



The *Women's* Centre



**safe space for women**

**Annual Report 2020**







From left to right: Megan Heywood,  
The Honourable Minister  
Coralee O'Rourke, Skye Jerome,  
Cathy Crawford, Kerri-lee Fredericks



## President's Report

It is my honour and pleasure to report to you on the achievements and activities of the dedicated volunteers and staff of The Women's Centre in Townsville. The community demand for core services are guided by the centre's vision "to provide a physically and emotionally safe space that allow for an increase in service delivery for women".

In 2006 important discussions started about the poor state of 50 Patrick Street Aitkenvale and how the centre will meet the need for additional women's counselling services to support Townsville's current and future population.

In October 2020, The Women's Centre will operate from new premises, a purpose-built building at the corner of Charles and Nathan Street Townsville. The larger premises will allow existing services to continue and expand services for women faced with homelessness, domestic violence, victims of sexual assault and counselling services in a safe and secure building.

We expect significant growth to the level and range of services including child therapy services, medical clinics, cooking classes encouraging healthy living and facilities for forensic examinations and police interviewing in the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART).

There is a significant community benefit for the Townsville area to develop women's access to services such as, counselling to improve mental and physical health, personal growth, skills training designed to improve parenting practices, activities leading to social inclusion, employment and provide more space to other professional services, such as women's health services.

The centre now has capacity to support additional student placements and other training opportunities.

Scheduled to continue are the support groups and programs of art, craft, yoga, playgroups, workshops proven to be successful in creating change and balance in the lives of women and children.

The Specialist Homelessness Service reports an increase in the number of referrals for assistance and crisis support. An encouraging increase in demand for counselling are the number of women who have counselling outside of usual business hours.

The centre will continue working within our networks and community health partners for counselling of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women.

In 2020 the management committee and staff will lead discussions for the implementation of increased services and consider the viability of reintroducing activities that were suspended in the past, because of limited capacity and space.

We are extremely thankful to the Sky Foundation for making a significant contribution. The Sky Foundation took the lead and raised community awareness not only for The Women's Centre need for a safe and secure building but to ensure that all women who experience domestic and family violence are aware of the centre being a place to attend and feel safe.

We appreciate Wingate Property and The Payce Foundation who in 2016 pledged, \$50,000 for five years for The Women's Centre. Thank you for all the generous donations received.

The Women's Centre Management Committee acknowledges Cathy Crawford. Her influence and tireless advocacy contributed to major changes for The Women's Centre improving services for women. The Women's Centre's Management Committee thank her for her guidance and all staff for their dedicated commitment to women.

Lastly, an acknowledgement to the Management Committee members for their good advice, participation in discussions and decision making.

Diana Falcomer, President.

## Coordinator's Report

The year began and ended with the design and build of the new premises at 118 Charles St., Aitkenvale. At the end of the financial year we find ourselves close to the finalisation of the new build and expect to be in the building by September 2020.

COVID-19 meant the service delivery changed but did not stop. Mobile support, phone and zoom played a very large part of all staff's lives from their homes. Staff and women responded very positively and displayed how resilient and flexible they can be. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions and the imminent move to our premises has meant that our groups were not held at the Centre for most of the second half of the financial year. Thankfully COVID-19 did not slow the building works down. Flood Recovery funding, COVID-19 funding and an increase in Emergency Relief funding has significantly supported our work through these incredibly different and trying times.

The sexual assault support component of the Sexual Assault Response Team secured a five year service agreement beginning at the completion of the current short term agreement. The response from the community and partners was very positive with comments such as "This is exceptional news and well deserved. The benefits to our community and to victims cannot be underestimated." The second presentation in February by the Sexual Assault Response Team to leaders in the community, whose work contributes towards a safer community, was very well received. It will hopefully continue to strengthen the evidence base thus supporting the need for further resourcing to sustain this important response to the needs of survivors of sexual assault.

Stakeholder and network meetings continued changing from face to face to web based meetings through COVID-19. Most significantly in my role as Coordinator I became a member of the North and North West Queensland Regional Community Forum, the Management Committee for the Queensland Sexual Assault Network and the Co-Chair of the Women's Health Service Alliance. These links and relationships are key to the ongoing growth, development and support to the organisation.

This year Di and I were supported to travel to Dallas and attend the Crimes Against Children Conference. We both valued the experience and came home with new insights and old ones reinforced. The service acknowledges the significant support to the Sexual Assault Response Team that Di has provided. For over 3 years Di supported the Sexual Assault Support Workers 24/7 without a break or any monetary support. Thank you Di for making it work.

Thanks to all the supporters of the service, the list is too huge to name all, however, there are a few that I wish to acknowledge as without their effort both in the past and this year the service would have struggled to reach its goals. The Sky Foundation, Wingate and all those that donated to the building fund, your efforts have made a huge difference to the facilities that the women of Townsville now have available to them.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts, professionalism and commitment of the staff of The Women's Centre. The team has remained incredibly busy through COVID-19, as well as the building of a new premises working with women with significant complexities. Every year I reflect at this time and think it is the staff and their journeys with women that make The Women's Centre very special. This year thanks goes to Rose for all the amazing work and support she has provided me and this organisation to make the new build happen.

The management committee has continued to grow in strength with the development of the financial, old premises, private practice and RAP committees that have provided leadership and support to the staff and organisation. Thank you for the ongoing voluntary work.

Thank you to the Honourable Coralee O'Rourke MP and Ms Claire O'Connor, the Director-General of The Department of Communities, Disabilities and Seniors, for the funding and ongoing support and negotiation that was required to ensure a new premises was delivered to Townsville women.

Thank you to our funders Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, Department of Communities, Disabilities and Seniors, and Department of Housing and Public Works for their ongoing support.



## Sexual Assault Support Service Report

Ongoing counselling with women who have experienced sexual assault, recently or in the past, aims to respond to the therapeutic and practical needs of women through purposeful conversations in which counsellor and woman identify the current issues, and how counselling endeavours to meet these needs.

This is a creative and empowering process in which women are encouraged to speak and their voices will be heard. The therapeutic environment is a safe space reflected through the establishment of the safety of the therapeutic alliance, grounded in the key principles of trauma informed care: rights, control, safety and choice.

As well as counselling around the impacts of the sexual assaults, women may be supported through advocacy, court support, group work and access to other relevant victims' services such as Victim Assist Qld. Each woman is a unique individual, and the counselling conversation, being holistic in nature, facilitates an exploration of additional issues which may have pre-existed the experiences of sexual violence, or those which have emerged as a direct consequence of the violation endured. We note that during the period of this financial year, women identified grief and loss as very significant, thus becoming a crucial area of support for women who engaged in the sexual assault counselling process.

The year 2019 – 2020 once again highlighted and reinforced the value of the Sexual Assault Response Team and the continuation of strong partnerships between the key agencies in ensuring an holistic trauma informed response to victims of an acute sexual assault. This service, unique in Queensland, strives to deliver an evidence based standard of excellence in which reflective practice and continual improvement are fundamental to enhancing quality support for victims of sexual violence.

Once again, we applaud the courage of all survivors to challenge the dominant patriarchal systems which create opportunities for the perpetration of sexual violence. We stand with survivors as they say "we will not allow sexual violence to inform who I am or constrain who I will become".

## Specialist Homelessness Service Report

The Specialist Homelessness Service team have worked tirelessly throughout the year, facing enormous challenges, some unique and others reoccurring. The presenting issues are of a complex nature relating to the needs of women requiring access to appropriate, affordable and safe accommodation.

We experienced women's needs intensify during COVID-19, which required working to a new way of thinking with some creativity. Accommodation was limited during this time due to social distancing, resulting in less crisis and short-term accommodation options available. Events in Townsville such as the Elton John Concert, V8 Supercars, Horn/Tsuyu fight, NRL football games and school holidays complicated access to accommodation in an already difficult arena, with the ongoing accommodation crisis in Townsville.

The team has seen an increase in women presenting on visas who are not eligible for income or accommodation due to their visa status, seeking support due to domestic violence, homelessness or risk of deportation. The Specialist Homelessness team is the initial contact of the newly formed Townsville Women's Visa Support Group, who liaise where necessary with other services in order to provide an immediate coordinated response. The team has also seen an increase in women presenting with extreme complex mental health issues and/or substance abuse issues.

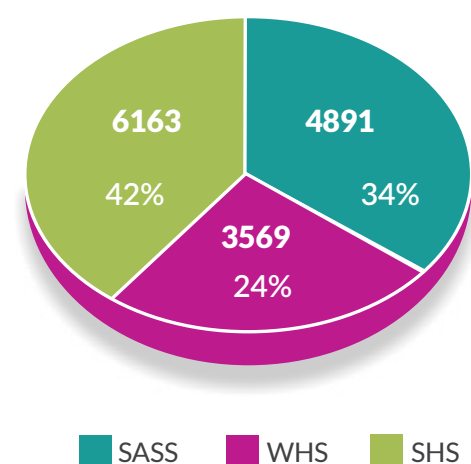
During the year, the Specialist Homelessness team supported 633 women, with 118 of those women assisted to access a range of accommodation including crisis, transitional and long-term housing in addition to supporting women to sustain their tenancy.

The Specialist Homelessness team has grown significantly with a current team of six, consisting of a Team Leader, Case Workers and Flood Recovery Workers. Our team continues to grow with another two Case Workers joining our team soon.

The Specialist Homelessness team strives to provide a collaborative response to women presenting at The Women's Centre seeking support, working in partnership with other external stakeholders to achieve positive outcomes for all women.

The Specialist Homelessness team believe all women who present at The Women's Centre should never leave empty handed and that their lives should be richer as a result of their engagement with The Women's Centre.

NUMBER OF CONTACTS PER SERVICE  
2019-2020



## Women's Health Service Report

What a year it has been! So different to what we ever imagined and planned for and the last 8 months or so have changed the way we look at service delivery and we have seen the way in which uncertainty has created challenges for so many women.

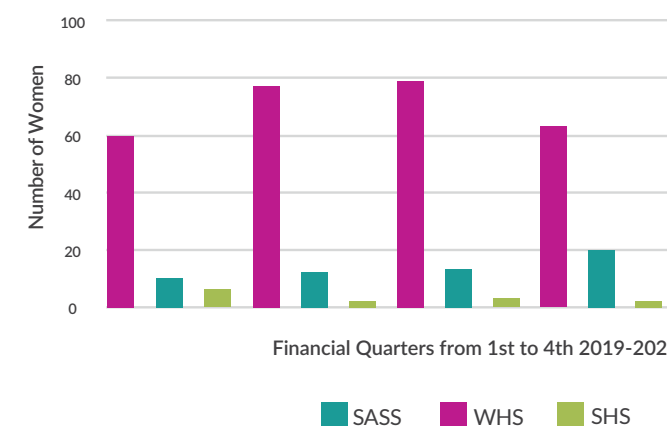
We know that the gendered impacts of COVID-19 have been enormous and women are among the most significantly impacted by the necessary household adjustments that were and still are the consequence of COVID-19. Anecdotally, we have seen through the Women's Health Service that circumstances for women haven't necessarily changed, but have intensified significantly.

- The heavy restrictions earlier in 2020 saw women continuing to take responsibility for an increase in unpaid work in the home while simultaneously home schooling children as well as meeting paid employment requirements;
- the feminisation of the casual work force meant that many women lost their income and women on visa's were unable to receive any income support;
- regulated isolation meant that women experiencing domestic and family violence were cut off from their supports and safety net and experienced continuous surveillance;
- women experiencing mental health issues were at higher risk of experiencing anxiety, panic and suicidal ideation

We had to be creative about the way we worked with women to keep them connected to support over this time. The Women's Health Service continued to support women from their homes and relied heavily on technology to keep us connected! Daily, we provided contactless support through our mobile delivery service which distributed emergency relief and wellbeing packs including activities, information and strategies to help women manage the impacts of isolation. Phone calls, Zoom chat, email and social media posts became a very important way of communicating. As a part of the trauma informed counselling we provided during this time we supported women to access health care, income support and sustain their housing, to report crimes to police and create a new type of safety net, to maintain a connection with family and friends and other supports, to continue practices of self-care and to adjust expectations of themselves that better fit with their current surroundings.

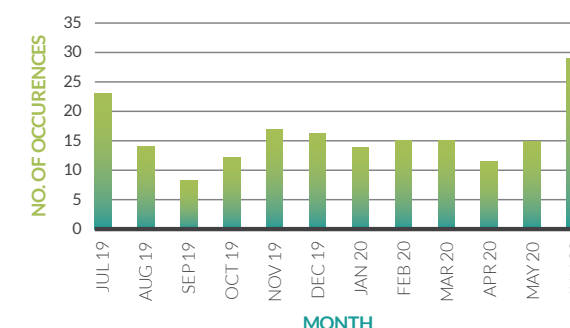
If we've learned anything from our experiences of COVID-19 we can see that women continue to adapt to the circumstances around us, we continue to survive the unthinkable and we continue to step up and connect with our community. "Nevertheless she persisted."

POLICE REFERRALS BY QUARTER TO THE WOMEN'S HEALTH SERVICE THE SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT SERVICE AND THE SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICE.



Referrals were less for the Women's Health and Specialist Homelessness during the fourth quarter of the year. This appears to be due to COVID-19 people were less likely to leave their home for services and more women were housed or less likely to leave their accommodation. This does not include sexual assault response team referrals.

FREQUENCY OF SART RESPONSE 2019-2020



The number of unique people for the year was 143 and 4 of those people were men in 2019-2020.

## Flood Recovery Service

July to December of 2019 saw many women struggling with the impacts of the Monsoon earlier in the year. Collaboration and lobbying with the Disaster Community Recovery Service established in Townsville resulted in two qualified counsellors employed to work with flood affected women. Support was provided from The Women's Centre and NOTCH. The challenges included securing accommodation, removal and storage of furniture, debt management, trauma and emotional fatigue. The team participated in Disaster Ready Sunday and with the success of a Monsoon Trough Grant we were able to create and deliver promotional merchandise and information regarding women's safety. Further lobbying has resulted in the extension of funding and continuation of the service for a further 12 month term, now rebranded the Women's Flood Recovery Counselling Service.



## Treasurer's Report

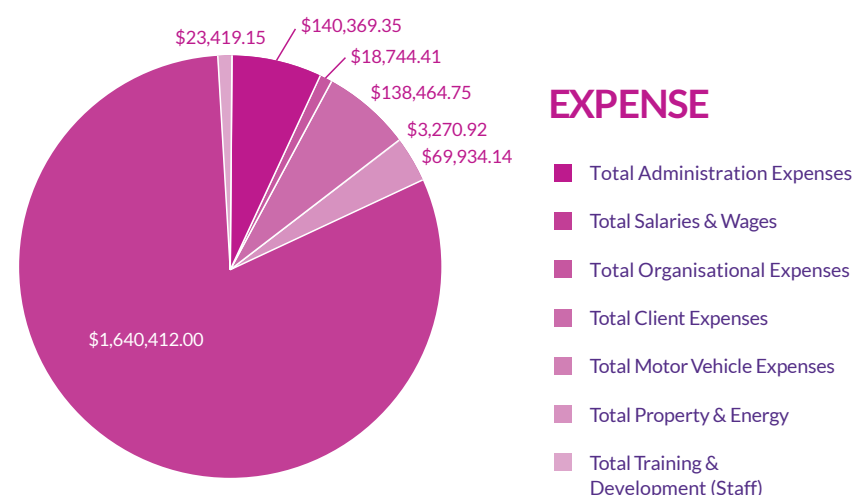
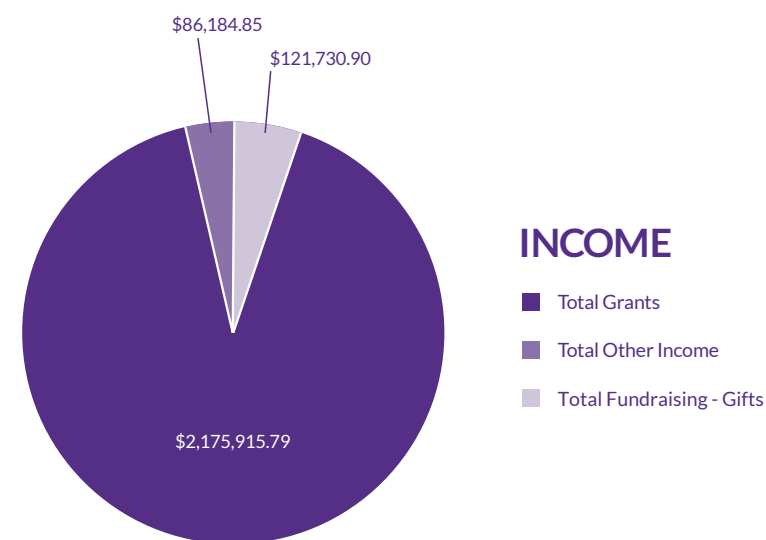
The Women's Centre has continued to operate with great strength and resilience, providing valuable services to women and their families through yet another turbulent year. As was the case with the effects of the Monsoon the year before, COVID-19 has resulted in compounding adversities for women and families in Townsville. Additional funding from both State and Federal Governments; Women's Flood Recovery, Disaster Emergency Relief Funding, COVID-19 Brokerage, Monsoon Trough and State Emergency Relief Funding totalling approximately \$260,000 has provided much needed extra support to those in need.

Amidst the challenges there have been opportunities this past year, such as securing the building of new premises at the corner of Nathan and Charles Streets for the Women's Centre. Funding of \$4.2m has been provided by Dept Communities, Disability Services and Seniors to bring the project to fruition. A momentous journey for all involved after many years of struggling with the limitations of the existing building at Patrick Street and ongoing campaigning to raise funds led by the Sky Foundation. It presents a moment for all to reflect and show gratitude towards those who have tirelessly worked to ensure the women and families of Townsville have a place they deserve. I would like to acknowledge the work undertaken by Cathy as Coordinator and Rose as Administrator who have driven the progress of the build with true passion and determination despite all the challenges they have faced.

New Accounting Standards AASB15 came into effect from 30th June 2020. The Women's Centre has applied the new income recognition requirements in the 2019/20 financial year. Other changes include the formation of a Finance Sub Committee which meets monthly in advance of the Management Committee Meetings.

For the 2019-20 financial year the Women's Centre income has been over \$2.3 million, which is an increase on previous years. Of this, over \$121,000 came from fundraising through the Sky Foundation and donations and \$38,633 from a number of new one-off grants which were applied for to enhance service delivery. The Women's Centre's main funding contracts through Department of Child Safety Youth and Women and the Department of Housing and Public Works kept pace with inflation.

The largest area of expense was salaries and related expenses equating to approximately \$1.98m. Expenses associated with support to clients saw an increase which aligns with the additional Emergency Relief Funding received by the Women's Centre to help support those effected by both the Monsoon and COVID-19. As the year drew to a close, and the new premises were taking shape, spending of funds raised in relation to the building began to increase for the fit out and furnishings for the Women's Centre's new home.



Flood Recovery Support Service counsellors Laura and Dadi in attendance at Moroney Park community event.



## Management Committee

### President

Diana Falcomer

### Secretary

Theresa Petray

### Treasurer

Verity Bennett

### Committee Members

Jenny Sebba

Sara Pots

Trudi Tronc

Sharon Barnwell

## Staff Team

### Coordinator

Cathy Crawford

### Senior Counsellor

Di Plumb

### Business Administrator

Rose Alexander

### Administration Assistants

Julie Lingley

### Sexual Assault Counsellors

Kady Agius

Rudo Banya

Trudi Contarino

Ashley Burk

Karen Rowan

Belinda Vincent

### Women's Health Counsellors

Tiffany Russell

Erin Costello

### SHS Team Leader

Sallie Kearnan

### SHS Women's Caseworker

Portia Baffour

Belinda Matthews

Angela Russell

Anagi Gunasekara

Holly Wilson

### Reception / Community

#### Engagement Workers

Narelle McKenzie

Serai Zaro

### Disaster Community

#### Recovery Counsellor

Dadi Jabangwe

Laura Stokes

### Quality & Human Resources

#### Officer & Playgroup Facilitator

Alison Thorburn

## Casual/Relief Workers

### Art & Craft Group Facilitator

Sonia Ward

### Yoga Teacher

Meredith Starck

### Playgroup Facilitator

Cassie Foster

## Partnerships/Alliance/Networks

ACOSS

Althea Projects

ANROWS

ATSIWLS

BSSS

Children by Choice

Clinical Forensic Medical Unit

Coalition on Criminal Assault in the Home

Coast to Country Housing Company

DOVETAIL

EVAWQ

Homelessness Australia

Housing & Homelessness Area Network

Housing Connections

James Cook University

Local Level Alliance

MENTER

Northern Australia Primary Health Ltd

NQ Alliance for Mental Health

NQWLS

NQWSN

QCOSS

QSAN

Queensland Police Service

Queensland Women's Health Alliance

Red Cross Australia

Red Rose Project

Sexual Assault Regional Leaders Group

Sexual Assault Response Team

Scrap & Stamp

Sera's Women's Shelter

Sharehouse

Sky Foundation

Child Abuse & Sexual Crimes Unit

The Payce Foundation

The Townsville Hospital

Townsville Aboriginal & Islander Health Services

Townsville City Council

Townsville Multicultural Support Group

Townsville Suicide Prevention Network

Townsville Women's Correctional Centre

Townsville Youth Justice Centre

Victim Assist Qld

WESNET

Workways Australia Pty Ltd

Yumba-Meta

## Thank you, fundraisers & supporters

Aitkenvale Pharmacy - Caroline Hildred

Ben and Lesley Mchahon

Brad & Kay McGrath Real Estate

Bupa Dental

City Women NQ

Donna Schifilliti - Willows Shopping Centre

Karen Bottemly - Goodstart Early Learning

Kates Campaign for Change

Kay O'Rourke QCWA

Lani Webb Coral Coast Tupperware

Lieutenant Kath Cumming 3rd Combat Signal Regiment

Lt Col Nick Duff

Luke Dolan - Hawkeye Carpentry

Maggie Island Outrigger Canoe club - Kim Maree Whiting

Minding Family

Mount Louisa Cornetts IGA

Paige & Pearce

Paynters

Platinum Electricians - Dave & Kirsty Lyon

QCWA Willows Branch

Riverside Convention Centre

Rotary Club of The Port of Townsville

RSL Womens Auxiliary Townsville Sub Branch

Senior Constable Emily Lyons

Snap Insurance - Lorraine Ryan

Suncorp Townsville

Tea Timers

Thuringowa City Ladies Bowls Club

Townsville Bridge Club