved in Bsafe remained at high risk of experiencing serious, ongoing post-separation violence and therefore had long-term support needs.

In *Researching the Gaps*, Dr. Lucy Healey argues that there is a major policy and practice gap within the integrated family violence service system. Dr. Healey insists that the current system fails to recognise that some women and their children are at high risk of experiencing ongoing consequences of family violence and therefore require longer-term support, which at present is unsustainable in the current crisis-focused system.⁴⁸ Dr. Healey maintains that for the risks to these women and children to be properly managed, a suite of services is recommended, including the implementation of Bsafe to manage high risk clients at home.

The gap Dr. Healey identifies between the capacity of services and the long-term needs of clients was effectively managed for some time by the Bsafe coordinator, a social worker with over a decade of family violence expertise. She maintained ongoing contact with women via routine phone calls to monitor the women's safety and whether Bsafe was working effectively to meet their needs. However, as the project grew, this became unsustainable.

One of the biggest issues that was particularly highlighted during the caretaker position⁴⁹ has been the lack of follow-up by family violence services with Bsafe clients. What we found was that women had changed addresses, their circumstances had changed, or their Intervention Order had lapsed. Often we couldn't track women so a number of kits have had to be written off. There was a complete lack of follow up by services to the point where we had to contact the police to do welfare checks to see if women were safe and if the kit was still required. (Bsafe coordinator)

⁴⁸ L. Healey (2009) *Researching the Gaps: The needs of women who have experienced long-term domestic violence*, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services: Melbourne, p. 8.

⁴⁹ The project had a caretaker worker while the Bsafe coordinator was on maternity leave.

As a response, the 'Terms and Conditions' document was developed. It specifies that agencies are required to maintain contact with women for the duration of their involvement with the project. The minimum requirement is a monthly telephone call. Women are required to agree to have contact with their referral agency and notify them of any changes to their circumstances.

Bsafe's clients often have long-term safety needs. Issues such as Family Law Court, custody of children and men's release from prison, means that the risk posed to them and their children frequently fluctuates, as they cycle in and out of crisis. Women's help seeking and risk management processes are complex and active⁵⁰, and many need support to make decisions with new information about risks and housing and safety options.

The importance of the Bsafe coordinator role

The Bsafe coordinator must be a distinct role within an appropriate service. The role of the coordinator is pivotal to the success of Bsafe. It involves overseeing the referral process, ensuring timely kit installation, monitoring activations and police response. The coordinator provides essential ongoing communication to relevant key stakeholders about changes to process and practice and educates new workers and police about Bsafe. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is a key responsibility, as the coordinator monitors a newly emerging evidence base.

A major strength has been [Bsafe coordinator's] determination and great work to progress the project. That might not be seen by so many people outside the steering committee, but it has been the key ingredient required for the project. (Police officer one)

We need a regional coordinator for the project to be a success. There needs to be a continuation of the steering committee. The worker needs to be full time. (Family Violence Outreach worker)

⁵⁰ C. Thompson (2007) How Safe? Issues of domestic violence risk assessment for women who stay in their homes after leaving abusive relationships, Risk Assessment Workshop Presentation, NSW Department of Housing, p. 3.

Training workers in the use of Bsafe

Training police, family violence and sexual assault workers in the use of Bsafe is delivered by the Bsafe coordinator. Training covers the eligibility criteria, the referral process and the installation of Bsafe.

A critical component is the implementation of training for police family violence liaison officers, specialist family violence and Centre Against Sexual Assault workers. Training includes the eligibility criteria and the referral procedure as well as the installation process. The training involves how the system works with VitalCall and police response, as well as how to monitor clients' needs and usage and ensuring the process for returning the units is explained to women at the referral point. This can so easily be incorporated into CRAF training. (Bsafe coordinator)

The evaluation found that women who activated their kits when IVO breaches occurred were more likely to see a decrease in the severity and frequency of perpetrator violence. Activating the units ensured the system operated as a deterrent, increasing the likelihood that perpetrators who continued to breach the IVO, would be apprehended and prosecuted. This crucial information needs to be communicated via the family violence worker to women, in order to improve safety outcomes for them and their children.

Training for workers must be comprehensive so that the Terms and Conditions are understood and adhered to by both workers and their clients. This includes rights and responsibilities, notification of status changes, technical difficulties, police responses and the need to maintain contact with services.

7. Strengthening the Integrated Family Violence System

The referral process

Bsafe has strengthened an integrated approach to family violence through its referral process, clear procedures and protocols.

Once eligibility is determined:

- the family violence or sexual assault service faxes through the Comprehensive Risk Assessment and the IVO to the Victoria Police's Family Violence Liaison Officer (FVLO) and the Bsafe coordinator.
- The FVLO then completes a VitalCall referral form which is then faxed to VitalCall and the Bsafe coordinator

The current procedure ensures that police are aware of Bsafe clients in their local division and the high risk nature of their circumstances.

It is important that the police are actively involved in the referral process. They're a crucial part of the integrated system and need to be alert to not only Bsafe clients but also offenders in their local area. (Bsafe coordinator)

Police and service providers' perceptions of Bsafe's key strengths

For police and service providers the strength of Bsafe is its ability to provide victims of violence with a sense of safety while assisting them to manage the fear and anxiety associated with men's ongoing and chronic violence. Service providers insist that Bsafe had increased women's personal power and autonomy, as it enables them to regain control in their lives.

[Bsafe gives] clients the freedom to leave their home or feel protected whilst in their home. (Police officer)

I think Bsafe is an essential tool to assist women and children to feel empowered in the face of violence. A great strength is that it increases confidence and reduces fear. (Family violence worker)

Ability to seek immediate help without the perpetrator's knowledge [and it's an] ... effective tool that makes women feel safer immediately. (Family violence worker)

The greatest benefit to the worker is another tool we have in our tool kit for safety of women. For the woman it is about 'peace of mind' and autonomy in her movement and her ability to live her life with some sense of further security. (Family violence worker)

It helps women manage their anxiety and fear; for some women they feel that the perpetrator could turn up at any moment and kill them. In one case it has meant the difference between life and death because the police were able to respond immediately. (Family violence worker)

By far the most effective tool for family violence clients ever. It not only gave the women the power to stay safe, it also made my job easier as they were not so hyper-vigilant, were able to come to appointments and the fear response lessened. It acted as a safety net and reduced anxiety which meant that I could work on the effects the violence had on them. (Family violence worker)

My client appreciated having Bsafe to enhance her sense of confidence both inside and outside of the home. It allowed her to reengage in community activities. (Family violence worker)

Effectiveness of the police response

Bsafe is a valuable tool that assists the police in supporting victims of violence and ensuring offenders are held accountable for their criminal behaviour.

In terms of our ability to catch offenders it's fantastic. We had a situation... where a man was breaching an Intervention Order.... doing things such as lighting fires... but he was always gone when the police attended. We gave the victim a Bsafe kit and she used it. The police attended and we were able to catch the offender there at the property. As a result that offender was remanded and I understand that he was given a sentence. (Police Family Violence Advisor)

It gives the police that little added advantage in gaining evidence to take that person before the court. (Police Family Violence Liaison Officer)

As the women's narratives testify, the overwhelming majority of Bsafe clients have reported an appropriate and timely police response.

Overall the police response to women has been really good given the complexities of a project such as this one. (Bsafe coordinator)

The police response in the Hume region has been excellent. (Service Manager)

Bsafe strengthens partnerships

Bsafe's success is due to stakeholder cooperation and an integrated approach to family violence. Bsafe has contributed to strengthening the network between key stakeholders such as the police, the family violence and sexual assault services, VitalCall and the women involved in the project.

[Bsafe is] about ensuring that women have a journey of safety... It's about working together, so that each service understands what is required to offer her that next level of safety. (Outreach worker)

As well as being of huge economic benefit to the community, Bsafe is a great example of integration at work. From the time a woman requests a kit, the streamlined process involves the woman, the police, the Bsafe Coordinator, the family violence worker and the security agency. This process leads to greater safety for women and their children to assist them to live free from fear. (Regional Integration Coordinator)

It increases the links between women/children and police which are the most important links to be legitimised. When police believe and respond promptly they uphold the law and legitimacy; all other aspects of the system fall into place behind that fundamental first call response. Research has shown that specialist services such as family violence and sexual assault services tend to 'get it right' so knowing that police also are getting it right through tools/supports such as Bsafe is strengthening integration ... in the Hume region. (Service Manager)

It provided also a very unique way of conversing and interacting with police and in a sense created a strength and a conversation that was not present previously. (Family violence worker)

8. Directions for the future of Bsafe

Bsafe has successfully provided a risk management option for high risk women and their children escaping family violence and sexualised assault. This project has achieved considerable success, evident in part by winning an *Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Award for Excellence*.

Incorporating Bsafe into safety audits

The findings from the pilot and other Safe at Home models indicate the need for Bsafe to be seen in the context of a 'safety audit' of the home much like the NSW model, 'Staying Home Leaving Violence'. Incorporating a safety audit as part of the risk assessment procedure can assist in safety planning with women and is essential given the high numbers of women that choose to remain in their homes.

By including Bsafe as part of a woman's safety audit we are better able to assess risk and her individual circumstances. For example a tree from her property may need to be cut down so that she has a view of the street from the safety of her home ... By installing Bsafe as part of this audit, it becomes one of a raft of tools that works to support high risk clients at home. (Bsafe coordinator)

Tailoring risk assessments for Bsafe clients, particularly women remaining in their homes, ascertains the degree and imminence of risk, as well as identifying other needs including further security upgrades such as an inexpensive lock change. Incorporating Bsafe into a safety audit of the home that informs the development of safety plans with women and their children is essential for Bsafe clients who are at high risk of life threatening abuse. One practitioner stated that Bsafe is already being utilised in the context of safety audit and planning.

During my work when there was the availability of the Bsafe kit, I found the extra peace of mind with offering a Bsafe to clients at high risk, a very beneficial way of engaging with women. It provided a 'gap area' when planning around safety. (Family violence worker)

Formalising the process by which Bsafe is included in women's safety audits, clients are better informed about the potential for recidivism and the risks they face, which helps them make informed decisions about housing and safety options, including Bsafe.

Bsafe: A risk management option for rural women

Women in regional and rural communities face particular challenges in relation to men's violence in the home and in securing pathways to safety. Limited emergency accommodation and access to specialist support and housing, lengthy police response times and increased perpetrators' access to firearms are but a few of the added complexities for women and children escaping violence in rural and remote areas.⁵¹ With fewer specialist family violence and sexual assault services in rural and remote areas of Victoria, practical difficulties of distance and transport mean that for many women outside the regional centres, opportunities to access services or a plan out of violence become more precarious.⁵² For women and children living on farms and remote properties an immediate police response is unachievable due to geographical isolation. Bsafe's ability to provide support to women through VitalCall until police arrive has significantly increased these women and children's feelings of safety in times of crisis.

In my 13 years of working within the homelessness/family violence sector, Bsafe is the most practical, effective and useful tool that I have come across for women escaping family violence ... Many of our women would have opted to enter refuge or move away from their communities and supports without the aid of a Bsafe kit ... It is especially useful for women in rural and remote areas who are at a heightened risk due to their geographical isolation from breaches of the IVO and ongoing intimidation and fear. The fact that they can use their Bsafe kit to get in contact with someone on the end of the phone, who will continue to stay with them after calling the police, is very reassuring for these women. (Service Manager)

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children maintains that different responses are needed in rural and remote areas and that responses need to be tailored to meet the varied and specific circumstances of women and their children living in rural and remote communities. Bsafe has been successfully piloted in rural and remote Victoria with high risk women and children; a diverse client group whose needs for the most part have previously been unmet.

⁵¹ A. Alexander, op.cit.

⁵² D. Parkinson

Investment in the safety of women and children

Despite winning a national award, proving its cost effectiveness and receiving positive testimonials from women, police and workers, the future of Bsafe remains uncertain. This lack of certainty is a concern for women and those working within the family violence sector, particularly given that Bsafe demonstrates a capacity to reduce perpetrator violence, assist women and children at high risk to remain in their homes and communities and significantly increase feelings of safety.

It's like real estate – location, location..... Ours is funding, funding, funding. This is followed by support for taking the project to a state level. (Police Officer)

Showing the benefits of the system to the persons responsible for the funding so that the project may continue. (Police officer)

The other issue is the lack of ongoing funding, which creates uncertainty [for victims of violence]. (Service provider)

Funding to be able to offer it to all women who feel in need. (Service provider)

There are constant worries about sustainability. Otherwise the project could only improve. (Service Manager)

If 'Safe at Home' models are to become a legitimate option for women, particularly those at high risk of further violence, the introduction of risk management options such as Bsafe are vital.

9. Action – What needs to happen

Building on the success of the Benalla Trial and the Bsafe pilot, and the stated needs of women, workers and police, Bsafe must be established permanently in the Hume Region and rolled out throughout rural Victoria. The benefits to rural women are clearly documented in this report. Bsafe can keep rural women safer for longer and with less cost.

Urgent action is needed to:

- Appoint a state manager
- Appoint regional coordinators
- Facilitate buy-in by stakeholders i.e. police and Integrated Family Violence Services
- Train police and workers through CRAF training
- Plan for ongoing research and evaluation including longitudinal studies

On-going Quality Improvement

To provide an efficient, high quality product that makes a real difference to women and children's lives, Bsafe must strive to deliver the best possible service.

- Improvement of Telstra services in remote locations
- Ensuring quick installation
- Ensuring timely police response
- Securing on-going funding

10. What success looks like

Bsafe has given a new freedom, a liberation. (Service Manager)

I think it is a wonderful initiative that contributed to saving my life and I highly recommend it being rolled out for all women in high risk categories. (Millie)

Bsafe is allowing women to stay in their homes, stay in their communities, they aren't being blamed. It's putting the onus of responsibility back on to perpetrators. (Service Manager)

The program has proven to be a very effective tool in providing an enhanced security to victims of family violence. It also has proven to be a vital link between the persons involved and the attending police as it allows the police response to be swifter and more targeted due to the recorded details of all persons involved giving the responding police the ability to have known details before attending, which results in a better arrest rate of offenders. (Police officer)

Bsafe as an innovative risk management option for women and children at high risk of further violence has been highly successful. Not only does Bsafe operate as an effective deterrent for extremely violent men, the prompt police response increases the likelihood that offenders who continue to breach Intervention Orders will be apprehended, charged and prosecuted.

The impact Bsafe had on women and children's feelings of safety was profound. For women who had been previously living in a state of 'intimate partner terrorism'⁵³, Bsafe enabled them to feel 'safe' or 'very safe' in their homes and communities. The ability to sleep, regain some normality and a sense of personal strength and freedom are important outcomes for women. Children's understanding of Bsafe and how to activate the unit in times of crisis further identify Bsafe as a highly effective tool to support the needs of children escaping family violence and sexualised assault.

Perhaps Bsafe's greatest achievement is its potential to reduce the high rates of women and children experiencing homelessness as a consequence of fleeing family violence and sexualised assault. Women's added level of security provided by Bsafe allows them and their children to remain in their own home and community. Bsafe safeguards the autonomy and social support networks of victims, reduces the financial, social and health

⁵³ M. Johnson (1996) Patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence: Two forms of violence against women, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 57, (2), pp. 283-294.

impacts, and holds perpetrators to account by ensuring that they experience consequences for their violent and criminal behaviour.⁵⁴ Bsafe's integrated approach to family violence has been groundbreaking; allowing specialist family violence and sexual assault services, women's health services and Victoria police to work in unison to support women's and children's endeavours to live a life free from violence.

If 'Safe at Home' models are to become a viable option for women and children who are at high risk of severe and ongoing violence, interventions such as Bsafe must be made widely available, particularly in rural regions. Violence against women and children is a social justice issue, just as safety in one's home is a basic human right that must be protected and upheld for all women and their children.

⁵⁴ L. McFerran, *op.cit*, p. 21.

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Appendix 1 Project definitions of violence and sexualised assault

The Bsafe Pilot Project characterises family violence as the use of violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour by one individual against a family member or an intimate partner.⁵⁵ Bsafe recognises that family violence is a gendered crime, as overwhelmingly it is men who perpetrate acts of violence against women and their children.⁵⁶ In accordance with the Victorian *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* the Bsafe Pilot Project defines family violence as:

(a) Behaviour by a person towards a family member if that behaviour-

- (i) is physically or sexually abusive; or*
- (ii) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or*
- (iii) is economically abusive; or*
- (iv) is threatening; or*
- (v) is coercive; or*
- (vi) in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person; or*

(b) Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph (a).⁵⁷

Bsafe defines sexualised assault as any unwanted sexualised behaviour that causes humiliation, pain, fear or intimidation. It is sexualised behaviour that someone has not consented to, where another person uses physical or emotional force against them. Sexualised assault can include anything from sexualised harassment, through to life threatening rape.⁵⁸

In accordance with these definitions, Bsafe recognises that non-physical forms of violence are as serious and threatening as physical forms of violence. To be eligible to participate in the Bsafe project, victims were not required to have experienced or to be at further risk of physical violence, however only an estimated three of the 72 women using Bsafe had not experienced some form of physical violence from their former partner.

⁵⁵ DV Vic (2006) *Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children: Enhancing the safety of women and children in Victoria*, Domestic Violence Victoria: Melbourne.

⁵⁶ The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009) *A Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*, The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Canberra.

⁵⁷ *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*.

⁵⁸ CASA Forum: Victorian Centre Against Sexual Assault, Accessed online at: <http://www.casa.org.au>.

Appendix 2

B-Safe Process								Total Cost per case
1								
Crisis Accommodation				Return to Family Home				
	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$		Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	\$\$
3 nights Accommodation	3	105.00	315.00					
Transport	1	75.00	75.00	Transport	1	75.00	75.00	
Food & Essentials	3	57.00	171.00	Support Worker Time / Hrs	52	35.00	1,820.00	
				B Safe Program				
Support Worker Time / Hrs	14	35.00	490.00	SL1 Pendant - Installation	1	130.00	130.00	
				Monitoring Cost per Quarter	2	88.30	176.60	
				Mobile SmartlinQ - Installation	1	200.00	200.00	
				Monitoring Cost per Quarter	2	151.26	302.52	
TOTALS			1,051.00	TOTALS			2,704.12	3,755.12

Appendix 3

Established Process				Assuming 6 weeks Assume 1 Adult & 2 Children			
1				2			
Crisis Accommodation				"Refuge" Accommodation by RHNL			
	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$		Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$
3 nights Accommodation	3	105.00	315.00	THM Rent Foregone Accommodation	6	105.00	630.00
Transport	1	75.00	75.00	Transport	3	50.00	150.00
Food & Essentials	3	57.00	171.00	Set Up Food & Essentials	6	27.00	162.00
				Replacement Clothing	3	100.00	300.00
Support Worker Time / Hrs	14	35.00	490.00	Children School Re-location Costs	1	1,200.00	1,200.00
				Support Worker Time / Hrs	30	35.00	1,050.00
				TAW Support Time & Admin Time		35.00	0.00
				Power & Gas Checks - COMAC	1	80.00	80.00
				Laundry	1	70.00	70.00
				Cleaning	1	150.00	150.00
				Maintenance/Furniture	0.058	6,000.00	346.15
				Refuge Rent Recovery	6	-40.00	-240.00
TOTALS			1,051.00				3,898.15

Appendix 3 (continued)

3			4				Total Cost	
Transitional Housing			Long Term Housing (Private Rental)				per case	
	Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$		Quantity	Rate	\$\$\$	\$\$
Accommodation - 20 weeks	20		0.00	Tenancy Admin - Sign Up	2	36.00	72.00	
Pre Tenancy Cleaning	1	300.00	300.00	Removal Costs	1	900.00	900.00	
Household Set Up Costs	1	250.00	250.00	Bond Loan	4	180.00	720.00	
Bedding & Linen	1	480.00	480.00	Rent in Advance	4	180.00	720.00	
	2400	40%	480.00	Re-connect Utilities	1	75.00	75.00	
Support Worker Time / Hrs	52	35.00	1,820.00	Post Tenancy Property Mgr Time / Hrs	3	36.00	108.00	
IAP Worker Time / Hrs	8.75	37.00	323.75					
TAW Worker Time / Hrs	18	36.00	648.00					
Connect / Disconnect of Utilities	2	75.00	150.00					
Post Tenancy Cleaning	1	300.00	300.00					
			0.00					
THM Rent Recovery	20	-105.00	2,100.00					
			2,651.75				5,595.00	10,195.90