

A bottle shop spat could lead to a much-needed women's refuge in this booming suburb



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What began as a local controversy over the opening of a new bottle shop near a home for vulnerable men in Melbourne's north has triggered a multimillion-dollar quest to build the first women's shelter in the same community. But many hurdles remain before the booming suburb will be able to offer safe refuge for women fleeing domestic violence.

The booming outer suburb of Greenvale got its first bottle shop in 2024. It is hoped the region will soon have its first crisis shelter for women fleeing family violence, after the owner of the shopping centre where the bottle shop is located donated a vacant block of land to the cause.



Tamara Nolan, Greenvale Residents Association president, with Jamie Gray, Greenvale Shopping Centre owner, and Sophie Panigirakis of Women's Community Shelters, are working to open the first community-run shelter in Melbourne's north. EDDIE JIM

The facility would be one of the first among a new wave of community-led women's shelters proposed for Melbourne, expanding on a non-government model that has succeeded in Sydney.

NSW-based provider Women's Community Shelters operates eight shelters in Sydney and plans to open its first Victorian shelter on the Mornington Peninsula this year. Greenvale would be the second.

"It is actually a first," Women's Community Shelters chief executive Annabelle Daniel said of the donation of vacant land.

"Here's a generous philanthropist who is making an in-kind donation that will have a significant impact on our ability to get going, which is very exciting."

A series of conversations between shopping centre owner Jamie Gray and Greenvale Residents Association president Tamara Nolan were crucial to kick-starting the project.

“Jamie [Gray] was getting a liquor licence for the packaged alcohol store that they put in, which was sort of disputed years ago,” Nolan said. “Some didn’t want to have it in there because of Corpus Christi, which was an aged care facility for men only.”

The shelter gave those men a way out of homelessness, often linked with alcohol addiction, and the controversy sparked a discussion between Nolan and Gray about the lack of any dedicated local shelter for women.

Gray, who owns a property group that has developed several shopping centres valued at more than \$200 million, also owns an empty block of land elsewhere in the City of Hume.

Gray contacted Women’s Community Shelters and offered them his land.

“I’m not looking for any pats on the back,” Gray said. “I’m doing it because I think the block of land is sitting there doing nothing, and it could be put to good use.”

Though grateful, Daniel warns that securing a site is no guarantee the crisis shelter will be built.

The organisation is seeking private sector donations and a state government contribution to build the facility, which has an estimated cost of \$2.9 million. It is hoped the shelter will have enough room to accommodate six women and their children at any one time.



A community-run women’s shelter in Revesby, in outer suburban Sydney, is one of eight in NSW. The organisation seeks to expand into Melbourne. BIYANI HOUSE

More than one in two women who seek accommodation in a crisis shelter are turned away, according to data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

“Those are really the tip of the iceberg. There’s a lot more out there that never know that they can ask for help,” Daniel said.

The institute’s data also shows that the proportion of people who say they would know where to turn for external help shrunk, from 60 per cent to 56 per cent, between 2017 and 2021.

In outer-suburban growth areas such as Hume, facilities can be even harder to find. Women frequently end up being placed in hotels and motels that are unsuitable, Daniel said.

“It’s not an ideal situation. If it gets to late at night and you’ve got four kids bundled into one double bed and your abusive ex-partner’s texting you, ‘I’m really sorry. I promise it won’t happen again, just come home’, the likelihood is that somebody will return to abuse rather than receiving the support they need to leave,” she said.



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Rates of family violence in Hume are similar to the statewide average, at 1386 incidents per 100,000 people, but the raw number of incidents is rising in line with population growth in the booming municipality.

The number of people receiving support for homelessness due to family violence hit a five-year high of 1832 in 2024-25. Emergency department presentations and ambulance patient numbers also peaked at 285 and 68 for domestic violence respectively, Crime Statistics Agency data reveals.

There is no established women's crisis shelter in Hume, which is home to more than 270,000 people.

A Hume City Council spokesperson said local service providers reported long waitlists for crisis accommodation, with women spending more time in interim housing before they move into longer-term options.

"The state government has committed funding for additional crisis accommodation places, but not for staffing those sites, so progress is being made, but gaps remain," the spokesperson said.

A community forum on the proposed women's shelter will be held at Aitken College, Greenvale, at 6.30pm on Wednesday evening.

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