

North West Tasmania Women's Shelter Annual Report 2025/2026

The 2025–26 year has been a defining chapter in the history of North West Tasmania Women's Shelter.



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the punnilerpanner people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, work and support women and children.

We pay our deepest respects to the punnilerpanner women, men and children who cared for this Country, its waters and its communities for generations, and to those who did not survive colonisation. We remember the lives, families, stories, knowledge and connections that were lost, and honour the strength of those who endured.

We recognise the enduring strength of Aboriginal women and children, whose connection to Country, culture, family and community has continued despite generations of dispossession, violence and hardship.

As a women's shelter, we acknowledge the importance of safety, dignity, belonging and the right of every woman and child to live free from violence and fear. We recognise that for Aboriginal women and children, safety and healing are deeply connected to culture, Country, family and community.

We honour the women who have come before us, the women who continue to hold families and communities together, and the children whose futures we have a responsibility to protect.

We commit to listening, learning and walking respectfully alongside Aboriginal women, children and communities, while continuing to create spaces where every woman and child is heard, valued, supported and safe.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, families and communities.

by Hellen Gower, NWTWS Board Member



Message from the Chair & CEO

The 2025–26 year has been a defining chapter in the history of North West Tasmania Women's Shelter.

It has been a year of transformation, reform and renewed purpose — one that honours more than 40 years of supporting women and children experiencing family violence and homelessness while positioning our organisation to meet the increasingly complex needs of our region.

For more than four decades, our organisation, formerly known as Warrawee Women's Shelter, has provided safety, support and hope to women and children across North West Tasmania. Today, we stand at the beginning of a new era — one grounded in best-practice governance, contemporary service delivery and an unwavering commitment to ensuring every woman and child has access to safe, trauma-informed support when they need it most.

The past 12 months have required us to look honestly at who we were, where we needed to improve and, most importantly, what women and children in our region deserve from a specialist family violence service. That reflection has driven one of the most significant periods of organisational reform in our history.

Since Sophie Hunt commenced as the inaugural Chief Executive Officer in April 2025, every aspect of the organisation has been reviewed through the lens of improving outcomes for women and children. We have strengthened governance, modernised systems, transitioned from paper-based records to secure digital platforms, introduced contemporary operational practices and begun embedding a trauma-informed, therapeutic model of care that places women and children firmly at the centre of every decision.

These reforms represent far more than organisational change. They are about creating a service capable of responding to the realities facing victim-survivors today and ensuring women and children in North West Tasmania receive the same quality of specialist support available elsewhere in Tasmania.

In September 2025, we formally transitioned from Warrawee Committee Inc. to North West Tasmania Women's Shelter Incorporated, alongside the introduction of a new Constitution. This milestone marked not only a change in name, but a renewed vision for the future.



Sophie Hunt - CEO



Liz Leslie – Chair

Our new identity reflects our role as the specialist family violence crisis accommodation provider for North West Tasmania while acknowledging the organisation's proud history. We also commenced the important journey towards adopting an Aboriginal dual name, recognising the significance of culture, place and truth-telling in shaping our future.

With this transition came the evolution from a long-standing Committee to a contemporary Board focused on strategic leadership and strong governance. We acknowledge the extraordinary contribution of those whose dedication has guided the organisation over many years.

We extend our sincere thanks to former President Cheryl Larcombe, Treasurer Jacob Hendricks and Secretary Kathy Van Beek for their outstanding leadership and commitment. We also thank outgoing Committee members Loretta Moles, Ruth Carswell and Sarah Howard for their valued service and the strong foundations they have helped create for the future.

We are grateful to Cheryl Larcombe for her leadership during this period of transition and for nominating Liz Leslie to lead the organisation into its next chapter as the inaugural Chair of North West Tasmania Women's Shelter Incorporated.

During the year we were proud to launch our new name, brand and website — an identity that honours our history while reflecting the contemporary, specialist organisation we are becoming.

Liz Leslie, Chair
Sophie Hunt, Chief Executive Officer



Responding to a Region in Crisis

While our organisation has undergone significant transformation, the challenges facing women and children across North West Tasmania have continued to intensify.

North West Tasmania experiences the highest rates of family violence in the state, approaching three times the national average. At the same time, the housing crisis continues to deepen, creating unprecedented pressure on specialist homelessness and family violence services.

Average lengths of stay within our service have increased dramatically — from 39 nights in 2023 to 179 nights during this reporting period — as women and children remain unable to access safe, long-term housing.

Today, four out of every five women and children seeking accommodation through our service are turned away because we simply do not have the capacity to respond. Social housing wait times exceeding 85 weeks mean specialist crisis accommodation has increasingly become a substitute for long-term housing rather than the short-term crisis response it was designed to provide.

Alongside these housing pressures, we are supporting families experiencing increasingly complex needs. The intersection of family violence, homelessness, mental health challenges, alcohol and other drug issues, financial hardship and rural disadvantage requires responses that are both highly specialised and deeply integrated.

Despite the extraordinary commitment of our staff, the reality is that current funding models do not adequately reflect the complexity or scale of need within North West Tasmania.

“Our turn-away rates remain consistently high, with four out of five women and children seeking support unable to access accommodation. We know many more families remain in unsafe situations without ever contacting our service because they believe help simply isn't available. Every turn-away represents a woman or child we know deserves better.”

This reality continues to drive our advocacy at both State and Federal levels.

Despite serving Tasmania's largest geographical region and experiencing the state's highest rates of family violence, North West Tasmania Women's Shelter continues to operate with significantly fewer resources than comparable specialist shelters.

For too long, women and children in our region have experienced inequity in the level of support available to them. We remain committed to changing that.

Family Violence Incident Rate Per 10,000 Population

Based on the latest ABS population estimates





Building the Service Our Region Deserves

Throughout the year we have focused not only on responding to today's challenges, but on creating the service North West Tasmania will need for decades to come.

During the 2025 State Election, we secured funding to develop a comprehensive business case for a new purpose-built specialist family violence facility on land identified by Homes Tasmania.

Working alongside Cushman & Wakefield and Core Collective Architects, we developed a vision for a contemporary, trauma-informed facility incorporating independent accommodation, therapeutic spaces, integrated support services and environments specifically designed to promote safety, dignity and recovery.

Although funding for construction has not yet been secured, the project continues to progress and is currently being assessed by Housing Australia for Federal investment.

We remain steadfast in our belief that women and children in North West Tasmania deserve facilities and services equal to those available elsewhere in Australia.

While we continue advocating for this transformational investment, we have not stood still.

Recognising that meaningful trauma-informed practice cannot be fully realised within an outdated communal accommodation model, the Board made the significant decision to transition away from communal crisis accommodation in December 2025.

This decision represented one of the most important reforms in the organisation's history.

In January 2026, we implemented a completely redesigned service delivery model supported by a new organisational structure. Specialist therapeutic roles, child-centred practice leadership, strengthened tenancy support and enhanced practice governance now ensure women and children receive holistic, trauma-informed support throughout their time with us.

Although these reforms remain in their early stages, the outcomes are already evident.

Women are engaging more deeply with therapeutic support, children are being recognised as victim-survivors in their own right, and our workforce is building a culture grounded in safety, collaboration, reflection and hope.

Equally important has been our investment in our people. Supporting women and children experiencing trauma requires skilled, resilient professionals. Throughout the year we have strengthened supervision, wellbeing initiatives and professional development, recognising that exceptional outcomes for families begin with a supported workforce.



Looking Forward

This year has been one of immense challenge, but also one of extraordinary progress.

Together, our staff and Board have embraced significant change with courage, professionalism and unwavering commitment to women and children. Their dedication has laid the foundations for a stronger organisation — one that is better equipped to respond to today's challenges while shaping the future of specialist family violence services in North West Tasmania.

As we move into the next phase of our journey, our focus remains clear: to fully embed our specialist therapeutic model, continue advocating for equitable investment and ensure every woman and child who reaches out to us can access the safety, dignity and support they deserve.

We know there is still much to achieve.

Yet we have never been more confident in our direction, our purpose or our capacity to create meaningful change.

Together with our community, partners, governments and supporters, we will continue working towards a future where every woman and child in North West Tasmania can live free from violence and with the opportunity to heal, recover and thrive.

Liz Leslie, Chair
Sophie Hunt, Chief Executive Officer





Our Impact in Numbers

Every statistic in this report represents a woman or child who sought safety, stability and the opportunity to rebuild their life. Behind every number is a story of resilience, courage and hope.

While this year's data demonstrates the significant reach of our service, it also highlights the increasing pressure facing specialist family violence and homelessness services across North West Tasmania. Women and children are remaining in crisis accommodation for longer due to an unprecedented shortage of affordable housing, reducing our capacity to respond to new families seeking support.

Despite these challenges, our team remained committed to delivering high-quality, trauma-informed support to every woman and child who entered our service.

When We Couldn't Say Yes

Perhaps the most confronting figure in this report is not the number of women and children we supported — it is the number we could not.

321 women and children were unable to access accommodation through NWTWS during 2025–26 because our service was at capacity.

Every turn-away represents a woman or child who reached out for safety at one of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. While our team worked tirelessly to provide referrals, safety planning and alternative options wherever possible, we know these measures cannot replace immediate access to specialist crisis accommodation.

Reducing these turn-away numbers remains one of our highest organisational priorities and continues to drive our advocacy for increased investment in specialist family violence accommodation across North West Tasmania.

2025–26 Snapshot



10,538
Bed nights
provided



78
Total support



34
Women



44
Children



154
Nights
Average length
of stay

Why Women and Children Sought Support*

75% Experienced family
violence

87% Were experiencing
housing insecurity or
homelessness

*Many women and children presented with multiple, intersecting issues.



Highlights

Expanding Safe Accommodation for Women and Children

One of the year's most significant milestones was progressing plans to expand our accommodation capacity through the Commonwealth-funded Crisis and Transitional Accommodation Program.

Following the announcement of Federal funding in late 2024, extensive planning throughout 2025–26 laid the foundations for three new self-contained units at our Ulverstone site.

The project will transform an underutilised office building into purpose-built accommodation designed using trauma-informed principles, creating safer and more dignified environments for women and children recovering from family violence.

Developed in partnership with Core Collective Architects, the project reflects contemporary best practice in specialist crisis accommodation and represents another important step towards modernising services in North West Tasmania.

Construction is scheduled to commence in August 2026, with the new units expected to welcome families by March 2027.

A Strategic Partnership for Long-Term Change

This year also marked the beginning of an important partnership with **Housing All Australians**, bringing together two organisations united by a shared commitment to improving housing outcomes for women and children experiencing family violence.



The partnership extends beyond fundraising. It reflects a shared vision to advocate for greater investment in North West Tasmania, increase awareness of the unique challenges facing our region and explore innovative funding pathways through philanthropy and corporate partnerships.

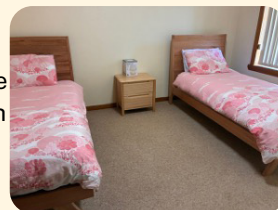
Together, we are advocating for contemporary, trauma-informed crisis accommodation that reflects national best practice and provides women and children with environments that promote healing, dignity and long-term recovery.

The partnership also supports our vision to redevelop existing infrastructure at our Ulverstone site, increasing accommodation capacity while creating contemporary workspaces for our staff and visiting partner agencies.

The official launch brought together government representatives, philanthropists, sector leaders and community partners, reinforcing a growing commitment to ensuring women and children in North West Tasmania receive the specialist support they deserve.

Enhancing Our Accommodation Through Community Support

Creating a sense of safety extends beyond providing a roof over someone's head. The physical environment in which women and children begin their recovery plays a vital role in supporting healing, restoring dignity and helping families feel safe after experiencing trauma.



While we continue to advocate for contemporary, purpose-built crisis accommodation, we have remained committed to improving the homes we currently provide. Throughout the year, community partnerships and generous donations have enabled us to significantly enhance the comfort, functionality and liveability of our accommodation.

Thanks to our partnership with the DV Collective, every accommodation property received upgraded beds, replacing outdated furnishings with 14 new queen-sized beds. This was complemented by a generous donation from Penguin Community Op Shop of eight Tasmanian Oak single beds and high-quality mattresses, ensuring women and children entering our service experience greater comfort during what is often one of the most difficult periods of their lives.

These seemingly simple improvements have a profound impact. A comfortable bed, a welcoming space and a sense of normality can provide reassurance, stability and dignity at a time of significant uncertainty.

Small Acts of Care That Make a Lasting Difference

Trauma-informed practice is reflected not only in our therapeutic model, but also in the everyday experiences of women and children entering our service.

This year, our staff introduced personalised welcome packs to ensure every family receives practical essentials alongside a clear message: you are welcome, you are safe, and you are valued.

These small acts of kindness help create a positive first experience, reducing anxiety and demonstrating the compassion that underpins every aspect of our service.

Community generosity has also enabled us to continue improving our accommodation portfolio.

An ongoing contribution from **Freemasons Tasmania** has established a dedicated fund to replace furniture, purchase household items and progressively upgrade accommodation across our properties, helping create environments that support recovery, independence and wellbeing.



Community Partners Making a Difference

The generosity of our community continues to play an invaluable role in supporting women and children experiencing family violence.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Crystal Girls, whose commitment to helping young people feel confident, included and cared for resulted in beautifully prepared care packs containing toiletries, clothing and essential items for families entering our service.

We are equally grateful to the many community organisations and groups that have supported NWTWS through fundraising initiatives, awareness events and donations throughout the year, including:

- Soroptomist International of Smithton
- Cast Offs Market – Port Sorell
- Bootscootin' Devils
- Soroptomist International of Devonport
- Penguin Village Stitchers
- Ally Smith Consulting
- Penguin Community Op Shop
- Zonta Club Of Devonport
- Crystal Girls
- Ulverstone Scrabble Club
- St Brendan Shaw College
- Tasmanian Masonic Benevolent Foundation
- Thread Together
- DV Collective
- Ignite Women Tasmania
- MONA
- Mersey Skills Training
- Woolworths Ulverstone

We also wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to the many individuals who gave generously throughout the year, with cash donations, donations of vouchers and financial commitments to redevelopment projects. At special occasions throughout the year we also receive many gifts, thoughtfully curated for our families, especially at Christmas, Easter and Mother's Day.

Every contribution, whether financial, practical or in-kind, helps create safer environments, reduces barriers for families in crisis and demonstrates

to women and children that their community stands beside them.

Together, these partnerships reinforce an important message: ending family violence is a shared responsibility, and lasting change is only possible when communities come together to support those experiencing it.



Ignite Women Tasmania – Inspiring Action Through Community Leadership

In March 2026, Chief Executive Officer Sophie Hunt was honoured to deliver the keynote address at the Ignite Women Tasmania International Women's Day Breakfast.

The event provided an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the realities facing women and children experiencing family violence in North West Tasmania, while sharing the significant organisational reforms underway at North West Tasmania Women's Shelter.

Under the theme “**Give to Gain**”, the morning became a powerful call to action — encouraging individuals, businesses and community leaders to play an active role in creating safer futures for women and children.

The response from the community was extraordinary.

Funds raised through the event were donated to North West Tasmania Women's Shelter in the form of Woolworths and Coles vouchers, providing women and children with the flexibility, dignity and choice to purchase the everyday essentials they need as they begin rebuilding their lives.

These practical supports reflect one of our core practice principles: empowering women with agency, respecting individual choice and recognising that recovery looks different for every family.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Ignite Women Tasmania and every person who contributed to this remarkable initiative. Their generosity is making a tangible difference in the lives of women and children across our region.





Co-located Services and Programs

At North West Tasmania Women's Shelter, we recognise that recovery from family violence requires more than safe accommodation. It requires coordinated, accessible and specialist support that responds to the legal, financial, emotional and practical challenges women face as they rebuild their lives.

Throughout 2025–26, we continued to strengthen our integrated service model by bringing specialist services directly to women and children within our therapeutic hub. By reducing barriers to access and improving collaboration between agencies, we are creating a more responsive, person-centred experience for families at every stage of their journey.

Improving Access to Specialist Legal Support

This year we were pleased to welcome **Women's Legal Service Tasmania** to our NWTWS hub, providing regular on-site legal advice and consultation for women accessing our service.

Delivered through the **Just Healthy Families Partnership**, these fortnightly clinics enable women to receive timely legal support within a safe and familiar environment, while working alongside our therapeutic team to ensure responses are coordinated, holistic and centred on each woman's individual circumstances.

The partnership also strengthens access to financial counselling and other specialist supports, recognising that addressing legal and financial issues is often critical to achieving long-term safety and independence.

Supporting Recovery Through Evidence-Based Programs

We were also pleased to host **Engender Equality's Shark Cage Program**, providing women in our service with access to a nationally recognised program designed to strengthen understanding of coercive control, rebuild confidence and support long-term recovery from family violence.

Providing programs within our service environment removes barriers to participation and enables women to engage in therapeutic learning alongside the practical supports they are already receiving.

Working Together for Better Housing Outcomes

Access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing remains one of the greatest challenges facing women and children leaving crisis accommodation.

Throughout the year we continued to strengthen our partnership with **CatholicCare Housing Services**, working closely with Practice Leaders and Key Development Coaches to coordinate case planning and improve housing pathways for women transitioning from crisis accommodation.

These collaborative relationships ensure women experience seamless support, with services working together towards shared goals rather than navigating complex systems in isolation.

Strong partnerships such as these are essential to improving long-term outcomes and reducing the likelihood of women and children returning to unsafe situations due to a lack of housing options.

Introducing Our Specialist Practice Model

One of the most significant achievements of 2025–26 has been the implementation of our new specialist therapeutic service delivery model.

Developed as part of our broader organisational transformation, the model reflects contemporary best practice in specialist family violence services and recognises that recovery extends far beyond providing emergency accommodation.

At the heart of the model are our **Therapeutic Specialists**, who work intensively alongside women throughout their time with our service.

Their role is to build trusting relationships, identify strengths, navigate complex systems and provide individualised support that empowers women to achieve their own goals.

Support is tailored to each family's unique circumstances and may include:

- therapeutic interventions that support healing and recovery
- comprehensive safety planning and risk management
- advocacy across legal, housing and community systems
- complex case coordination
- referrals and collaboration with specialist services
- support to secure long-term housing
- practical assistance during periods of crisis
- strengthening confidence, resilience and independence.

Rather than responding only to immediate crisis, our therapeutic model supports women to build the foundations for long-term safety, wellbeing and stability.



Keeping Women and Children at the Centre

Despite the scale of organisational reform undertaken throughout the year, our greatest achievement has not been the implementation of new systems, structures or programs.

It has been our commitment to ensuring that every decision begins and ends with the voices, experiences and aspirations of women and children.

Their courage has shaped our reform.

Their experiences have challenged us to improve.

Their resilience continues to inspire the way we design services, advocate for change and measure success.

Throughout every stage of our organisational transformation, we have remained focused on creating an environment where women feel heard, respected and empowered, and where children are recognised not simply as accompanying family members, but as victim-survivors with their own rights, experiences and recovery journeys.

This commitment continues to guide every aspect of our practice.

As we look to the future, we remain focused on building a service that is compassionate, evidence-informed and responsive — one that not only provides safety in times of crisis but also creates opportunities for healing, recovery and hope.

Because ultimately, our success is not measured by the number of programs we deliver or the reforms we implement.

It is measured by the lives changed, the futures rebuilt and the women and children who leave our service safer, stronger and empowered to move forward with confidence.



Thank You

Meaningful change is only possible through the commitment, generosity and collaboration of many people.

We extend our sincere thanks to our dedicated staff, whose professionalism, compassion and unwavering commitment have supported women and children through some of the most difficult times in their lives. Throughout a year of significant organisational reform, they have embraced change with courage, resilience and an unwavering focus on those we serve.

We thank our Board for providing strong governance, strategic leadership and steadfast belief in our vision for the future. Their commitment has guided the organisation through one of the most significant periods of transformation in our history.

We are deeply grateful to our government partners, community organisations, donors, volunteers and advocates whose support continues to strengthen our work and expand what is possible for women and children across North West Tasmania.

To everyone who has contributed financially, shared their expertise, advocated alongside us or stood behind our organisation — we thank you.

To Homes Tasmania, for their ongoing funding and partnership.

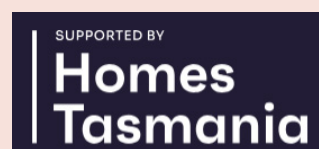
Together, you are helping create safer futures for women and children.

While the challenges facing our region remain significant, so too does our determination.

We are building more than a service.

We are helping build a future where every woman and child experiencing family violence can access safety, dignity, hope and the opportunity to heal.

Thank you for standing with us on that journey.





Looking Ahead: Our Priorities for 2026–27

The transformation of North West Tasmania Women's Shelter is well underway, but our work is far from complete.

As we enter the next phase of our journey, our focus is on embedding the reforms of the past year while continuing to advocate for the investment our region urgently needs. Every initiative we undertake is driven by one purpose: ensuring women and children experiencing family violence have access to safe accommodation, specialist support and the opportunity to recover and thrive.



During 2026–27, we will focus on:

Embedding Our Specialist Therapeutic Practice Model

We will continue to strengthen our trauma-informed, child-centred approach, ensuring women and children receive consistent, evidence-informed support throughout their journey with our service. This includes further developing our practice framework, investing in workforce capability and embedding reflective practice across the organisation.

Expanding Safe Accommodation

Construction of three new self-contained units at our Ulverstone site represents an important step towards increasing accommodation capacity. We will continue progressing our vision for a purpose-built, contemporary specialist family violence facility that reflects national best practice and meets the growing needs of North West Tasmania.

Strengthening Partnerships

Meaningful change cannot be achieved in isolation. We will continue building strong partnerships with government, Aboriginal organisations, community services, housing providers, philanthropic organisations and local communities to create more coordinated responses for women and children.

Advocating for System Reform

The inequity experienced by women and children in North West Tasmania remains unacceptable. We will continue advocating for sustainable investment, equitable funding and policy reform that recognises the unique challenges of our region and supports specialist family violence responses that are fit for purpose.

Building a Sustainable Organisation

As our service continues to evolve, we remain committed to strong governance, financial sustainability and continuous improvement. Investing in our people, systems and organisational capability will ensure we continue delivering high-quality services while positioning NWTWS for future growth.

**For more information
please contact:**

Sophie Hunt, CEO NWTWS
0427 889 061
sophie@nwtws.org.au
www.nwtws.org.au

