

Good Shepherd
Australia New Zealand

When Rigour Meets Reality: Lessons from a Developmental Evaluation in an Evolving Service Environment

How evaluation supported learning, adaptation and decision-making

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Why this work matters: interrupting the cycle of violence and unsafe housing

Family and domestic violence (FDV) is now at unprecedented levels in Australia

Children are victim-survivors in their own right even during pregnancy

1 in 4

women have experienced violence from an intimate partner since age 15

2.6m adults (13%)

witnessed violence towards a parent by a partner before the age of 15

100 women & children

every night in Victoria are in motels escaping FDV

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026) *Family, domestic and sexual violence*, accessed 3 August 2026: https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23, accessed 3 August 2026: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-22-23/contents/clients-who-experienced-fdv
McAuley Community Services for Women (2026) *New emergency accommodation platform supporting safer placements for women and children*, accessed 3 August 2026: https://www.mcauley.org.au/new-emergency-accommodation-platform-supporting-safer-placements-for-women-and-children/

Bridget House

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) partnered with Mercy Health to deliver an innovative ecological FDV emergency accommodation model at Bridget House. The development of the model was guided by lived experience.

Bridget House offers emergency housing for Culturally, Linguistically and Faith Diverse (CLFD) women and children, replacing motels with safe, culturally responsive, supported accommodation.

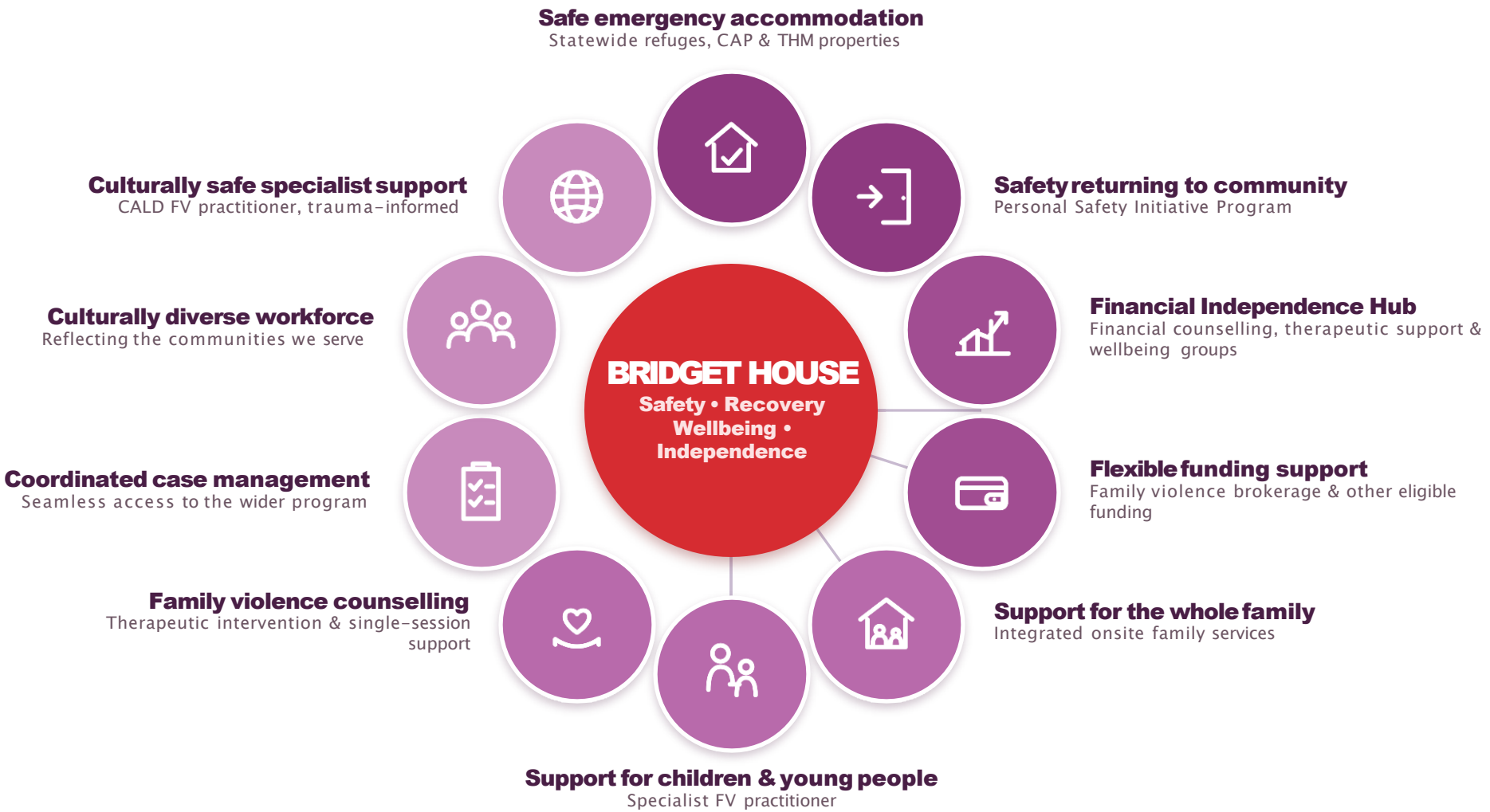
The model is piloting an integrated service hub offering wrap-around support.





*Photos are AI generated to protect client identity.

Bridget House integrated support ecosystem



Evaluating innovation as it happens

A Developmental Evaluation approach[1]

Key aspects include:

Ongoing learning and adaptation: Supporting real-time program improvement through feedback.

Practitioners' wisdom: Capturing the client journey, uniqueness of Bridget House , wrap-around support, and impact stories from observations of victim survivors' experiences.



1. Patton (2010) Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use, Guilford Press, New York.

Key evaluation questions (KEQs)

What we wanted to learn from this work

1.

How is the Bridget House model being implemented in practice, and what contextual factors, enablers and barriers are shaping delivery?

2.

What are the strengths of the model, and how can it be improved to better meet the needs of CALD mothers and children?

3.

How can evaluation findings and internal data systems support continuous improvement, future sustainability and funding decisions?

Data collection: reflective journaling for learning

7 structured sessions took place from July to November 2025 with staff involved in Bridget House.

6 staff participated: Specialist Family Violence Practitioner, Senior Specialist Family Violence Practitioner (Children), Specialist Family Violence Practitioner (CALD), Team Leader Family Violence Services, Team Leader Family Violence Therapeutic Interventions, Program Support Worker.

Monthly stakeholder check-ins supported continuous adaptation.

Journal-style reflections captured:

- Adaptations, barriers and enablers
- Decisions and learning moments
- Emerging outcomes for adult and child victim-survivors

Prompts evolved with staff insights and stakeholder feedback e.g., cultural responsiveness, implementation, monitoring priorities.

Data analysis: Reflexive thematic analysis

Practitioner journaling transcripts were analysed thematically in two stages.

1



Coding the transcripts

- Read through transcripts from the practitioner journaling sessions.
- Labelled important ideas and patterns as codes, using Braun and Clarke's six-step method[2].

2



Building the themes

- Brought codes and practitioner quotes together in one shared spreadsheet.
- Organised the codes into a hierarchy, then grouped similar ideas into main themes.

2. Braun and Clarke (2021) Thematic analysis: a practical guide. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.

This evaluation approach uncovered moments that matter...

What it takes to move from crisis to stability in culturally responsive emergency accommodation

Bridget House provides a consistent pathway for safety, choice and responsive support

PRE-INTAKE



Referral & preparation

Referral review and initial screening.
Sharing information on communal living, room set-up, dietary needs and any cultural or safety considerations.

INTAKE



Arrival, consent & children

Warm welcome and time to settle before paperwork.
Informed consent, understanding children's needs, and "getting to know you" form.

CASE COORDINATION



Wrap-around support

Orientation and planning with integrated, multidisciplinary support, cultural responsiveness in service delivery, children's specialist and therapeutic team providing counselling when wanted.

EXIT



Planning & transition

Early exit planning and transition support, with continuity of referrals into refuge or, where possible, longer-term housing.

More than a room: wrap-around support and what changes

Unlike hotel accommodation, Bridget House provides wrap-around support that meets immediate needs and lays the foundation for longer-term stability.

- Discussion of goals, safety and risk
- Structured activities and consistency
- Practical support and material assistance
- Accompaniment and access to services
- Emotional and therapeutic support
- Opportunities for connection and wellbeing
- Choice in routine decisions — groceries, clothing, budgeting
- Cultural responsiveness in service delivery

Outcomes for mothers

- Emotional wellbeing and relief from stress
- Belonging and peer connection
- Housing stability
- Awareness and ability to access supports

Outcomes for children

- Emotional and behavioural regulation
- Social engagement and belonging
- Positive emotional, social, physical and developmental outcomes

Reflection for evaluators: learning alongside practitioners
Identifying appropriate outcome measures, and how these fit into existing program delivery

Trauma-informed practice in service delivery

Unlike hotel accommodation, Bridget House reflects the key principles of trauma-informed care. These support emotional safety and more consistent engagement, aligning with the SAMHSA framework.

Six guiding principles of a trauma-informed approach



1
Safety



2
Trustworthiness & transparency



3
Peer support



4
Collaboration & mutuality



5
Empowerment, voice & choice



6
Cultural, historical & gender issues

> *We try to keep activities flexible and centred around families' needs… we don't expect them to work around our schedule. We avoid rigid expectations and offer flexible timeframes, allowing participation in ways that feel manageable and respectful of their circumstances.*
>
> **— Bridget House Practitioner**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

At Bridget House, these principles look like...



Flexibility in service delivery

Activities built around families' competing demands, with consistency and follow-through that help families rebuild trust and feel secure.



Sensitive conversations & emotional safety

Difficult conversations carefully managed — setting boundaries, offering alternative activities, or deferring discussions, especially for children.



A predictable, responsive environment

Flexible scheduling and tailored activities model consistency and reliability, this is significant for children who may not have known stable environments.



Choice & autonomy

Children consulted before activities and offered alternatives; women exercise choice in routine decisions like groceries, clothing and budgeting.

> *I won't make promises to children about what we're doing tomorrow unless I know it's going to happen… that follow-through shows we mean what we say and helps build trust.*
>
> **— Bridget House Practitioner**

Reflection for evaluators – how does this or could this show up in your evaluation practice?

Cultural responsiveness in service delivery

Staff assess and respond to individual cultural needs often within the first week, while acknowledging the challenge of meeting diverse needs.



Assessing & responding to cultural needs

Dietary preferences and religious practices gathered early. Support to access culturally appropriate food, clothing, and materials such as prayer mats or beads.



Open dialogue & collaboration

Ongoing conversations and interpreters used to understand preferences and avoid assumptions — recognising not all needs can be anticipated in advance.



Using feedback to strengthen responsiveness

Client feedback drives improvement — for example, purchasing religious texts or other culturally meaningful items to enhance inclusivity.

> *A client today is being taken to the Indian grocer… we've supported a client to buy culturally appropriate clothing… and we have books, beads, and prayer mats available on site if needed.*
>
> **— Bridget House Practitioner**

Reflection for evaluators – how can we apply cultural responsiveness to evaluation?

Data collection: working as an in-house evaluator

Working with practitioners in real time

Benefits:

- Supports adaptation as the program evolves
- Strengthens reflective practice
- Provides an independent perspective
- Generates timely evidence for funding
- Builds evaluation capability

Challenges:

- Competing priorities during implementation
- Balancing learning with accountability
- Evolving program design
- Maintaining independence and collaboration



Positionality

- Psychologist
- Academic
- Language other than English

Future considerations when working 'in-house'

- Number of engagements
- Modality (e.g. joint sessions vs 1:1)
- Making better use of real-time data
- Creating organisational memory

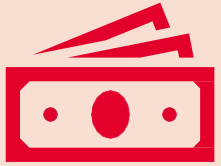
What can evaluators learn from this?



Even in developmental and process evaluations, there is often a strong expectation to demonstrate outcomes. Evaluators need to balance these expectations of demonstrating program value with maintaining integrity and scope.



Aligning evaluation approaches with practitioners' existing ways of working (e.g. reflective practice) leverages familiar processes to encourage meaningful engagement, strengthen participation, and provides an avenue for community of practice.



Resourcing for culturally safe and trauma informed engagement with clients must be part of evaluation supports and planning.

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Thank you

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