

Resolution of Council

20 September 2021

Item 10.5

Establishing a Publicly-Funded Women's Refuge in the City of Sydney

Moved by Councillor Phelps, seconded by Councillor Scully –

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note:
- (i) the 2021 Greater Sydney Covid-19 lockdown has had an adverse impact on family violence services and the women and children who need them;
 - (ii) according to an August 2021 report by Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) titled "The impact of the 2021 Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown on specialist domestic and family violence services, and their clients":
 - (a) 73 per cent of domestic violence services have faced a significant increase in demand;
 - (b) 84 per cent of services said there has been an increase in the complexity of the situations for the clients referred; and
 - (c) 48.5 per cent of the 33 services operating waiting lists have seen an increase in the length of their waitlists;
 - (iii) while the City of Sydney does not operate a refuge for those fleeing violent and abusive situations, there are a number of long-established and important specialist services in our Local Government Area providing accommodation, case management, material support and crisis care for women and children in need, which do provide accommodation for hundreds of people nightly;

- (iv) these organisations include the Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre, Elsie Women's Refuge and Women's Community Shelters, which have the specialist skills required to support women and children in crisis at some of the most challenging moments in their lives;
- (v) there is also Lou's Place which operates as a daytime refuge, Vincentian House, the B Miles Women's Foundation and Samaritan House that provide accommodation support to women experiencing homelessness;
- (vi) these organisations typically receive public funding from the NSW Government, which is responsible for funding social services, while some raise funds through philanthropic support;
- (vii) in 2021 the NSW Government allocated \$90 million to domestic violence services, \$60 million was for frontline services;
- (viii) another \$8.6 million was allocated for crisis shelters for 45 domestic violence services across metropolitan and rural NSW;
- (ix) the City of Sydney supports vulnerable women to access more affordable, safe and secure housing through various programs;
- (x) the Affordable and Diverse Housing Fund has provided a \$1.5 million grant to HammondCare that is a housing facility for people who have experienced long-term homelessness and has a dedicated floor for older women, and \$3 million to Wesley Mission for affordable rental housing for women aged over 55 who are at risk of homelessness, families impacted by domestic or family violence, and for key worker housing;
- (xi) the Chief Executive Officer is investigating a Notice of Motion by the Deputy Lord Mayor, supported by Council in July 2021, for a project that works with key sector services in our Local Government Area to provide affordable transitional housing for women experiencing domestic violence or at risk of homelessness;
- (xii) the City of Sydney works in partnership with Domestic Violence NSW and NSW Police to coordinate quarterly forums across the sectors working to respond to and reduce domestic violence;
- (xiii) the City of Sydney has delivered bespoke 'Cultural Competency and Safety' training for senior staff of domestic and family violence services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in the City;
- (xiv) the City of Sydney is involved in a pilot project called "Domestic Violence Pets in Need Program" that is funded by the Department of Communities and Justice to help survivors of domestic violence find temporary care for their companion animals while they are seeking safe alternative accommodation; and
- (xv) the City of Sydney awarded a Covid-19 Support Grant to the B Miles Women's Foundation providing support for women experiencing homelessness in 2021; and

(B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to:

- (i) consult with key sector services operating in our Local Government Area, such as those listed here, and Domestic Violence NSW, to determine the most impactful and appropriate way for the City of Sydney to continue to provide support for women experiencing crisis given the increased need as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown;
- (ii) draw on this consultation when investigating the potential for the City to play a role in establishing a women's and children's refuge;
- (iii) write to the NSW Government about how the City can work in partnership to support women and children escaping violent and abusive situations; and
- (iv) report back to Councillors via the CEO Update.

The motion, as varied by consent, was carried unanimously.

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