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## **inSpire delivers emergency relief to meet urgent needs of migrant and refugee families experiencing family violence**

COVID-19 has impacted each and every one of us in some way, experiencing emotions and hardships that no one could have ever expected. But throughout all of this, it's heartening to know that there is some good that has emerged, with organisations and individuals responding positively to the situation.

inTouch's inSpire initiative has quickly pivoted to provide emergency relief to meet the urgent needs of some of inTouch's most vulnerable clients in Melbourne. With the incredible support of local social enterprises and philanthropic support from the Collier Charitable Foundation and the Barlow Foundation, inTouch staff and volunteers have hand delivered 342 emergency relief packs, including \$20,000 worth of essential food items since 30 April. An incredible 739 weeks' worth of food has been delivered to 91 clients, supporting 201 people in total, and the impact of the deliveries cannot be underestimated. They have also enabled a unique opportunity to touch base and connect with high-risk, isolated clients during COVID-19, allowing staff and volunteers to check-in and provide brief, but vital, social interaction.

"The support we receive from inSpire is a lifeline. When we opened our first food pack I was so overwhelmed I couldn't help but cry! That night, I cooked my daughter's favourite meal and for the first time in weeks we sat together as a family to eat and talk, with a smile on our faces. Knowing that inSpire will be there to help us makes more difference than you can ever know. It's so much more than just food, it gives me strength in my body and hope in my heart", said inTouch client Liana\*.

When Liana reached out to inTouch, her situation was critical. A mother of two and migrant to Australia, the life she'd worked so hard to build had crumbled around her. Ineligible for JobKeeper or Centrelink, she was one of the first in her workplace to be let go when the pandemic hit. As financial stresses began to build, so too did the severity of family violence she endured. Thanks to the support from her inTouch Case Manager, Liana has found safety in temporary accommodation, away from family violence. But with no family in Australia to lean on, her situation remains precarious, making it difficult to provide for her family.

CEO of inTouch Michal Morris said that during COVID-19 case managers have seen an increase in requests for help, and have made a huge 8,490 contacts with clients between April-June, an increase of 36% compared to previous quarters. Ms Morris said that this demonstrates the complexity of clients' needs during COVID-19 as they are making contact more, and of particular concern are the number of requests for financial assistance due to loss of income because of the pandemic.

"A significant number of our clients like Liana, are on temporary visas and are ineligible for government income support, including stimulus initiatives implemented in response to COVID-19. This has left many of our clients and their children in an even more vulnerable position. Not only are they experiencing family violence and trying to seek safety and stability during the current climate, but they need support to meet even their most basic day-to-day needs", said Ms Morris.

Each day, inTouch Case Managers work to support and advocate for clients' safety and access to essential needs. But with support services overwhelmed with calls for help, this task is harder than

ever. inTouch Case Manager Vera\* said that this kind of support is so important for clients because it provides an immediate response to their basic needs.

“It gives them a sense of relief, taking the pressure off having to worry about being able to put food on the table. The packs are not only good for their nutrition, but also for their mental health. Clients have told me they feel like they haven’t been forgotten in the community, and are being acknowledged. It gives them a sense of dignity”, said Vera.

The inSpire emergency relief packs include much needed culturally appropriate, seasonal and locally sourced fresh fruit, vegetables and staple pantry items from Sibling by Kinfolk in Carlton North.

“We’re incredibly privileged and grateful to be in a position to help facilitate this important food relief for inTouch clients”, said Sibling by Kinfolk Operations Manager, Johanna Reilly.

Information on COVID-19 has also been provided in the packs, in the women’s own languages, ensuring they and their families are aware of the latest restrictions and how to avoid putting themselves and their children in any further risk. Most recently, reusable cloth masks have also been included in to the packs thanks to generous funding from the Edward Wilson Estate.

“Having information provided in their own language has given our clients a clearer understanding of the stage 4 restrictions. Clients have told me that having masks provided has given them a sense of care and duty to wear them. It’s also meant that they’re not worrying about how they are going to afford buying them, or risk being fined if they can’t afford them”, said Vera.

Teaming up with Collingwood’s The Social Studio, a remarkable 2000 masks will be provided over a four-week period to inTouch clients in need. Part educator, part retailer, part production house and all about people, The Social Studio is a not-for-profit social enterprise that uses fashion and creativity as a cultural connector to create work and learning opportunities for Melbourne’s refugee and new migrant communities. CEO Cate Coleman said they had received an influx of bulk orders for cloth face masks since wearing them became mandatory in Victoria.

“We are so proud to be able to support this project and be able to do our part in supporting vulnerable women from migrant and refugee communities who are experiencing family violence”, said Ms Coleman.

CEO of inTouch said that connecting those in need with essential items would not have been possible without the community coming together and the help provided from all of our supporters, including individuals who have donated directly to inSpire.

“On behalf of our clients and their families, thank you. It’s so heart-warming to know that even during a pandemic, there are people out there who want to help vulnerable members of our community when they need it most”, said Ms Morris.

**ENDS**

For media and interview inquiries, contact Sonia Morabito, Communications Coordinator, 03 9413 6568 or email [soniam@intouch.org.au](mailto:soniam@intouch.org.au)

\*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

### Quotes attributable to inTouch clients

In the interests of safety and confidentiality, the following quotes are attributable to inTouch clients, however they are not available for interview.

“Due to this difficult time free groceries really help me a lot. I don't have a job and facing a lot of financial issues. These groceries really helps me a lot. Because of Covid-19, I face so many problems to finding a job. I don't have a car so whenever I need something I used public transport so it helps me not to use such public transport frequently. In order to safe myself and also others. Whenever I received groceries it saves my time and money. I really appreciate your efforts”, - inTouch client

“It was the most beautiful thing that people ever done for me. I wouldn't be able to put a meal on the table without your support”, - inTouch client

“Thank you so much, I don't have enough words to thank you. Thank you so much for all that you're doing for me”, - inTouch client

“It has given me a sense of dignity to be able to provide food for my 3 children”, - inTouch client

“Having four children with large consumption each week made me fear of food shortages, especially when we have been in tied budget. The food delivery had saved me from being stressed”, - inTouch client

“I don't have Centrelink and I was eating canned tuna for days. Since I have been receiving food aid now I have a lot of food”, - inTouch client

inTouch provides person-centred, integrated, culturally responsive family violence services to migrant and refugee communities across Victoria. We are the only accredited family violence service in Australia specialising in culturally tailored support and programs for both victim-survivors and perpetrators.

For over 35 years, inTouch has assisted more than 20,000 women from refugee and migrant backgrounds whose lives are devastated by family violence.

The inSpire initiative was established in 2018 to support Victorian refugee and migrant women moving beyond family violence, helping them establish their economic independence and emotional wellbeing.

For more information see [intouch.org.au](http://intouch.org.au)