

# Families left with nothing

BY MICHELLE SMITH

IN THE first week of what is supposed to be a festive month for everyone, almost three quarters of the families that Eureka Mums have supported have been fleeing domestic violence.

The social, emotional and financial pressures of the COVID-lockdown have driven a spike in domestic violence across Ballarat and in many cases women and children are leaving with little except for the clothes on their back.

"One morning this week we helped with an emergency involving severe domestic violence and they were leaving town. We supplied items because they left home with nothing," said Eureka Mums operations manager Trinsa Lewis.

On Wednesday, every single bundle of clothing, toys and other goods that case workers picked up from Eureka Mums' Sebastopol warehouse went to families escaping domestic violence.

"It's shocking and it's disappointing but that's the reality at the moment," Ms



**HELPING:** Beck Moss and Trinsa Lewis at the Eureka Mums warehouse where they have seen a big increase in families needing help to re-establish themselves after fleeing domestic violence. **Picture:** Kate Healy

Lewis said. "It has gotten worse and I don't think we've seen the full effect of it yet.

"Social workers haven't been able to meet all families face to face and I don't think we fully understand what is

happening."

Sadly Ms Lewis believes demand for help from case workers supporting women and children fleeing domestic violence will further increase once Job Keeper and

other COVID-19 government financial supports end next year and financial pressure ramps up on disadvantaged families, many of whom have lost jobs during 2020.

"People are getting mon-

ey and support they don't normally get and once that disappears we are going to see more people needing our support," she said.

Panic buying during the early stages of the pandemic increased pressure on families struggling to make ends meet.

"When people started panic buying nappies we were getting a huge number of requests from families who couldn't afford to buy the bigger boxes of nappies. They could only buy what they could afford that week and those (smaller) packs had been sold," she said.

During non-panic buying times supplying the basics for a baby or toddler - nappies, wipes and formula - can ease the pressure and free up enough money to put food on the table.

"We've had caseworkers say if you can give say nappies to a family, when you take the price of nappies off the shopping list that's a lot more food you are able to put on the table."

Christmas over-spending is the next big challenge that Eureka Mums expect to see.

"Over Christmas people will be determined to make up for the life we have had this year and Christmas unfortunately always causes issues money-wise so we will see the side effects of that next," she said.

So far this year Eureka Mums has supported 1600 babies and children, handing out second-hand goods worth just under \$500,000. Among them are almost 600 bundles of clothes and almost 100 cots.

Ms Lewis said while donations were always welcomed, the charity needed cash donations to allow them to repair donated goods and buy cots, among other supplies.

"We often get prams, high-chairs and cots needing bolts or repairs and that's what a cash donation will help us do - to be able to save things from landfill - but we can't fix things and rehome them without funding," she said.

The regulations around cots are strict and the charity often buys cots to send to families with nowhere for their infants to sleep.

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