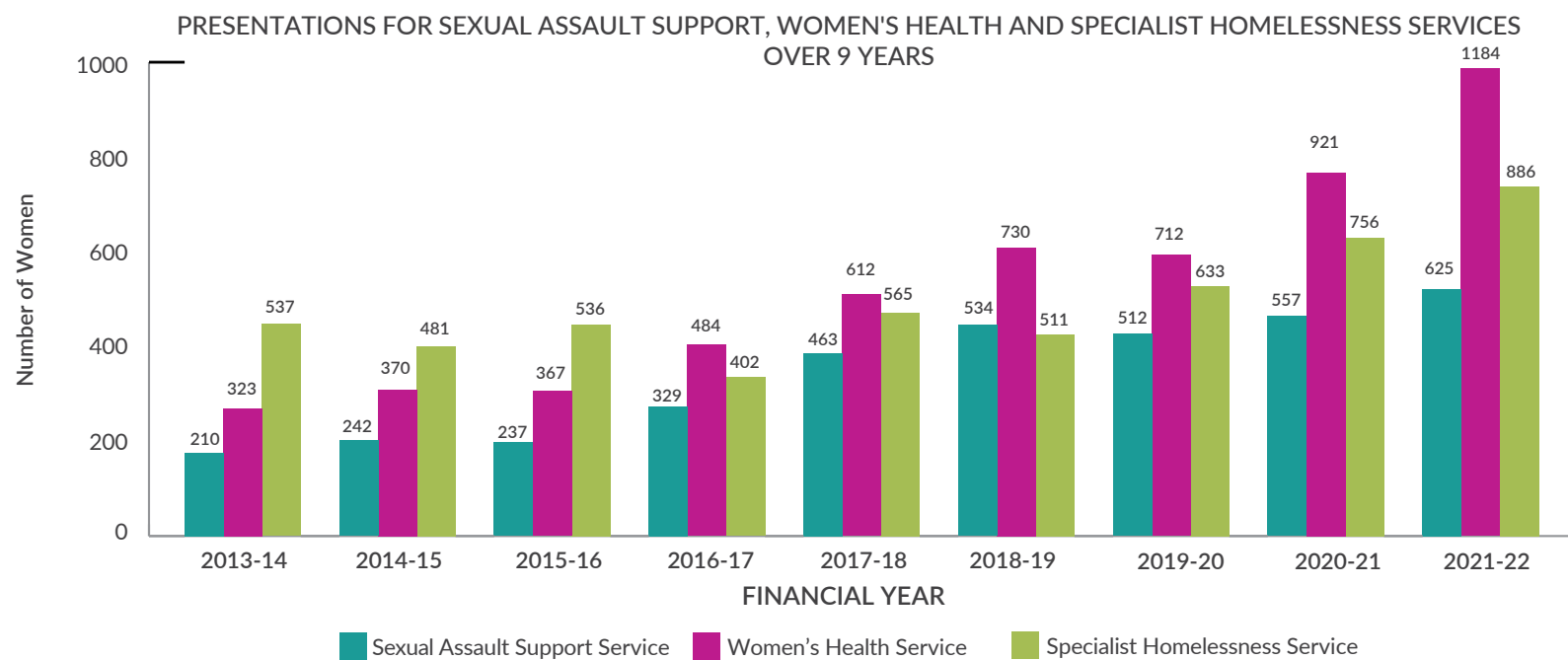




The *Women's* Centre
safe space for women



Annual Report
2021 - 2022



President's Report

I am pleased to present the 2021-2022 Annual Report for The Women's Centre. As in previous annual reports, we share stories of increasing demand for the services we offer, as well as stories of incredible effort and high-quality work done by staff and volunteers.

I want to focus on the statistics, to reiterate the experiences of women in our community, and the pressure to support them which ultimately requires increased funding.

- The number of unique women accessing the Homelessness service grew by 11% since the previous financial year, and has more than doubled since 2016-17.
- In the Women's Health Service, the number of unique women has grown by almost 20% this year, and is 2.5 times greater than in 2016-17.
- The Sexual Assault Support Service, including SART, looks like it has smaller growth, with total unique women still almost 7% more than the previous year, and nearly twice as high as 2016-17. However the total contacts for this service is the highest, averaging more than 10 contacts per woman.

A key challenge continues to be the lack of available and affordable housing for women in Townsville, and given that women's homelessness is intertwined with issues of sexual and domestic violence, recent and historical trauma, and often parenting, this is a wicked problem.

Despite this growth in demand, the staff continue to uphold the values of the service in meeting our vision to support all women. This includes all the staff, from reception to the women who work in a more behind-the-scenes capacity to keep the Centre functioning. I regularly hear praise for the quality of the case work and counselling, both formally through feedback that comes to the Management Committee, but also informally, from women who just want to let me know what a supportive and empowering experience they have had.

I have loved working with the Management Committee for another year. This financial year saw us welcome Jemima Giles. Sara Potts took on the Secretary role. We also thank the outgoing Treasurer, Verity Bennett, and Secretary, Diana Falcomer, for their time in those positions and their patient and supportive mentoring of newer committee members. Both of these are important roles, and we appreciate the commitment and effort from all.

At this AGM, Verity Bennett will step down from the Management Committee, and I want to thank her for her years of professional and capable contribution to the team. Verity has helped us as we continue to professionalise the work of the Management Committee, especially with regards to financial oversight, transparency, and accountability. Her hard work over the past few years will continue to impact on how we operate, and we look forward to an ongoing relationship with Verity in her capacity as CEO of NQDVRs.

Finally, endless praise and thanks to Cathy Crawford for her excellent leadership of The Women's Centre. She is a powerhouse, and while it feels like we would be absolutely lost without her, she is also forward planning and building a strong leadership team that are capably managing the various services the Centre provides. Thanks Cathy for your vision for the Centre's continued growth and success.

Theresa Petray, President.

Coordinator's Report

Over the last twelve months there has been an increased demand for all services at The Women's Centre. Both the state and federal government have responded with increased funding to all services. This has not been without significant advocacy and public acknowledgement of the demand. Unfortunately, the extra funding are short-term enhancement grants, however, we are hopeful that in the future core funding will be increased.

We have seen state policy changes in QPS as a result of the ongoing leading work of Townsville's Sexual Assault Response Team, which continues to be at the forefront of sexual assault service provision in Queensland. The dedication by everyone involved in the SART work has been inspiring.

The Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce consulted with the Women's Centre, SART and survivors throughout the year and staff and survivors wrote submissions for contribution. The recommendations from the Taskforce included many of the SASS recommendations including all responses to Sexual Assault to be based on SART or a similar holistic model. Alongside this work, The Women's Centre now provides the financial and HR management of the Queensland Sexual Assault Network which is another fully operational incorporated state peak.

The desperate ongoing housing shortage, increased cost of living and the increased rental costs has significantly impacted on availability of both crisis and long-term housing often leaving the specialist homelessness team no housing options for women. At times, women have housed themselves in unsafe environments or returned to unsafe situations resulting in women experiencing further abuse.

We have done well this last year delivering services, developing a new space, meeting all reporting requirements and Human Service Quality Standards, recruiting many new staff and providing ongoing professional opportunities. There has been ongoing investment in technology and the development of resources through the e-project. Please look at our sexual assault service website to view the videos.

The ongoing work with JCU, our SART partners, homelessness services, women's services and many others has seen the development of great work such as that achieved by JCU and the Respect programme. I would particularly like to thank the Soroptomists for the very successful Safe Nights programme which raised close to \$30,000 and provided 134 safe nights for women and their children.

Thank you to the management committee for providing direction and support to myself and the organisation.

Finally, the outstanding work and commitment by the staff at the Women's Centre mean that the outcomes and impact they have on women's lives can be meaningful, lasting and life changing. It is not uncommon for women to return to the Centre sometime after using the service, even years later, to either give back or to thank the service.



SASS and SART Service Report

The Sexual Assault Support Service continues to provide trauma informed counselling, support and advocacy to women as they commence their courageous exploration of reconnection with the self following the devastation of sexual violence. The capacity for sexual violence to overwhelm a person's safety in the world can be profound and many people may feel that the world they knew has now been shaken to the core. Re - establishing safety and a sense of security, choice and control are some of the fundamental tenets of counselling.

In addition, the Sexual Assault Support Service provides specialist therapeutic, play based sessions to children 12 years and over once all investigative processes are complete. Building safety, rapport and therapeutic trust are key goals for therapy and enhanced by consistency, choice and predictability including mutually agreed boundaries.

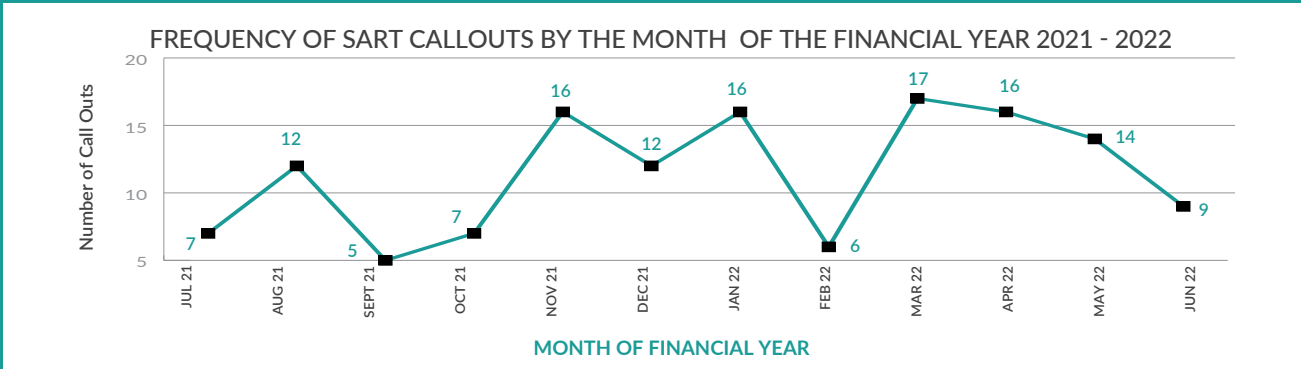
In our day to day work, staff are noticing an increase in women presenting for counselling who have complex needs linked to chronic and complex trauma. Women whose experiences of childhood trauma, the impacts of which may be likely to continue to shape women's lives, tend to live with additional vulnerabilities during adult life. The depth and devastation of such repeated trauma, including sexual violence, so often fundamentally prevents women's access to an internal world in which emotional and psychological safety can be established.

A disturbing trend we are recognising...although I also believe counsellors are being very thorough and thoughtful when asking women questions around their past and current safety and imminent risks. Strangulation seems to be becoming more "normalised" in the context of sexual behaviour. I'm appalled at even giving power to these words by sharing them with you. Apparently "consensual". And certainly as an extreme use of power, degradation and danger during sexual violence. Misogyny has almost been legitimised through these crimes, with strangulation powerfully endorsed by the pornography industry.

Working in the Sexual Assault Response Team continues to be a space where staff prioritise survivor's rights, choices, safety and options. SART workers strive to support survivors to seek agency and autonomy following a recent experience of sexual violence, and can be a buffer when survivors encounter the confronting processes which may unfold. Often, an immediate, safe connection can be built with the survivor in the traumatic aftermath of rape, and workers continue to reflect on the immense value of the SART model, and the privilege of being present with the survivor in this space. We acknowledge the generosity, skills and mutual professional respect shared with our interagency partners and enjoy opportunities to further nurture these professional relationships.

One of the highlights of the year has been the inclusion of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions as a key member of the SART interagency group. Many advantages have resulted from this, especially the generosity of ODPP staff to share their knowledge with workers who are likely to be encountering the court system and all its particular formalities for the first time. This is crucial learning for staff who support survivors in the District Court. Opportunities for staff to work more closely with the ODPP when supporting survivors who are preparing for court are thus greatly valued and appreciated. The preparation of a document setting out the protocols and parameters of interactions between SASS workers, the ODPP and survivors has been a unique development.

Instilling a sense of hope, and recognising the support and camaraderie between staff, and the respect across and within the centre for all who choose this work, keeps us determined to challenge the patriarchy and the ongoing marginalisation of women. Simply by being here, we do!



On average there was a SART callout every 2.66 days during 2021 - 2022.

Women's Health Service Report

Our work in the Women's Health Service this financial year 2021-2022, has made visible the growing complexity and struggle facing women and children in our community. Similarly to our Specialist Homelessness Service, the Women's Health Service overwhelmingly sees that financial hardship continues to create struggle for women to access food and household items, maintain utilities, sustain tenancies and accommodation and support women and children escaping violence to increase their safety. Our Women's Health Service which has been typically therapeutic counselling with some intermittent practical support for women, has very much shifted towards intensive and holistic practical support alongside complex, trauma informed therapeutic counselling.

Having received additional funding this year to support the social and health implications for the community after the impact of COVID-19 in the community, we have been in a fortunate position to support women and children to access the very basic needs they require to live and survive. We recognise, and have seen the implications of these times that create added risk for women and children to experience further distress, trauma, violence and abuse. However, because of the additional short term funding this year, we have found ourselves in a position to be highly responsive to the very diverse needs of women experiencing financial hardship; including the capacity to provide food vouchers, access to health care needs including medication and mobility equipment, upgrading of personal safety and security. As we move into the next financial year, with very limited funds for these purposes, there is an increasing feeling of concern amongst the team and from the women we support as to how we will be able to continue to respond to the ever increasing complexities and financial requirements women are faced with.

Since the change in legislation in 2018 of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill, and particularly within the last twelve months, health care for women and pregnant people in Townsville has actually decreased. With the closure of Marie Stopes Australia in Townsville and many other regional communities, women and pregnant people wanting to access medical terminations of pregnancy are faced with the only option to travel to Brisbane to access this healthcare. For those women and pregnant people with the option to choose medical terminations of pregnancy, it is increasingly becoming more expensive to access this medication from local GPs and pharmacies in Townsville.

It is remarkable to work amongst a team who genuinely embody dedication and determination to continue to advocate for women's rights and who continue to challenge the destructive patriarchal culture that perpetuates gendered violence against women. In the last twelve months, many members of the team, in their own time, have embarked on or finished study, ongoing learning and professional development at all levels with a diversity of focus including trauma informed practice, LGBTQIA+ community, narrative therapy, neuroscience and leadership and mental health. The 'whole' team (greater than the sum of its parts), continues to absorb knowledge and skills in order to respond effectively to the changing and challenging social circumstances confronting women, and to promote a broader political understanding of the structures that continue to create injustice for women.



*"When I was sexually assaulted -
"They understood and helped me
through the process to recover and
be myself again."*

*"When I was homeless -
"The Women's Centre supported
me to find the right shelter for me
and got me out of a bad situation.
this made me feel safe."*

Specialist Homelessness Service Report

The Specialist Homelessness Service experienced a challenging and almost impossible year accommodating women and children amidst a housing crisis, with real estates unfortunately choosing the highest-income household that is seeking a property. The current rental vacancy rate in Townsville is less than 0.6% which is the lowest it has been in more than 10 years.

The current Specialist Homelessness team consists of a Team Leader, three full-time Case Workers and two part-time Case Workers, who have identified an increase in the level of complex issues relating to women presenting for support. Thankfully the support we provide to women is not dictated by timeframes, allowing support to be provided for the "duration of need".

With older women over the age of 55 being the fastest growing group to experience homelessness in Australia, our service has seen an increase in the most vulnerable cohort of older women reaching out for support. It was reassuring to see a new housing support hub and advisory group to help older Queensland women access housing formed by the Queensland Government earlier in 2022.

We also know that 44% of single women in Australia over 45 are on low and medium incomes, don't own their own home and are renting. We are experiencing extreme difficulty securing long-term accommodation for single women and women with one to two children, being ineligible for private rentals due to not meeting the affordability criteria, therefore reliant on social housing and then endure the extensive wait prior to being offered a property. The only options available to these women is to couch surf, stay in over-crowded accommodation with friends and family, or pay for highly unaffordable short-term accommodation which is not sustainable.

During the year, the Specialist Homelessness Service supported 886 women, with 328 women assisted to access accommodation into crisis, transitional and long-term housing; to sustain tenancies and for domestic and family violence related matters. This is an increase of 103 women being assisted from the previous year.

Large numbers of women escaping domestic and family violence continue to present, seeking support to relocate, for a referral into shelter or to secure alternative and safe accommodation. A common issue for women fleeing violence is a loss of income, therefore they are going to struggle to compete for a property on income grounds. Many women are then forced to return to violent partners or become homeless due to lack of affordable, available and safe housing.

The Homelessness Week theme for 2022 is "To end homelessness we need a plan", with Homelessness Week awareness from the 1st to the 7th of August, 2022. The Specialist Homelessness Service Team Leader and three Case Workers will be attending the National Homelessness Conference in Canberra, from the 8th to the 10th of August, 2022. It has been a very difficult time for many who have faced the pandemic, a series of natural disasters and the housing crisis that continues to sweep the country. It is more important now than ever to participate in this conference to learn, engage and network with others from housing and homelessness service in other states.

"Poverty and Homelessness is like punishment for a crime you didn't commit"

Treasurer's Report

On behalf of the Management Committee, I have pleasure in presenting the audited financials for the year ending 30 June 2022.

The Management Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all our financial supporters, funders, members and staff for their ongoing commitment and dedication to the organisation. The year has continued to see growing numbers of women and children seeking support from services provided by the Women's Centre. This demand along with increased costs to deliver services, presents an ongoing challenge to meet the need with the available resources.

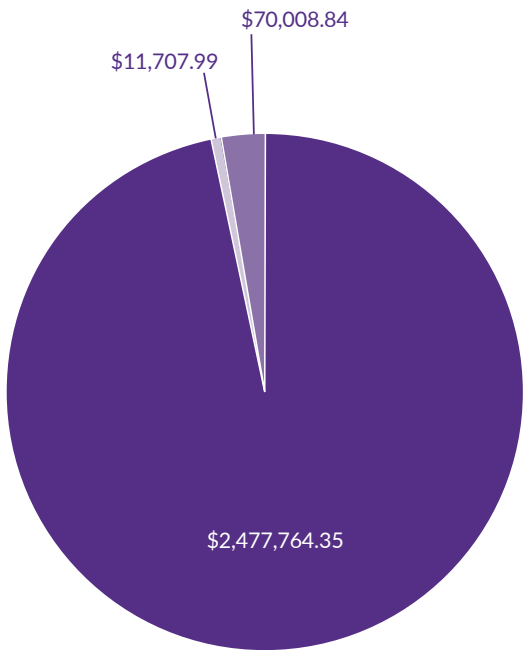
The Management Committee is able to report that income and expenditure remained in line with budget projections. Income for the 2021/2022 year was just under \$2.6 million, which has seen a small growth from the previous year. The largest proportion of revenue was grant income from Queensland Government through the Department of Justice and Attorney General and the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy as well as the Commonwealth Government, totalling approximately \$2.5 million. Recognising the continued high demand for service, enhancement funding was again provided by the Department of Justice and Attorney General during the year.

2021/2022 saw an increase in donations, in part attributable to an outstanding contribution from the Safe Nights Townsville project. Soroptimist International established the project in response to the increased demand for safe, affordable crisis accommodation for women and children in our community.

The largest area of expense were salaries and related costs, equating to approximately \$2.2 million. Having settled into the new premises, training and development of staff became a focus, with an increased investment during the year. The year also saw the final touches to the building and garden roll out, as the Women's Centre settles into its new location and bids farewell to the old building on Patrick Street with its sale in May 2022.

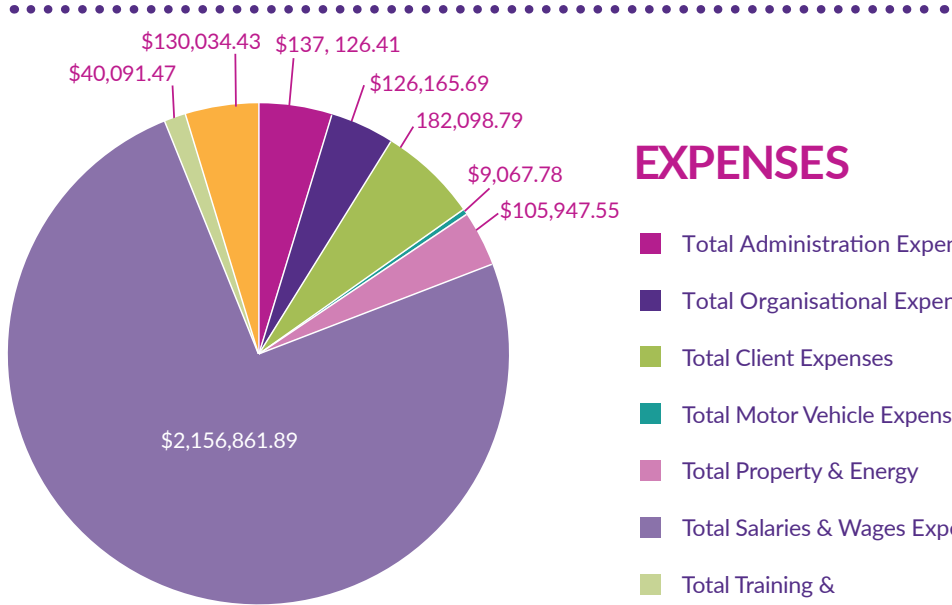
As I step back from my role as Committee member and Treasurer, I wanted to express my gratitude for the governance experience I have gained in the role. I have a deep appreciation for the Committee members, present and past, and for Cathy and all the staff at the Women's Centre. I really am quite enthusiastic about the opportunities which lay ahead by remaining connected to the Women's Centre in my role as CEO of NQDVRS as we strive to further support and empower women and children in our communities.

Verity Bennett, Treasurer.



INCOME

- Total Grants
- Total Fundraising - Gifts
- Total Other Income



EXPENSES

- Total Administration Expenses
- Total Organisational Expenses
- Total Client Expenses
- Total Motor Vehicle Expenses
- Total Property & Energy
- Total Salaries & Wages Expenses
- Total Training & Development (Staff)
- Total Building Expenses

OUR VALUES



Integrity

When I needed counselling - "I felt at ease to ask for help at The Women's Centre and knew that I would be supported."

Staff comment - "It is a privilege to work at The Women's Centre because it is a strong, feminist, supportive environment."

Respect

When I needed counselling - "It's the only service that I have ever attended that allows me to sit near the door and feel safe during sessions."

When I was homeless - "The Women's Centre staff listen to women in need I really appreciate it."

Inclusion

When I went to The Women's Centre - "I just adore this place. I have met so many different people - just all filled with love and understanding for one another."

When I went to The Women's Centre - "They helped me a lot and made me feel welcome and that I belong."

When I went to The Women's Centre - "I immediately felt safe, staff are all extremely friendly warm welcoming and helpful."

Trust

When I needed help - "I always go to The Women's Centre cause they always there to help and lead us to the right help we need."

When I needed counselling - "I felt safer here than anywhere else and this is my safe zone and happy place."

When I was sexually assaulted - "It has been extremely hard to trust anyone with my story, however since coming here I'm slowly learning to trust and speak."

Accountability

When I needed help - "I could always rely on your support in a crisis."

Comment from Funding Body - "I wanted to thank you for the interesting and important insights shared with me during my time as your contract officer. The services your organisation provides are critical and, in the case of SART, important innovations in sexual violence responses. I really appreciate and respect the hard and necessary frontline work tirelessly undertaken by yourself and your teams."



Administration Team Report

During the past year the Administration Team has continued to grow to meet the demands of increasing services being provided to women. We now have a Business Administrator, a Quality, Finance and HR Officer, two full time Receptionists, a Property and Resource Officer and a new Administration Trainee.

This year we answered calls, greeted women, administered groups, created calendars, flyers and booklets and delivered them around the town. We were all trained as Fire Wardens and worked on our Emergency Response Procedures together to keep staff and women coming to the service safe. We also responded to the often changing COVID-19 situation by ensuring everything was in place to keep staff and women's health and safety a priority.

The team also worked hard on keeping the centre looking welcoming, organised, clean and well-resourced for all of the women using our services.

A word from the team ...

"Working at The Women's Centre is both challenging and rewarding. It is a privilege to work at The Women's Centre because it's a strong, feminist and supportive environment."

It's a pleasure to work with so many diverse women in the community and we take pride in making The Women's Centre a safe and welcoming place for all women."

A word from women ...

"Would like to thank the phone receptionists and staff at the front counter. They are always so patient and understanding. So welcoming and helpful. To hear their voices brings such calm."

GROUPS AND EVENTS

When I went to The Women's Centre - "I felt safe."

NAIDOC, 2021



"I have been participating in Tasty Time as a recommendation of my dietitian & psychiatrist to improve my relationship with food & eating. This has been achieved and excelled. Many thanks to Vivienne and The Women's Centre for making it possible."

Viv Salu - Tasty Time





Playgroup



International Women's Day 2022



Management Committee

President

Theresa Petray

Secretary

Sara Potts

Treasurer

Verity Bennett

Committee Members

Angela Carroll
Bernice Hookey
Diana Falcomer
Mangalam Sankupellay
Jemima Giles

Staff Team

Coordinator

Cathy Crawford

Senior Counsellor

Di Plumb

Business Administrator

Rose Alexander

Quality, HR & Finance Officer

Tanya Jones

Property & Resource Officer

Tracey Slattery

Administration Trainee

Marlana Pryor

Reception

Narelle McKenzie
Kiara Seabourne-Radecker

Playgroup Facilitator

Maree La Spina

Counselling Team Leader

Erin Costello

Sexual Assault Counsellors

Trudi Contarino
Kady Agius
Isabella Chellingworth
Angeleen Connolly
Jasmine Kopp
Miki Li

Sexual Assault & Women's Health Counsellors

Karina Seale
Melanie Lotfali
Sian Miller
Nicole Thomas

SHS Team Leader

Sallie Kearnan

SHS Women's Caseworker

Anagi Gunasekara
Stephanie Penman
Laura Stokes
Gabe Cairns
Kat Buchta

Contracted Services and Volunteers

Private Practitioner

Betty McLellan

Art & Craft Group Facilitator

Sonia Ward

Art Group Facilitator

Karen Doolan

Senior Women's Group Facilitator

Donna Curro

Form Filling Assistant

Wendy Burton

Yoga Instructor

Meredith Starck
Paddy McGrath
Coral Gilmore

Hairdresser

Monique Frawley

Tasty Time Facilitator

Vivienne Salu

Handywoman

Melissa Cattle Cabinetmaker

Kate's Campaign for Change

Kate Pemberton

Indian Dancing Facilitator

Geeta Sadagopan

Former Staff and Students

SHS Women's Caseworker

Holly Wilson
Kate McIntosh
Christine Cameron

Sexual Assault Counsellor

Portia Darkwa Baffour
Shannon Cross
Ana Munoz-Arteta

e-Services Project Officer

Nadia Hilton

Student and Relief Reception

Stephanie Jacobson

Service Integration Coordinator

Emily Mussap







GIVE A LITTLE - HELP A LOT
DONATE NOW

All proceeds raised will support
the work of The Women's Centre
in delivering their
Specialist Homelessness Service
to secure **SAFE NIGHTS** for
women and children at risk.



Townsville
Breakwater

The Women's Centre
safe space for women



Thanks to all our partners, stakeholders and supporters.

A special thank you to those that have donated, time,
money and resources:

Adairs Stockland
Amy Simmons
Brad and Kaye Matheson (McGrath Real Estate)
Catholic Women's League Townsville Branch
Chiefettes Womens Masters NRL Team
City Women NQ
Dinesh Singham - Absolutely Dental,
thank you for generously sponsoring our Tasty Time group
Hayden Crespan
Ignatius Park College
Lynn Fisher
Monique (Infinity Hair Creations)
North Queensland Custom Services
Office of Senator Susan McDonald
Page and Pearce Real Estate
Procut Meats
Rowes Bay Golf Club Women's Committee
RSL Women's Auxiliary
Soroptomist International
St Patrick College
Townsville Lioness Club
Toyota Material Handling



The Women's Centre
safe space for women

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Website www.thewomenscentre.org.au

Funded by Department of Justice and the
Attorney General

Funded by Department Communities,
Housing & the Digital Economy

Funded by



SART
SEXUAL ASSAULT
RESPONSE TEAM
TOWNVILLE REGION



Make a secure
donation

