

THE WASH HOUSE INC
Resourcing Women



ANNUAL REPORT
2019 - 2020



About Us

The WASH House Inc. is a community based resource centre for women. It is a place of support, information and a step to other services.

We offer a range of services and activities for women in the Blacktown LGA and surrounds.

The aim of the WASH House is to reduce the impact of poverty, social disadvantage and violence on the lives of women and their families. We do this through the provision of women-centred, quality, timely, culturally sensitive and accessible services.

The WASH House Inc.

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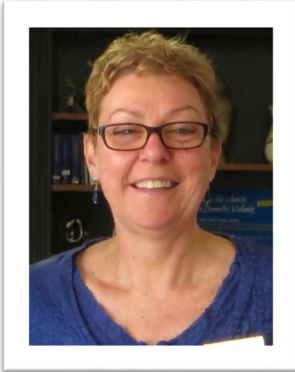
www.washhouse.org.au | www.facebook.com/washwomen

Contents

- 4 - Chair's Report
- 5 - Our Partners
- 6 - Groups and Events
- 7 - Community Projects
- 8 - The Bumpy Road
- 10 - Counselling
- 12 - Staying Home Leaving Violence
- 14 - Specialist Casework
- 15 - Our People



Chair's Report - Jo Fuller



The past twelve months started strongly for WASH House. We finalised and endorsed our Strategic Plan and Operational Plan which provide a clear vision for the future. Following consultation with staff, the Board implemented a new organisational structure for WASH House to ensure alignment with the current funding reforms and to ensure the ongoing financial viability of the organisation. Sadly this meant relinquishing our Community Engagement position and we want to acknowledge the amazing work that Josephine Rechichi did in that role. However, through the restructure we were able to increase our direct service capacity for women with the development of new Specialist Casework positions and the establishment of a leadership team for WASH House with the creation of an Executive Officer and two Coordinators roles – for Operations and Direct Service. This ensures strong support in place for all staff. The Board is grateful for the ongoing commitment and support of Catherine White acting as the Executive Officer, and was pleased to welcome Cindy Ryan into the Direct Service Coordinator role and Jane Attard-Taylor into the Operations Coordinator role.

We secured new funding from the Office of Responsible Gambling for a Gambling Harm Project Officer and Counsellor for Blacktown Local Government Area. We secured funding from WentWest to support our counselling projects, and a donation from the NRMA Good Hoods campaign for Courageous Conversations which was gratefully received. We were also pleased to be offered a 5 year contract through Department of Communities and Justice following the Targeted Early Intervention Reform recommissioning and contract negotiation process which provides a level of certainty for WASH House going forward.

We were excited to be visited by the NSW Governor on 30 August 2019. On behalf of WASH House Catherine established and led the Domestic Violence Providers Network for Blacktown to speak out following the distressing news of a number of Domestic Violence related homicides in the city. In the latter part of the financial year, the impact of COVID-19 on WASH House was significant. Some face to face work and programs ceased and staff explored other options to support the women of Mt Druitt and across Blacktown City. This was a very challenging time and the strategies put in place by Catherine, supported by all staff, have enabled us to continue operating and provide much needed services to those most at risk. In spite of the uncertainty and challenges I want to acknowledge the resilience of our community and our staff in this difficult time for all.

We were pleased to welcome three new members to the WASH Board who bring a wealth of experience, commitment and skill. Welcome Kristy, Caroline and Vicki. We also farewelled Ntumba from the Board and thank her for her time and commitment. In closing I would like to thank the Board – Tarsa Linsdell, Julie Jasprizza-Laus, Heather Chaffey, Widad Idelbi, Vicki Hill, Caroline Ferris and Kristy Hill – for their ongoing commitment to WASH House. Our amazing staff also deserve recognition for their hard work during the year. And finally I would like to acknowledge the women who access WASH House. Their resilience and strength is remarkable and inspires us all.

Our Collaborations

Blacktown Alliance for the Reduction of Gambling Harm
Blacktown City Community Safety Advisory Committee
Blacktown City Council Women's Advisory Committee
Blacktown City Elder Abuse Prevention Collaborative
DV Providers
Outer West DV Network

Say No to Violence Event
Say No to Ice Event
Kites 4 Kids Event
Child Protection Week Event
NAIDOC Celebration Event

Our partners

BACC
Blacktown City Council
BYSA
IDRS
Margaret Spencer and Susan Collings
Marrin Weejali
Mission Australia
Mt DrUITT TAFE
Penrith Women's Health Centre
Western Sydney Community Legal Centre

Our major suppliers

Access Easy English
Adair Evacuation Cons.
Adam's Home Building & Maintenance
Blacktown Image Print
Blacktown Roving Child Care
Bug Communications
Jerah Technology
Kallico Catering
LM Commercial Cleaning
Mt DrUITT Community Hub
Wavesoup

Our funders, donors, and financial supporters

Blacktown City Council
Blacktown Workers Club
Because You Matter/ Wendy James
Bianca Freedman
Bidwill Uniting
Bunnings Minchinbury
CBA Mt DrUITT
Community Smiles
Dept of Communities and Justice
Dinner on the Table
Glitter Bees
Good Neighbours
Good Hoods (NRMA)
Hillsong
Isidora Trovato
Mount DrUITT Rotary Club
Multicultural NSW
NDIA
QIS, Blacktown Westpoint
Seven Hills Toongabbie RSL
St Agnes Catholic High School
Rapid Relief Team
Riverstone Schofields Memorial Club
WentWest
Zonta Cumberland West



Groups and Events

The group program meets the social inclusion needs of the women in our community. It contributes to the health and wellbeing of women and gives them a soft entry to using other services.

Groups 2019 -2020

Term 3 2019: 1083 Attendances, Total number enrolled: 269

Term 4 2019: 1035 Attendances, Total number enrolled: 247

Term 1 2020: 767 Attendances, Total number enrolled: 248

Term 2 2020: All groups were cancelled due to COVID-19

Dance Stretch and Tone has had as many as 40 attending classes each week.

Yoga and Belly/Bolly regularly had attendance of between 20 and 30 women.

"I have learned so much about dealing with life and managing my feelings."

"I have made new friends"

Wellbeing Calls 2020

We started making welfare calls in April to the women that had enrolled in groups and were not engaged as clients with Counselling, SHLV or Specialist Caseworkers. 131 women were called weekly and the recipients were so appreciative of the staff taking the time to call, chat and listen to their concerns.

Health & Wellbeing

Yoga
Dance Stretch and Tone
Belly/Bolly Fusion
Tai Chi

Therapeutic & Personal Development

Art Therapy
True Colours
Mindfulness & Meditation
Self Care
Managing my Emotions
Bursting the Bubble

Skill Development & Social Inclusion

Art
Computers
Seams Sew Easy Sewing Group
Personal Safety & Self Defence
Children's Anti-Bullying

Events

Domestic Violence Community Vigil
Women's Multicultural Luncheon
International Women's Day
Fierce and Fearless

Workshops

Courageous Conversations
Fierce and Fearless 'Your Space'

Women's Health Conversations

Breast Care
Being a Blood Donor
Keep the Spring in your winter

"I appreciate the opportunity to meet and socialise with other women"

"I can see the patterns in domestic violence and the impact it has on my children"

"I feel safer and more comfortable"

"This gives me a sense of belonging. I feel more relaxed"

"Always happy to be learning new skills"

"I have gained wonderful insights."

Community Projects - Georgie Crabb

Developing and supporting projects and initiatives to resource and strengthen the local community.



Better Bet 4 Blacktown is a new project since last annual report. It is funded by the Office of Responsible Gambling and delivered in partnership with Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre and Western Sydney Local Health District. Gambling is clouded by shame and stigma. People are not talking about gambling and we want to work with community to break this silence.

This initiative is founded on the concern we have for the level of gambling harm in the Blacktown LGA. The daily poker machine losses in the area are \$780,447.00 per day. This puts Blacktown amongst the highest areas for poker machine losses in NSW. We also know that for every one person that gambles there are another 5 – 10 people affected. At the WASH House we recognise that women are experiencing violence and disadvantage where gambling is involved. We also recognise that women experiencing violence are at risk of developing gambling behaviours. For example, some women may seek refuge in going to the club and playing the pokies because it is seen as a safe place.

BB4B will consult with the community to better understand the drivers for gambling within the community and what the community would like to see happen to reduce gambling harm. Building the capacity of local service providers to identify and support people experiencing gambling harm is also a key activity for BB4B. We will be service mapping, identifying gaps in service provision and determining training needs.

BB4B has somewhat been disrupted by COVID constraints. It is difficult to run a consultation based project when you can't host face to face activities! This is particularly difficult with gambling. Despite these constraints we have made significant headway regardless of the constraints. Some achievements are

- Working together as a collaborative partnership
- Networking with local services and starting the conversation
- Building a strong relationship with the Blacktown Alliance for the Reduction of Gambling Harm (BARGH) and facilitating the growth of the Alliance
- Having our first community consultation out in the community

Courageous Conversations is an amazing program empowering people through education. The primary objectives of the project are

- Promoting equal and respectful relationships between men and women at all levels
- Bringing about structural and systemic organisational changes to promote gender equitable and non-violent cultures
- Building the capacity of individuals and organisations to act on gender inequity and sexism

We started off 2020 with a plan to deliver Courageous to all community services students at Mt Druitt TAFE. We were able to hold one workshop for 40 students and 5 teachers' pre COVID but due to public health restrictions further workshops were cancelled. The workshop we did hold was very positive. The students and teachers created a high energy conversation. The group reported that most learnt something new and had an increased confidence in talking about violence against women with family and friends. Many also reported an increased confidence in taking active bystander action.

3 domestic violence related homicides in May 2020 in our community were the catalyst for us to re-create Courageous Conversations to an online format. Not delivering the program to the community was not an option. Now more than ever it is critical that we continue to engage the community in awareness raising and prevention activities to reduce the violence occurring in our local area.

We set about re-writing the program for online delivery. This was a big task and has taken many hours with a group of skilled and knowledgeable advocates who are passionate about raising awareness and eliminating violence against women. For me personally I feel extremely fortunate to have shared this opportunity with such amazing people. Stay tuned for the launch of this amazing program later in 2020!

The Bumpy Road

Rachel Tozer, Janis Velan, Lisa Bartulis and Renee Cross

theBumpyRoad

Easy English fact sheets for parents dealing with the child protection system. Advice from parents with experience.

This successful project funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency NDIA ran from July 2018 - 30 June 2020.

It was a partnership between WASH House, The Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) and a group of 8 parents who have a learning disability and have lived experience of child protection services.

What did we do? We worked together to make an accessible website for parents who have learning difficulties. We shared the website with services and parents. The website:

- is about child protection and families
- has Easy English facts sheets
- has videos and parent stories
- is easy to use

I love how colourful the website is

This is one of the easiest websites I have ever used

What did parents say?

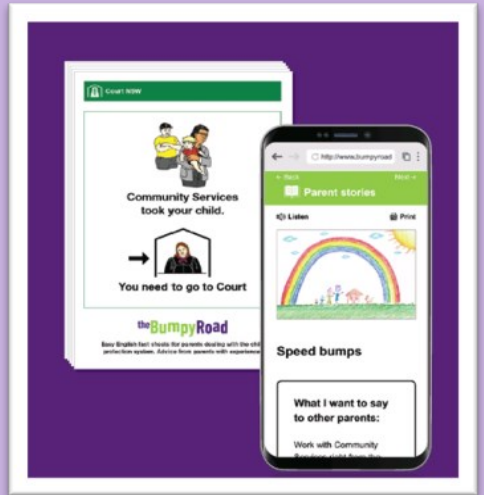
- Parents rated the website being easy to use as 8.5/10
- Parents rated the fact sheets as easy to read as 9/10

The videos were good. They stand out and are to the point

I like the topics, they are good

What did services say?

- Fabulous stuff, thank you for this resource/asset.
- This looks fantastic. HUGE CONTRATULATIONS to you and the parent team!
- That looks great, is easy to navigate and easy to read! Love it.
- Really relevant information for going through the court process.
- It's very easy to use and the pictures are brilliant.
- I am sure this will make such a difference to parents – and the parents involved in helping get this up what an incredible experience for them also.



Counselling - Linda, Lisa, Nancy, Natasha and Val

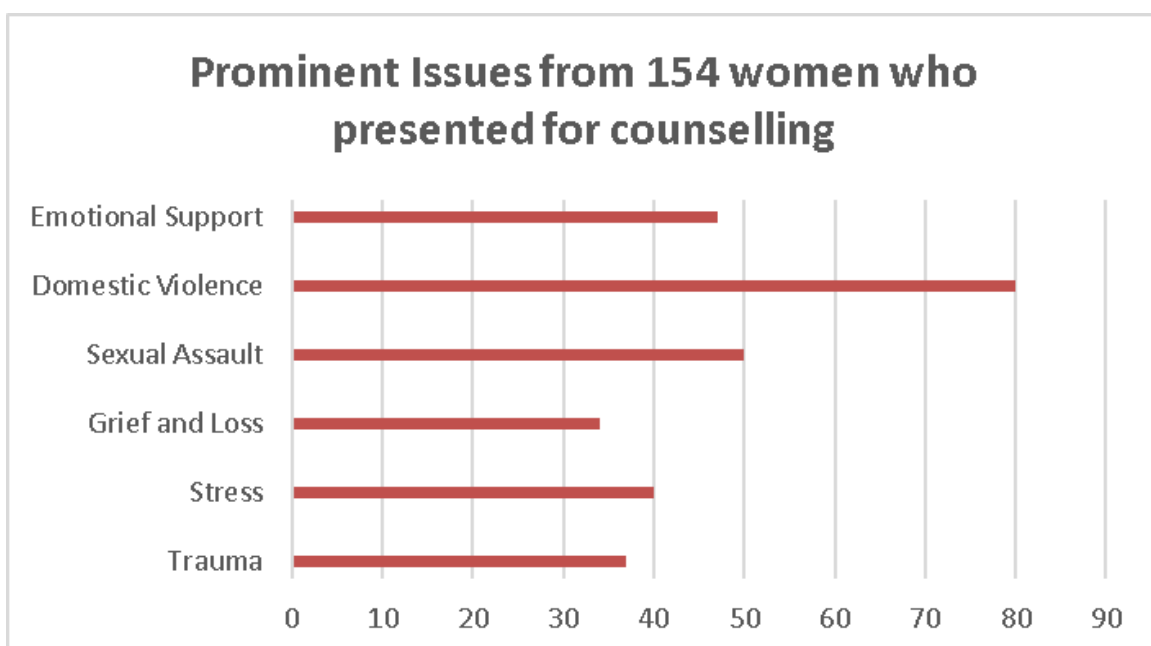
Providing information, support, counselling and group work.

Life is always a challenge for the clients who seek our help. This year has been exceptionally difficult due to COVID-19. For those women who have been isolated, had limited support and financial instability, these circumstances have been exacerbated. To provide counselling for our population, we have had to adjust the way we provide our service so that we could be of service. The counsellors have been pushed beyond their comfort zone and have been using a multitude of technologies to provide counselling. We have been working mostly from home which may seem easy but comes with its own set of challenges. It has been, and still is a learning curve for both clients and counsellors.

We continue to be supported by the Department of Community and Justice and WentWest. This year we received additional funding from the Office of Responsible Gambling to support women who have been experiencing violence where domestic violence and/or gambling is involved. As a result, we were able to employ another part-time counsellor, Valerine, to help with the demand for counselling. Valerine started on the ground running and has been a great asset to our team.

We welcome students to undergo their course placement hours at the WASH house. This year we were lucky enough to be joined by our wonderful ACAP student Natasha and she has been a valued member of our counselling team.

The demand for counselling continues to grow with 154 women accessing counselling with the main issues featured are below. Unfortunately this has meant we continue to have a waiting list. This financial year a new database was developed in line with a true crisis model. A system for triaging clients on the waiting list was developed. Clients who are deemed to be urgent are responded to very quickly (usually the same day). There is also now a focus on adhering to solution focused 10 session model.



The team was involved in many external activities throughout the year. We attended the Community Vigil to honour women who have died as a result of domestic violence. Lisa attended a Pampering Day in Parramatta organised by Western Sydney Women. Four clients received a new outfit, hair style and make up session as well as a tutorial on self-care which provided a great boost to their confidence and self-esteem.

Group work Program

True Colours

This group was for women who had endured trauma and other challenges associated with Domestic Violence. The women connected well and supported each other throughout the process which at times was confronting.

Managing Difficult Emotions

This group was well attended and most participants reported benefitting from the content which centered on mindfulness techniques and addressing self-talk.

Self Care

The group looked at financial, physical and emotional self-care heading into the Christmas period. The group was consistently attended by eight women who engaged well in the group content and activities.



Bursting the Bubble

This group was run twice during the year and was designed for women who had been impacted by people exhibiting narcissistic traits, partners, friends and family members. The program was developed by the facilitators, drawing on ACT, Art Therapy and other resources. The shared experiences of the group allowed the women to bond quickly and provided a space where they felt safe to engage with the content. The first group was run in the pre COVID-19 era but had to be shortened by one week with the onset. The second group was run as our first online forum and was very successful. We noticed that women not normally able to attend groups due to work or family commitments were able to join. Some even from their cars in their lunch break!

Mindfulness Meditation

For this group we engaged a Psychologist, Kelli). The women were taken on a journey to explore different parts of themselves through the modality of meditation and the concepts of mindfulness. This group was impacted by COVID-19 in week 6.

Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV) - Amelia, Casey, Nat, De and Rachel

A specialised domestic and family violence program keeping women and children safe at home when leaving violent relationships.

The SHLV project is a specialised domestic and family violence program, which supports women and children to remain safely in their home or to relocate to safe accommodation elsewhere. SHLV provides intensive long term case management, ongoing safety planning and education through group work, with the aim of improving all aspects of a family's well-being in recovering from violence.

Case plans are tailored to meet the individual needs of the women and children in the program by addressing issues such as:

- Safe and stable accommodation
- Financial security
- Access to education and employment
- Maintaining/developing support networks
- Addressing the impacts of trauma/mental health
- Providing court support and referrals for legal assistance

Safety plans are developed in collaboration with the women who are supported by the project. They are reviewed regularly and may include:

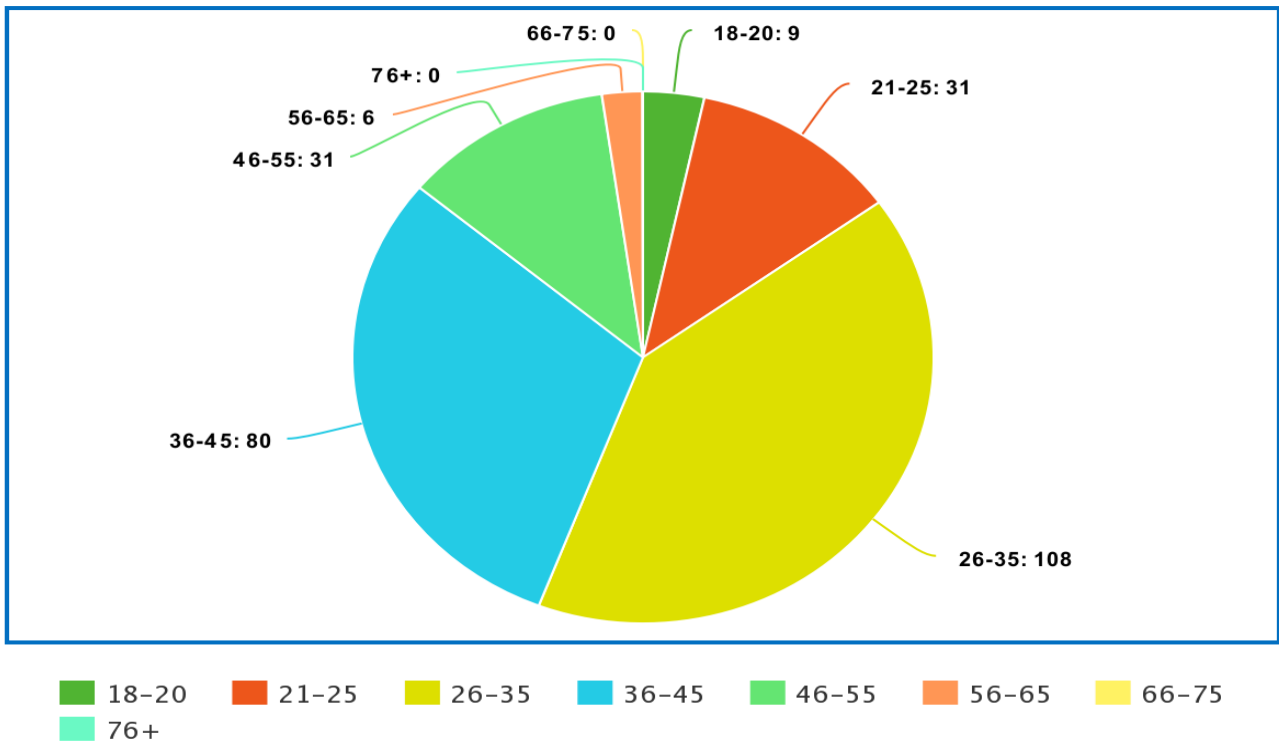
- Home safety audits
- Home safety upgrades
- Provision of SOS devices
- Relocation

In the last 12 months, the SHLV Project has encountered many challenges. There have been occasions when the project has closed for short periods, due to a spike in referrals. In the face of COVID-19, our practice and service delivery has changed dramatically in the following ways:

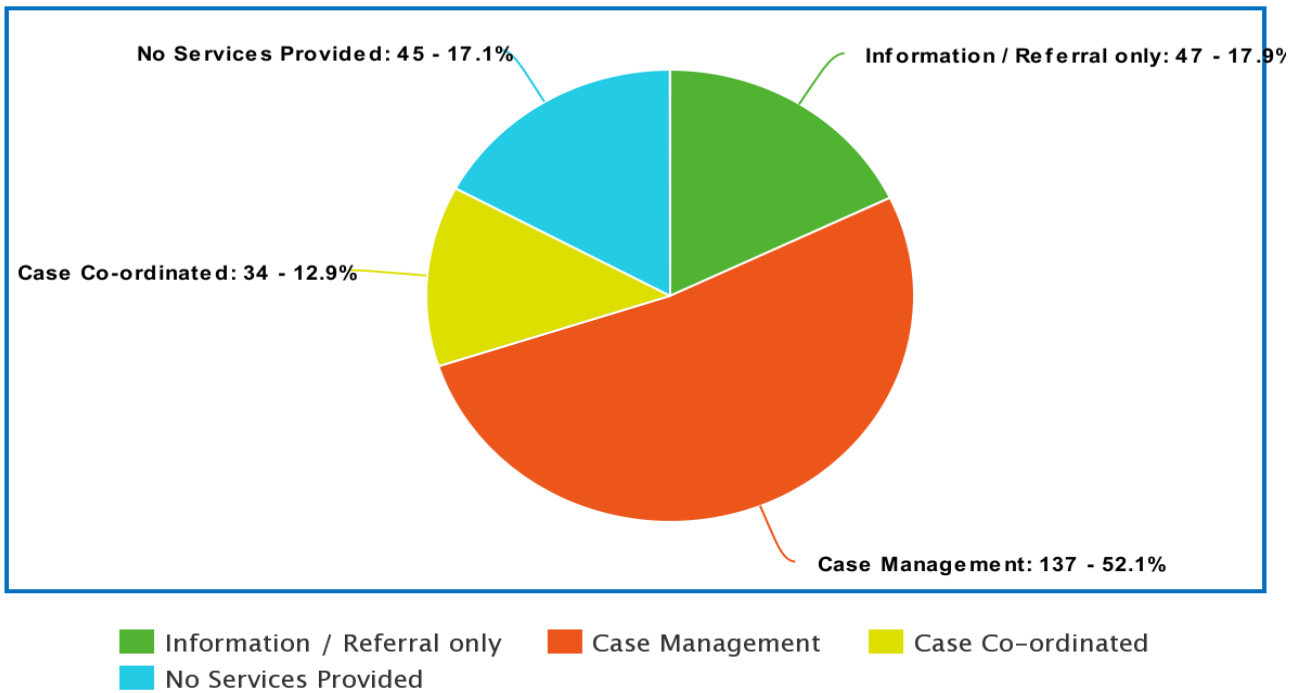
- Working remotely from home on alternate weeks
- Working in split teams
- Conducting some home safety audits remotely
- Working with clients more frequently over the phone, and less face to face contact
- An increase in work load due to the closure or restrictions of other key stakeholders
- Some cases of perpetrators being released early from custody due to COVID-19, which has impacted women's safety
- A significant increase in the need for CCTV cameras to provide evidence of AVO breaches to Police
- Closure of Local and Family Court
- Restricted access to emergency accommodation due to the closure of refuges
- Difficulty in accessing private rental accommodation due to limited open inspections

Between 1/07/2019 – 30/06/2020 we received 282 referrals. We provided case management to 134 women and case coordination to 34 women.

Ages of Women who accessed SHLV project between 1/07/2019 – 30/06/2020



Service Provision 1/07/2019 – 30/06/2020



Specialist Casework - Sonja, Aimelle and Chloe

Providing support from the first point of contact for women in need. Ensuring all women seeking support are provided with relevant and timely assistance.

Specialist Casework is a dynamic service that provides women with relevant and timely assistance. We provide the first point of contact for women and do an initial assessment, identify needs and do appropriate internal or external referrals. We are client led and support women to meet their individual goals. This ranges from women who are in crisis through to longer term case management.

The reasons women have come to the WASH House are wide and varied. The Specialist Casework team can assist women from form filling (that helps them engage or access a service) to empowering them to build a better life for themselves (which can include moving to a new place or being free from violence).

Women aged 18 to 76 have accessed our services in the last financial year. Most women are Australian born with an average of 20% of all clients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We have seen women that were born in 26 other countries.

Most women are self-referred and just drop into our centre without an appointment. During the pandemic, there were more women who contacted us via phone and email. Staying open, as an essential service it was important to continue face to face contact and safe space for women, particularly as other services could not continue their normal operations. Women expressed to us that they were extremely isolated. The ongoing support of the WASH House team and regular phone calls to check in were greatly received and appreciated by women. Women with violent partners were forced to spend more time at home and this significantly increased their risk and vulnerability. Family and Domestic Violence continues to be the most reported issue to our service.



Since the pandemic, there has been an increased need for material aid, and women who have been self-sufficient who found themselves out of work having to seek welfare assistance for the first time. There has also been an increase in applications to Department of Communities and Justice for housing.

In this financial year, we have had a few staff changes with Aimelle joining the team in November, Sonja moving on in April, and Chloe joining the team in March. We co-facilitate groups run here at the WASH House. Sonja co-facilitated the *True Colours* therapeutic group with Amelia in Term 1. Aimelle co-facilitated the *Art Therapy* group with Art Therapist Sophie in Term 1.



The WASH House Board as at June 2020

Our board is made up of up to 8 women who meet monthly to oversee the governance and strategic direction of the WASH House. Currently:

Chair: Jo Fuller

Treasurer: Julie Jasprizza-Laus

Deputy Chair: Widad Idelbi

Secretary: Heather Chaffey

Members: Tarsa Linsdell, Caroline Ferris, Kristy Hill, Vicki Hill

The WASH House Staff as at June 2020

Acting Executive Officer: Catherine White

Operations Coordinator: Jane Attard-Taylor

Direct Services Coordinator: Cindy Ryan

Administration: Mary Hassiem, Melissa Palmer

Finance: Lynelle Newman

Community Projects: Georgie Crabb

Parenting from Afar: Rachel Tozer, Lisa Bartulis, Renee Cross, Janis Velan

Counselling: Nancy Bannerman; Lisa Brown; Linda Marsonet

Specialist Casework: Aimelle Manrique, Chloe Mvura

Staying Home Leaving Violence: Amelia Webster, De Nabarro, Casey Bush, Rachel Grimshaw