



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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**SELECT COMMITTEE ON COST OF LIVING PRESSURES IN THE ACT**  
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT

**Submission Number: 010**

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# **ROUNDABOUT CANBERRA SUBMISSION**

**Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT**

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# SAFE, ESSENTIAL MATERIAL GOODS FOR LOCAL CHILDREN

## Who we are

Roundabout Canberra was founded in 2018 as a way to donate second-hand baby, parenting and children's goods to families in need. Roundabout Canberra provides families experiencing hardship in Canberra and the surrounding regions with essential items and equipment to ensure the safety, wellbeing and dignity of their children; and to support their participation in everyday activities.

Roundabout Canberra's team of over 250 volunteers sort, clean and prepare donated items, which are provided to families via a network of more than 100 Canberra-region services and charities. We support those services by ensuring that essential items are in excellent condition and are readily available for their clients.

As an organisation, Roundabout Canberra has become a leading agency in the support of families in the ACT and surrounding areas; and Canberra's number one option for the recirculation of baby and children's items. We have developed a model which is volunteer powered, people centric, environmentally responsible and has become a critical element of Canberra's support system for vulnerable families.



**every child deserves  
A SAFE START**



**every family deserves  
DIGNITY**

## How we help

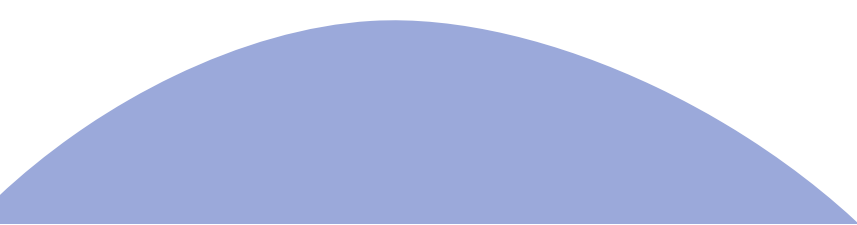
Roundabout is unique in that we do not work directly with individuals. Our role is to support social services who are the experts in providing support to vulnerable families.

We know that the first 1000 days of a child's life is the most formative, and by providing safe, clean, and essential items for a baby, we are playing an important role in ensuring that every baby gets a safe start. We are committed to providing every baby access to essential items to keep them safe, and we always have a safe sleep space and safe transport option (car seat and/or pram) available at all times for our social service partners.

We are also fulfilling a significant need in the community for older children (up to 16 years) and their families. We know that the pressures to fit in at school for children can be overwhelming and have detrimental impacts on their schooling participation, mental health, and social wellbeing. By providing high quality clean and essential clothing, toiletries and school supplies, we are empowering children to feel like they are respected and can fit in at school with their peers. We are alleviating both the financial burden on their carer and improving the wellbeing of the family unit and the child.

By providing material support, the social service can focus resources, both financial and time, on the holistic needs of the family. Material support alleviates financial pressure and the "mental-load" from a parent or guardian so they can focus on their parenting with dignity and confidence.

Roundabout is a non-judgmental, secular service which supports any social service and family regardless of their personal circumstances or background. We will help families multiple times, as their situation changes and their children grow. We trust our social service partners to assess need and request items that the family want, whilst setting up the supports they require. We work with community organisations and social services who focus on culturally and linguistically diverse families, migrants and asylum seekers and refugees. Further, we are actively involved with First Nations organisations working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Families. We value our constructive relationship with these organisations who are engaging and supporting families in a culturally appropriate way.



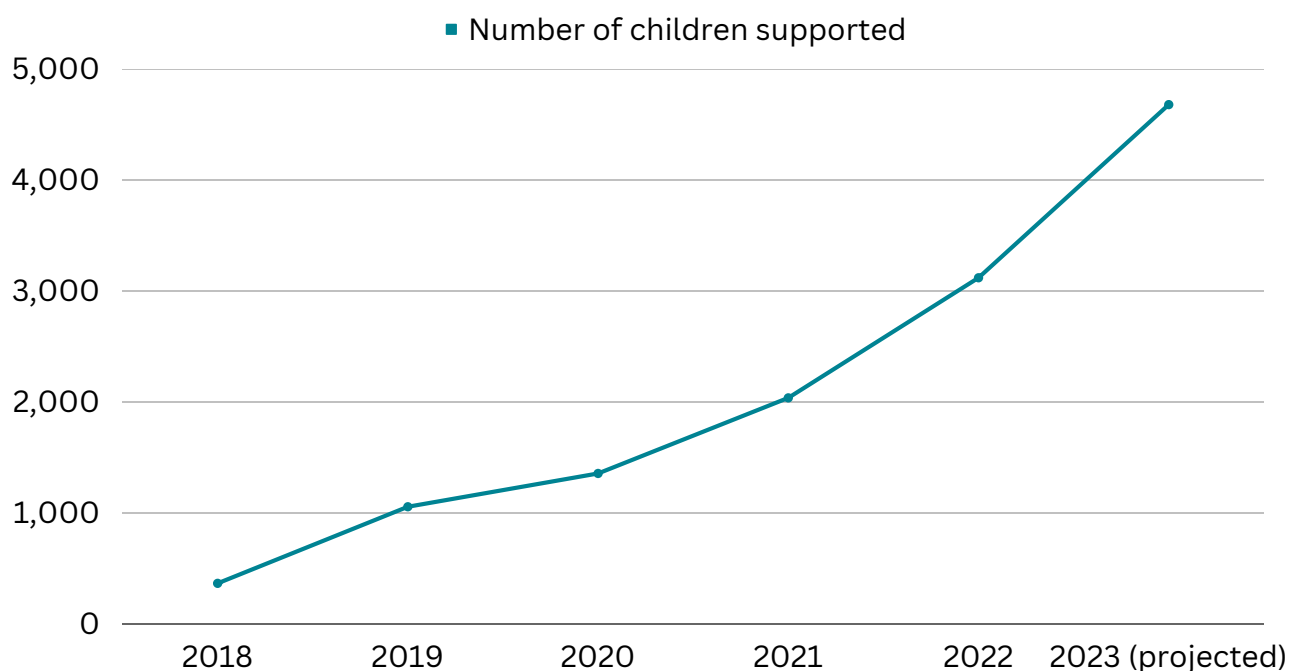
1 in 4 families supported in 2022 identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 10% of families are seeking asylum or are refugees, with a further 15% identifying as being from a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Roundabout has developed a strong partnership with ACT government services who are working with vulnerable families. Around 1 in 3 of the families we support are working with an ACT government department or ACT government-sponsored program.

## The current landscape

Roundabout Canberra has grown substantially in the past five years in response to the growing demand for support for local families; with particularly large increases in demand resulting from challenges posed by COVID-19, including challenges accessing goods and financial pressures from stand downs and job losses; and more recently associated with cost of living pressures faced by many Canberra families.

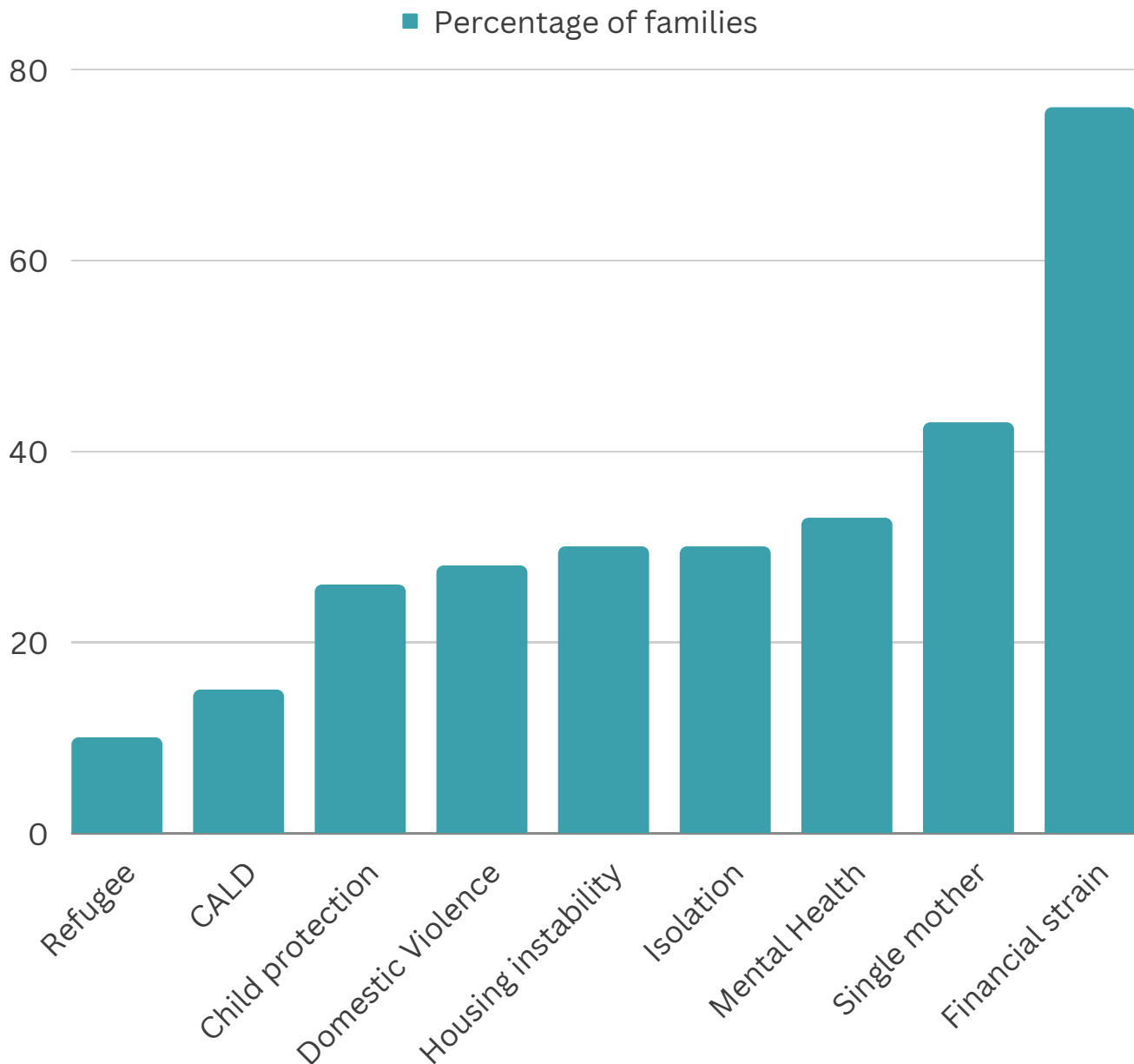
In 2018, we helped 350 children. In 2022 Roundabout Canberra helped 3121 children from Canberra and surrounding regions. This was a 50% increase on the number helped in 2021, and we've already seen a 50% increase on demand in 2023 compared to the same period last year. The graph below demonstrates the increase in demand seen during the last 5 years.



## 2022 data

It is not surprising that in 2022, more than **3 in 4 families we assisted were experiencing financial strain**. In the same period, almost **1 in 3 families assisted by Roundabout Canberra were experiencing homelessness or housing stress**. A large portion of the families we support are living in temporary accommodation. The statistics collected also show that more than a quarter have child protection concerns and one third have been subject to domestic violence. The patterns seen in 2023 are very much consistent with 2022 statistics.

## Circumstances of families assisted in 2022

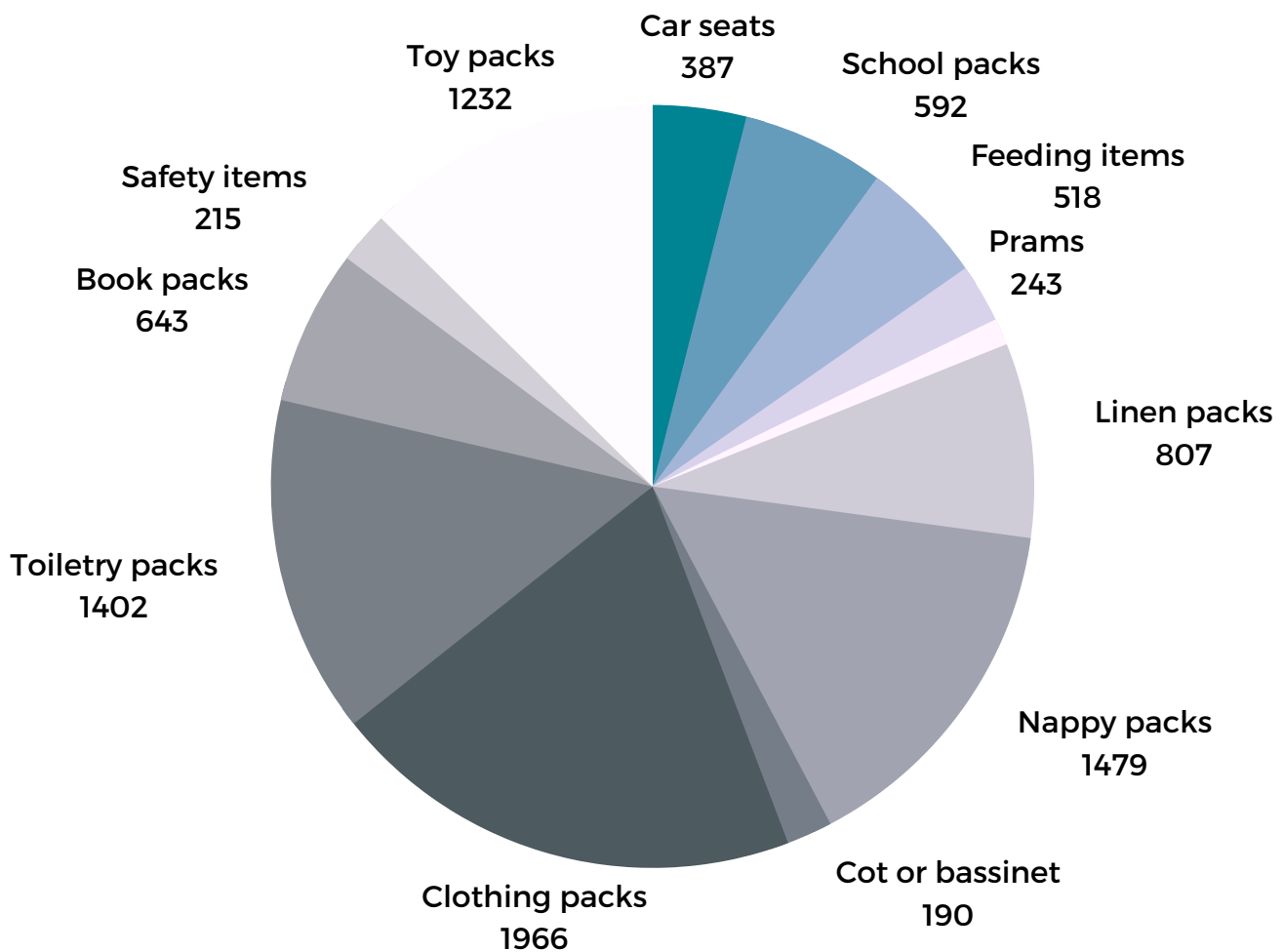


Please note, the total does not add to 100% as support workers can select multiple factors when providing information about a family.

## Canberra families are struggling with basic essentials

Items provided to families by Roundabout Canberra are considered essential to the safety and wellbeing of children, and include cots or bassinets, prams, car seats, clothing, linen, books, toys, school items, feeding items, toiletries and home safety items.

In 2022, Roundabout provided over 11,000 items to families with an estimated value of \$678,860 (based on a conservative second hand value). The graph below provides an overview of goods re-homed across the year. The most commonly requested items were clothing, nappies, linen, toiletries and toys - all goods which when purchased individually are low cost, but required in high volume.



## Cost of living pressures

Feedback from agencies which use Roundabout's services demonstrate the impact the goods have on the families receiving them. Services tell us that if we can give families these items for free, they can put what money they have towards other essentials such as rent or petrol. This is something we've been hearing more and more over the course of the last 12 months as the cost of living pressures become more pronounced.

The range and quality of goods as well as the timeliness of provision is seen as critical to allowing families to maintain their dignity and wellbeing at a time of immediate or ongoing crisis. Below are a few recent comments from service organisations:

"Sarah is a young, single mother of four children under the age of six years. She is struggling to provide essentials for her children. The high cost of living means that Sarah is living week to week and struggling to make ends meet. She has to walk the children to and from school each day which is a 20-30 minute walk one way. The walk home has an incline which is quite difficult to push the stroller. When it is raining, the children arrive to school wet and cold as they don't have any wet weather gear."

"Bonnie is a single mother of four children, one of whom has a significant disability, which leaves her unable to work. This year has been particularly difficult for the family due to their complex circumstances, added with the cost of living crisis and lack of suitable accommodation in Canberra."

"This family has just had their third child. Due to the cost of private rental and cost of living being so high, the family is financially stressed. Both parents rely on Centrelink payments, and the husband is unable to find a job that pays more than the Centrelink payments."

"This family is struggling to keep up with inflation and the cost of living. Dad is in between jobs and starts his new job in 2 weeks. Rental repayments have increased and all of this has put this family into financial hardship."

*"Roundabout helps break the financial barrier that stops so many families providing the best for their children, especially when setting up for a new baby. This removes so much stress and gives the family more time and energy to focus on the other challenges they are experiencing."*

Case worker



Our role is vital in allowing social services to build a constructive relationship with the parents and carers they are supporting. Anecdotally, we are told that the ability for a social worker or support worker to provide material goods to a family can be the catalyst for them being able to build a relationship with the family, which then allows them to work on any other vulnerabilities the parent, carer or child may be experiencing, including homelessness and domestic violence.

We are confident that our position in the Canberra region has allowed us to have a direct and constructive impact on Canberra's babies and children. By providing material support, we are alleviating a financial and mental burden on parents and carers and ensuring that every child has the safe, clean and essential items they need. The parent or carer and their children are treated with dignity and respect, and gifted with the confidence to parent their child.

## The Future

Based on current trajectories, we predict that we will support over 4000 babies and children in the 2023 calendar year. Our social service partners report that the cost of living pressures are having a significant impact on all aspects of parenting. Impacts are being felt with more families in financial hardship with roll-on impacts being seen in increased family violence, social isolation and severe housing pressures.

## Recommendations

- **Referral pathways need to be clearly accessible to the public, simple and effective to ensure that families are able to access essential goods they need quickly and in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity.** Whilst many families requiring support will already have a connection to a support service, unwavering cost of living pressures will mean families that haven't previously received support will now need to. Many services are already under strain with high case loads, and this increasing demand will exacerbate this issue.
- **Government can play an important role in providing adequate financial assistance to community sector organisations focused on delivering support in the form of basic essentials.** One option may be to provide short-term 'cost of living' grants similar to those made available to the community sector during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Stable and ongoing funding for priority areas in the community sector is required, particularly in the areas of material support, housing, domestic violence or crisis support, and general support to families.** This is essential to ensuring the community sector can keep pace with ongoing demands beyond the current cost of living and inflationary pressures.