

THIS KEEPS WOMEN OUT OF PRISON

Insights from the
First 18 Months



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY



Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) acknowledge the traditional custodians of country and recognise their continuing Connection to land, waters and culture.

WAGEC works on the unceded lands of the Gadigal, Wangal and Dharawal people of the Eora and Darug nation and we pay our respects to elders past and present.

WAGEC also recognises the intergenerational trauma and structural racism that colonisation has and continues to inflict on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge our position within a system and nation whose history is one of racism, Genocide, child removal, dispossession of lands and oppression of cultures and languages. We respectfully acknowledge the resilience and survival of the world's oldest living culture.

We pay tribute to the generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have led, and continue to lead, the way in creating safe futures for women and children and safe spaces for the community. We acknowledge their strength and commit to listening, learning and continuously improving our allyship in the movement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander safety, equality and justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE



Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) acknowledges the strength, resilience and wisdom of women with lived experience of incarceration, homelessness, and gender-based violence.

WAGEC recognises that women with lived experience possess unique knowledge and insights that cannot be gained through professional qualifications alone. We honour their courage in navigating systems that were not designed to support them, and in sharing their stories to create meaningful change.

We acknowledge that systems of justice, housing, and family support have historically overlooked the specific needs of women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, pregnant women, and mothers. We recognise the compounding impacts of trauma, violence, poverty, and structural marginalisation on women's pathways into and out of imprisonment.

We pay tribute to the women who have shaped and informed the From Now program through their direct experiences, feedback, and guidance. Their contributions ensure our work remains grounded in real-world understanding and authentic community needs.

WAGEC commits to centring the voices of those with lived experience in our program design, implementation, and evaluation. We acknowledge that true expertise comes from those who have walked these paths, and we pledge to listen, learn, and continuously improve our approach in partnership with the women we serve.

FOREWORD

CEO

Nicole Yade

For almost 50 years WAGEC has supported the most marginalised women and children in our community to access the right support to heal and start a new chapter in life. Our work supporting victim survivors who are homeless and fleeing domestic and family violence demonstrates our commitment to gender equality, safety and social change.

Approximately two years ago, we jumped at the chance to deliver domestic violence education and participate in service expos at Dillwynia Women's Correctional Centre – work that we continue to do to this day. We have met hundreds of women, women we seek to honour every day in our work on From Now.

I carry with me the stories shared with us from within the prison. So often those stories spoke to childhood abuse and experiences of violence, of trying to get by through poverty, addiction, and mental illness. Of feeling alone and not having any options. The people and systems that were supposed to be there to help failing terribly, and the consequences of those systemic failures etched into the faces before me.

But what has always stood out to me, not in any simple or cheerful way, was the hard-won strength, determination and courage I saw in the women I met. Like all of us they wanted a better life, for their children, for themselves.

We are privileged at WAGEC to accompany such women, and their children on their journeys in the support offered in From Now. In working with women and their children our ambition is not only to create change in the present moment but across generations.

WAGEC is so very proud of what From Now has already achieved in this initial pilot phase, but this report reminds us that there is more work ahead, that we

must do this together, to create the change we want to see in the world.

On behalf of WAGEC, I would like to sincerely acknowledge the generous support of The Judith Neilson Foundation. A project like this would not be possible without such authentic collaboration of which we are very grateful.

Together, we stand ready for the challenges ahead and remain committed in service and in advocacy until all women in prison are safe and free.



PROJECT LEAD

Jenny Holmes, Dharawal/Darug

As an Aboriginal woman with lived experience of the justice system, I carry the stories of my own journey and those of the many women I've walked alongside. I know what it means to carry the weight of stigma, to feel the shame that's been placed on us by systems that were never built for us, and to still rise each day determined to keep going - not just for ourselves, but for our children, our families, and our communities.

What's missing in our justice and social systems is real understanding, especially for women who are mothers or pregnant. Too many of our women are being refused bail and held in custody, often for things that would be handled differently if they were not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, if they were not poor, if they had safe housing. This is not just unfair, it's dangerous.

When a woman gives birth in custody, she is taken to the closest hospital to the prison, sometimes handcuffed to the bed while she's in labour, with a corrections officer present in the room, watching her the whole time. For anyone who's witnessed or experienced childbirth, you know how raw and vulnerable that moment is. Now imagine going through that while shackled and being watched - not supported. It is a traumatic and dehumanising experience, not only for the mother but for the baby and everyone involved. This is the reality for far too many women in society.

The From Now program exists because incarceration is part of a woman's story, but it is never the whole story. We are creating something different: a space of safety and care, where women can stop, breathe, and begin to heal. A space where they can look at what's happened without shame, and begin to rebuild their lives - with access to safe housing, support to reconnect with their children, and guidance to navigate

the trauma that so often sits behind incarceration and the events that led them there.

We carry a deep responsibility to do things differently. We will not stand by while another generation of children is taken from their mothers. We work to keep families together, to support women in learning the skills they need to heal, and to walk with them as they reclaim their strength and their future.

This work is close to my heart. I see these women, and I see their power - especially when the system tells them they have none. From Now is about walking beside them, not ahead of them, and helping them realise they are worthy of safety, stability, and a life they can be proud of.



THE JUDITH NEILSON FOUNDATION

Program Funder

WAGEC's From Now program addresses a critical gap in services for a highly marginalised cohort: pregnant women exiting prison. These women often face intersecting challenges, including histories of violence, homelessness, and systemic exclusion, which heighten the risk of reoffending and family separation. The Judith Neilson Foundation supports initiatives that address the structural drivers of incarceration for women and girls. From Now reflects this commitment by offering coordinated housing and reintegration support at a pivotal life stage, when women are seeking to rebuild stability for themselves and their families.

Women are the fastest growing cohort in Australian prisons, yet services have not kept pace. Without appropriate support, many leave custody into homelessness or isolation, often resulting in the loss of their children to statutory care. The From Now program offers a practical model for reducing these risks and supporting recovery, stability, and family reunification.

This internal review is a timely opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the model and inform its future development. It presents insights from program delivery and implementation, highlighting strengths, challenges, and areas for further learning. We acknowledge WAGEC's leadership in testing and refining this approach and their ongoing efforts to strengthen outcomes for women impacted by the criminal legal system.

At the Judith Neilson Foundation, we recognise the importance of data and evaluation in informing long-term systems change. We hope this report will

contribute to broader policy and service conversations around how best to support women exiting prison and prevent intergenerational cycles of incarceration. We value our partnership with WAGEC and look forward to the program's continued evolution



**THIS
PROGRAM IS
NOT ABOUT
SHORT-TERM
RELIEF, IT IS
ABOUT
SYSTEMIC
CHANGE.**

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	Acknowledgement of Country	3
	Acknowledgement of Lived Experience	4
FOREWORD	CEO	5
	Project Lead	6
	The Judith Neilson Foundation	7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		11
INTRODUCTION	What we Provide	21
	Our Programs	23
WHY FROM NOW IS NEEDED	Women Prisoners in NSW	27
	The Gendered Experience of Incarceration	29
	Transitioning From Incarceration	31
	Prison is no Place for Pregnant Women	33
PROGRAM OUTLINE	A Systemic Intervention	38
	Preventing Family Separation	39
	How From Now Links in with Current Initiatives	41
	Our Approach	43
	Target Audience	44

CONTENT WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report may contain images of people who have passed away.

Please note: All imagery included in this report is for illustrative purposes only and does not depict participants or contributors to this work.

OUTCOMES	45
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RECOMMENDATIONS	
Sustainability, Expansion and Systemic Impact	69
Core Infrastructure Investment	70
Programmatic Enhancements	71
Pre-release and Systems Coordination	74
Strengthening Program Visibility and Evidence Base	75

CONCLUSION	77
-------------------	----

GLOSSARY	79
-----------------	----

ACRONYMS	79
-----------------	----

REFERENCES	81
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) From Now program provides critical support for women transitioning from incarceration in New South Wales (NSW) through two complementary streams: dedicated supported accommodation and outreach case management services.

Established to address significant gaps in post-release support, From Now offers a rare combination of supported accommodation, child protection, intensive case management, and trauma-informed wraparound services specifically designed for women navigating the complex challenges of community reintegration.

Women exiting prison face extraordinary barriers including housing insecurity, disrupted family connections, untreated trauma, and limited access to coordinated healthcare. These challenges are particularly acute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who are significantly overrepresented in the prison system

and face additional systemic barriers upon release. The consequences of failed transitions extend beyond individuals to families and communities, with profound impacts on children and intergenerational wellbeing.

From Now directly addresses these challenges through a flexible, person-centred approach that prioritises safety, cultural responsiveness, and dignity. The program's distinctive methodology balances necessary structure with individual autonomy, creating pathways to long-term stability while respecting women's capacity for self-determination.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

From Now provides two distinct streams of support:

1. DEDICATED SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION:

Safe, stable accommodation with intensive case management and wraparound support.

2. OUTREACH SUPPORT:

Tailored case management and housing assistance for women and children unable to access the supported accommodation program.



KEY PROJECT OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

Evidence gathered throughout the implementation of From Now demonstrates significant positive outcomes across multiple domains:



SYSTEM-LEVEL IMPACTS

The From Now program has gained judicial recognition in NSW, leading to alternative sentencing options such as bail and community orders for women who might otherwise remain in custody. This shift aligns with findings from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), highlighting the positive impact of supportive post-release programs on bail decisions and sentencing outcomes, especially for women with dependent children.



INCLUSIVE APPROACH SERVING MARGINALISED WOMEN

From Now fills a critical service gap by providing an inclusive program for women often excluded from mainstream support due to rigid eligibility criteria. The program accepts women with histories of substance use, current parole orders, or ongoing criminal charges, aligning with bail conditions and offering structured support. This approach reduces recidivism and promotes meaningful reintegration for highly marginalised women.



HOUSING AND STABILITY OUTCOMES

The program has achieved significant housing outcomes for women exiting custody, with successful transitions into long-term transitional housing and placements on the priority housing waitlist. Stable housing is crucial for preventing recidivism and supporting reintegration, as confirmed by research from Homelessness NSW. From Now helps women navigate complex housing systems, fostering confidence and stability for long-term change.



CREATING SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

From Now provides a safe, non-judgmental environment described as "homely," offering therapeutic healing and practical education. When working from a foundation of feeling safe in professional relationships and physical environments, the program helps enable women in understanding the underlying causes of their past decisions, fostering self-awareness, accountability, and the skills needed to avoid harmful patterns. This structured environment empowers women to make lasting changes.



HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPROVEMENTS

The program facilitates recovery from substance use through a structured, supportive environment, incorporating routines, curfews, and expectations that promote stability. From Now connects clients with AOD counselling and intensive case management, addressing underlying trauma and mental health needs. This comprehensive support fosters personal responsibility and healing.



ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND THERAPEUTIC SUPPORTS

From Now has made significant progress in providing psychological and trauma-informed mental health support, addressing a critical need for women involved in the criminal justice system. The program facilitates access to a range of therapeutic services, improving psychological wellbeing and contributing to reduced reoffending and relapse. Clients gain greater insight into their pathways to incarceration and progress meaningfully through the program.



FAMILY RECONNECTION

This program prioritises women and their babies, playing a vital role in preserving and restoring family relationships, particularly for mothers. From Now's early intervention and structured support have prevented child removals, and it is significant that none of the women engaged in the program have had their baby taken from them, even in cases where DCJ intervention was likely. The program improves parenting abilities, mends familial relationships, and offers crucial social and emotional aid to alleviate intergenerational trauma.



CULTURALLY SUPPORTIVE

From Now provides culturally responsive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, embedding cultural safety and connection as core principles. Through cultural mentoring, activities, and events, the program fosters a strong of belonging, trust and community. Ongoing commitments to staff training and individualised cultural support plans ensure that women receive care that respects and reflects their lived experiences. This culturally grounded approach strengthens client outcomes by building trust, enhancing participation, and supporting long-term recovery and self-determination.



PROGRAM METHODOLOGY EFFECTIVENESS

From Now balances structure and autonomy, offering a unique, evidence-informed model for women transitioning from prison. The program's flexible, client-centred approach meets women where they are, enhancing engagement and long-term outcomes. By supporting women through setbacks with compassion, From Now promotes stability and trust. Effective interagency collaborations provide complementary support, addressing the fragmentation often experienced by women navigating multiple services post-release.



From Now operates within significant constraints that limit its potential impact.



ACCESS CHALLENGES AND REINTEGRATION

Women transitioning from prison face numerous systemic barriers that hinder their reintegration and access to support services. One significant challenge is the difficulty in accessing women while they are still in custody due to inconsistent processes across correctional facilities, limited cooperation from custodial staff, and delays in booking phone calls. This results in caseworkers entering the post-release phase with limited information about a woman's needs, raising safety concerns and the risk of missed support opportunities. Post-release, women encounter bureaucratic barriers such as re-establishing identity, banking, Medicare, and Centrelink access, often without valid identification, leading to delays in securing income, housing, or healthcare.



INTERAGENCY COMMUNICATION GAPS AND SYSTEMIC INACCESSIBILITY

From Now faces significant barriers to effective interagency communication, particularly with services responsible for children in out-of-home care, health systems, and essential services. Delays in receiving information and lack of clear referral pathways hinder family reunification planning and support. Women often face institutional stigma and invisibility within mainstream services, compounded by language and cultural barriers. These issues reflect broader systemic failures in interagency collaboration, requiring policy-level coordination, improved data sharing, and investment in culturally safe and trauma-informed service networks.



STRUCTURAL HOUSING CONSTRAINTS

Women exiting prison struggle to secure stable housing due to the affordable housing crisis and structural discrimination. Women with criminal records are frequently rejected from the private rental market and face barriers to priority social housing due to narrowly defined eligibility criteria. This exclusion is despite the high levels of mental health conditions, substance use, and homelessness among women in prison. The overwhelming demand for social housing exacerbates these challenges, creating an environment where recovery and reintegration are significantly undermined.



SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES

Access to consistent, appropriate medication is a critical aspect of post-release support, yet many women leave custody without prescriptions or continuity plans, compromising their wellbeing and increasing the risk of reoffending. Structural barriers also limit access to suitable, supportive accommodation due to restrictive risk assessment practices and rigid funding criteria. As From Now operates with limited staffing, additional funding for dedicated roles for culturally responsive support and intensive family support, will enhance the program's ability to deliver consistent, structured, and holistic services.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Women exiting custody in NSW face overlapping barriers - unstable housing, complex trauma, cultural disconnection, and fragmented service pathways - that too often perpetuate cycles of marginalisation and lead to poorer outcomes for the women, their families, and the potentially broader society through increased recidivism.

The following recommendations translate lessons learned from the From Now pilot into a focused blue-print for change: strengthening core infrastructure and specialist staffing; embedding trauma-informed and culturally safe programming; formalising pre-release through-care; building sector-wide capability; and securing long-term sustainability and scale.

Together, they chart a practical, evidence-based path to ensure that every woman leaving prison can access the stable housing, holistic support, and cultural connection she needs to rebuild her life and keep families intact.

ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE

- Secure sustained funding to preserve From Now's current services and explore expansion to additional Sydney and regional properties.
- Partner with a university to conduct an independent program evaluation and implement comprehensive data systems that track cost savings and long-term housing outcomes.
- Use the resulting evidence to advocate for permanent government funding, align with KWOOP's goal to halve the number of women in prison by 2030, and contribute to broader diversion and early-intervention reforms.

INVEST IN CORE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPECIALIST STAFF

- Fund critical positions - including an intake coordinator to manage smooth prison-release transitions, a family & child worker to support mothers, and a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker to deliver culturally safe, community-informed services.
- Integrate paid or volunteer peers with lived experience into group facilitation and mentoring, supported by a specialised staff member who can run therapeutic and life-skills programs and relieve pressure on case managers.

STRENGTHEN PROGRAM DELIVERY

- Contract external trauma-informed facilitators and appoint an in-house counsellor to ensure group sessions run consistently, create safer discussion spaces, and free internal staff to focus on complex case management.
- Embed a fully funded cultural program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, featuring personalised cultural plans, "return-to-Country" support, strong links with Elders and community services, and expanded cultural healing activities.

FORMALISE PRE-RELEASE THROUGH-CARE

- Establish uniform pre-release assessment protocols, reliable in-custody access for community providers, and robust information-sharing agreements with Corrective Services NSW so transitions are informed, coordinated, and uninterrupted.

BUILD SECTOR CAPACITY AND EVIDENCE

- Develop a statewide practice framework and toolkit that equips Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) with practical, trauma-informed, and culturally safe approaches to working with criminalised women, while encouraging inclusive intake policies that reduce unnecessary exclusions.

Together, these measures will consolidate From Now's proven model; stable housing combined with trauma-informed, culturally grounded support, while scaling its reach and embedding systemic change for women leaving custody.

The From Now program demonstrates a powerful model for supporting women's transition from incarceration to community. By addressing both immediate needs

and underlying trauma, it creates genuine opportunities for women to rebuild their lives and break cycles of marginalisation. With targeted investment in the identified areas for enhancement, the program can scale its impact, address critical service gaps, and create lasting systemic change that benefits women, children, families, and the broader community.



INTRODUCTION

The Women and Girls Emergency Centre (WAGEC) was established in 1977 by Jeannie Devine, a woman who, after becoming homeless and navigating a failing system, took it upon herself to create a space where women could turn when they had nowhere else to go. Jeannie scoured the city, street by street, finding women in crisis who had been turned away by others. She provided shelter, support, and guidance, turning her own pain into a catalyst for improving the future of women and girls.

Almost 50 years later, WAGEC has grown from a small drop-in service in Surry Hills into an organisation that provides over 200 women and children with accommodation each night. Today, we operate a drop-in centre, four crisis refuges, and 40 transitional properties for women and families escaping domestic and family violence or homelessness. We actively engage the community in our movement to end gender-based violence in a generation, all while carrying forward the vision of Jeannie Devine: supporting women whose experiences of violence and systemic disadvantage are not addressed by colonial and patriarchal structures.

In October 2023 WAGEC received a grant from The Judith Neilson Foundation to pilot From Now for 18 months. From Now is a transformative new program designed by WAGEC that boldly addresses one of our community's greatest needs. Working cross generationally with mum's and their kids, From Now supports women transitioning from prison to rebuild their life in the community. Through access to housing, intensive support and most importantly working with mums, their children and unborn babies we can break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.



**FROM NOW
SUPPORTS
WOMEN
TRANSITIONING
FROM PRISON
TO REBUILD
THEIR LIFE IN THE
COMMUNITY.**

WHAT WE PROVIDE



CRISIS RESPONSE

Our Central Support Office in Redfern provides personalised crisis assistance to women and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

When people first come to WAGEC, we talk to them about their situation then refer them to the best services and programs for their needs. When women and families come to us in crisis, we can help them to find housing and other immediate support.



SAFE HOUSING

We provide short term accommodation for women and families across the inner city and inner west of Sydney, totalling 90 beds on any given night.

We also provide over 40 transitional properties for families and a large ten-bed transitional property for single women. Our medium-term accommodation offers women and families the stability of affordable housing before they move on to a more permanent home. Almost all of the women and children in these refuges have experienced domestic and family violence, so we ensure the properties are safe and secure.



CASE MANAGEMENT

We provide wrap around services and holistic support to the women and children who are living in our accommodation and in the community.



HOLISTIC WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

We provide holistic, wrap-around services that place women, children, and families at the heart of service delivery.

This comprehensive approach recognises that individuals experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, incarceration, or economic disadvantage often face interconnected challenges that cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. By offering integrated support, we ensure that each client receives personalised, cohesive care tailored to their unique circumstances.

The significance of WAGEC's holistic approach lies in its ability to empower individuals beyond immediate crisis intervention. By considering physical safety alongside social and emotional wellbeing, economic independence, and social support, WAGEC fosters resilience and sustainable long-term outcomes. This integrated model of care not only addresses the immediate needs but also equips individuals with the resources and skills necessary to rebuild their lives, ultimately creating pathways towards lasting stability and independence.



COMMITMENT TO SAFEGUARDING

WAGEC is a child safe organisation, committed to the safety, wellbeing, and empowerment of all children who we engage with in our services and community.

We take a whole organisation approach to upholding children's rights and striving to prevent all forms of harm, abuse and neglect for children and young people.

Our leadership and governance structures are critical to sustaining a child-safe culture across the organisation. Our Child Safe Committee has representatives from across each department to provide strategic oversight, coordination, and the operationalisation of the NSW Child Safe Standards through policy, procedure, and practice. The Committee is implementing a Child Safe Action Plan as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

WAGEC recognises that child safety is everyone's business, and the importance of having workers who are equipped with child safe knowledge and skills. All WAGEC staff and volunteers are trained in child safety and child protection as relevant to their roles. We are committed to promoting an inclusive and welcoming environment for children, young people, and their families, and working with a child-centred approach which prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

When safety and welfare concerns for children and young people are raised, it is our aim to keep women and children safe. We recognise that children are likely to be more vulnerable due to their age and development, especially when they face homelessness, domestic and family violence, systemic disadvantage, or other intersecting factors such as age, cultural or ethnic background, disability, gender, and sexuality.

Our Safeguarding team is available to provide guidance and assistance when child safety or child protection concerns arise, to ensure that we are providing the best possible support to children, young people, and their families.



WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN THEIR OWN RIGHT

We recognise that children and young people as clients in their own right.

Children and young people have critical and unique perspectives on their lives and have the capacity and the right to have their voices heard and contribute to decisions about their lives.

Since 2019, WAGEC has endeavoured to deliver child-focused programs to meet the specific needs of the children and young people we work with, initially fundraising to be able to create a specialised team to work with children and their families. These programs now include:

CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON TEAM

Funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice under the Specialist Housing Program (SHS): We support families settling into crisis accommodation, often after escaping violence. This includes providing case management support to identify and address immediate needs of the child/ren including assistance with childcare and schooling, health and wellbeing, safety, parenting, connecting families to external community supports for longer term needs.

HELPING CHILDREN HEAL PROGRAM

Funded by Australian Government Department of Social Services: We provide trauma-informed healing and recovery services to children, young people, and their caregivers, aiming to restore the relationship between parent and child after experiencing domestic and family violence. This includes trauma recovery, educational and social support, therapeutic and health support, and parenting support.

OUR PROGRAMS

WAGEC's From Now program is underpinned by a holistic, wrap-around service model that recognises the complex and interconnected needs of women exiting custody. Rather than operating in isolation, From Now is designed to engage with the full breadth of WAGEC's service offerings, including Access, All In, Helping Children Heal, Specialist Homelessness Services, and Transitional Accommodation, to provide an integrated, coordinated support system that evolves with each woman's situation.

While full integration with all of WAGEC's programs may not have been achieved within the first 18 months of operation, the intent and ongoing goal of From Now is to connect clients with any and all relevant supports across the organisation, depending on their needs and circumstances.

THE STRENGTH OF FROM NOW LIES IN ITS CAPACITY TO CENTRE EACH WOMAN'S JOURNEY, WHILE DRAWING ON THE DIVERSE THERAPEUTIC, HOUSING, ECONOMIC, PARENTING, AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AVAILABLE WITHIN WAGEC TO FOSTER LONG-TERM STABILITY, HEALING, AND EMPOWERMENT.



ACCESS PROGRAM

ACCESS PROGRAM

Access is a free personalised mentoring initiative designed to support women and non-binary individuals aged 18 and over.

This 3 to 6-month program focuses on helping participants identify their strengths, build self-confidence, and set goals related to training, education, and employment. By pairing mentees with volunteer mentors, the program aims to enhance economic opportunities and foster personal development.

Mentors in the program are women and non-binary people committed to empowering others by providing guidance and support. They receive professional training to enhance their leadership and communication skills, gaining personal satisfaction and new perspectives. Mentees benefit from individualised support to improve their health and wellbeing, increase economic opportunities, and build confidence and resilience. The program's structured approach includes signing up, matching with a mentor, meeting to plan, and setting achievable goals for the future.



ALL IN

ALL IN

All In is a whole-of-service project that engages with early childhood educators, directors, education leaders, and families in a 'whole of centre' model.

All In empowers influential adults to challenge harmful gender stereotypes at a critical time in children's development. The program provides participants with tools to support children aged up to five to develop healthy, respectful relationships so they can be nurtured, safe and encouraged to reach their full potential – regardless of their gender.

The curriculum of the program is comprehensive, covering:

- The concept of gender inequality, gender stereotypes and the important role of early years educators in promoting equal, respectful and healthy relationships;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancient ways of Belonging, Being and Becoming, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childrearing practices, and their influence on the Early Years Learning Framework; and
- Practical steps to embedding gender equality and primary prevention principles in practice so educators have the skills and confidence to address resistance within their communities.

Interactive activities are also utilised throughout the workshops to prompt thought-provoking discussions between participants and facilitators. These discussions have helped to strengthen educators' understanding of gender inequality and its relationship to gender-based violence, connecting it to existing anti-bias approaches in the early childhood education curriculum.



HELPING CHILDREN HEAL

HELPING CHILDREN HEAL PROGRAM

The Helping Children Heal (HCH) program is a comprehensive initiative designed to support children and young people aged 6 to 12 who have experienced domestic and family violence.

HCH provides a range of integrated services aimed at addressing the social, educational, emotional, and developmental needs of affected children and their families.

- **Trauma Support:** HCH employs trauma-informed practices to assist children in processing experiences of change, loss, and grief. Through various activities, the program builds on the resilience of children, equipping them with skills to navigate their emotions and experiences.
- **Education and Social Support:** To maintain a sense of normalcy and connection, HCH offers one-on-one tutoring, homework assistance, and school holiday activities. These services address educational and social needs, ensuring that children continue to engage academically and socially during challenging times.
- **Therapeutic and Health Support:** Recognising the importance of holistic well-being, HCH facilitates access to therapeutic supports such as healthcare, psychology, and occupational and speech therapy. These services aim to ensure that children are physically and mentally supported as they recover from trauma.



Introduction Our Programs

¹ Moylan, C. A., Herrenkohl, T. I., Sousa, C., Tajima, E. A., Herrenkohl, R. C., & Russo, M. J. (2010). The Effects of Child Abuse and Exposure to Domestic Violence on Adolescent Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior Problems. *Journal of family violence*, 25(1), 53–63.

- **Parenting Support:** The program also focuses on strengthening the parent-child relationship by offering peer support groups and domestic violence education for mothers. Research indicates that a strong bond with the non-abusive parent is a crucial protective factor for children exposed to domestic violence. ¹ By supporting mothers, HCH promotes family healing and resilience.

Through these integrated services, HCH aims to create a supportive environment where children and their families can recover and thrive after experiences of domestic and family violence.

SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES (SHS)

WAGEC's SHS program provides critical support to women and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, particularly those affected by domestic and family violence.

Delivered in partnership with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), the SHS program offers crisis accommodation, transitional housing, and comprehensive case management across inner-city and inner-west Sydney. Through trauma-informed and client-centred practice, the program addresses immediate safety needs while also supporting clients to access longer-term housing, legal services, mental health care, and other essential supports. By prioritising safety, stability, and empowerment, WAGEC's SHS program plays a vital role in helping women and families rebuild their lives and break cycles of violence and homelessness.

TRANSITIONAL ACCOMMODATION

WAGEC offers transitional accommodation to women, non-binary individuals, and families who have experienced homelessness, domestic violence, or systemic disadvantage.

This medium-term housing solution provides a stable environment where clients can focus on rebuilding their lives and working towards securing long-term, permanent housing. WAGEC manages 40 transitional properties in collaboration with community housing providers, ensuring that residents have access to safe and affordable accommodation during this critical period.

Beyond providing housing, WAGEC's transitional program delivers comprehensive, wrap-around support tailored to each individual's needs. This includes case management, parenting and child attachment programs, therapeutic group work, art therapy, and trauma-informed yoga. By addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by their clients, WAGEC empowers women and families to heal from trauma, develop resilience, and successfully transition to independent living.

WHY FROM NOW IS NEEDED

WOMEN PRISONERS IN NSW

Australian Bureau of Statistics and NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data paint a picture of the makeup of women imprisoned in NSW ²



² Mulready, K. (2025). *The economic costs of incarcerating women in NSW: An analysis for the Keeping Women out of Prison Coalition*. HoustonKemp Economists. [Unpublished]



THE GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF INCARCERATION

Women in prison face significantly heightened stigma compared to their male counterparts, subjected to a “double deviance” effect wherein they are judged not only for breaking the law but also for violating gender norms and expectations of femininity. This dual stigmatisation creates profound barriers to reintegration and recovery that extend well beyond the prison walls.

³ Easteal, P., Bartels, L., Nelson, N., & Holland, K. (2015). How are women who kill portrayed in newspaper media? Connections with social values and the legal system. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 51, 31-41.

⁴ Morris, A., Gopfert, A., & Padgett, D. K. (2021). *Understanding discrimination effects in private rental housing* (AHURI Final Report No. 363). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited.

⁵ Breuer, E., Remond, M., Lighton, S. et al. The needs and experiences of mothers while in prison and post-release: a rapid review and thematic synthesis. *Health Justice* 9, 31 (2021).

⁶ Edwards, L., Jamieson, S.K., Bowman, J. et al. A systematic review of post-release programs for women exiting prison with substance-use disorders: assessing current programs and weighing the evidence. *Health Justice* 10, 1 (2022).

⁷ Australian Law Reform Commission. (2018). *Pathways to Justice-Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (ALRC Report 133).

In Australian society, women who offend are often portrayed as more morally corrupt than men who commit similar crimes. Research has noted that media representations of female offenders frequently emphasise their roles as mothers, their appearances, and perceived moral failings, contrasting sharply with coverage of male offenders that focuses primarily on their crimes. ³ This gendered framing contributes to public perceptions that cast women who offend as having “fallen further” from societal expectations.

The stigma has tangible impacts on post-release outcomes. Studies from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute found that formerly incarcerated women experience significant housing discrimination when applying for private rentals. ⁴ Women were also more likely to report being questioned about their parenting capabilities, relationship status, and mental health stability during housing interviews - questions rarely directed at formerly incarcerated men.

For mothers, this stigma is particularly destructive. While fatherhood is rarely central to assessments of male offenders, motherhood becomes a defining framework through which women in prison are judged. Research reveals that mothers in prison often experience shame and stigma because of their gendered parenting role, which is not as intensely experienced by fathers in prison. ⁵ This perception persists despite the fact that prior to incarceration, more than 54% of women in NSW prisons were primary carers for their dependent children, compared to only 36% of incarcerated fathers. ⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face compounded stigma that intersects with racism and colonialism. The Australian Law Reform Commission reports that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the justice system frequently encounter stereotyping that assumes substance dependency, violence, or neglect, perceptions that directly impact their treatment within legal, housing, and child protection systems. ⁷ These biased assumptions create additional barriers to fair assessment and support.

Another factor compounding stigma is the misidentification of victim-survivors of domestic and family violence as perpetrators. Women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, may be criminalised for retaliatory actions or self-defensive behaviour, with police or courts failing to identify patterns of coercive control. Once misidentified, these women face a stigma not only as offenders but as perpetrators of violence, which reinforces existing biases and further alienates them from services. This misidentification entrenches the perception that such women are inherently dangerous or unstable, undermining access to housing, family reunification,

Why From Now is Needed The Gendered Experience of Incarceration

⁸ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. (2025). *Bail dashboard* [interactive data dashboard]. Department of Communities and Justice.

⁹ Ferguson, C. (2015) *Parole in Western Australia: An analysis of parole cancellations of female offenders* (Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 501). Australian Institute of Criminology.

¹⁰ Gleeson, H. (2019). *What happens when an abused woman fights back?* ABC News.

and recovery supports, and compounding their exclusion from systems designed to protect them.

Women exiting prison in NSW also face heightened community surveillance and judgment. Women exiting prison face more intensive community scrutiny. In NSW, over half of proven breaches by women on court-ordered supervision are technical. ⁸ Qualitative work shows these breaches are frequently instigated by neighbour or partner reports, leading to swift revocation. ⁹ Media accounts illustrate the gendered double-standard. ABC reporting quotes court-support workers who observe that “when women breach, they throw the book at them ... [police will breach her] because *he* has reported it” - highlighting how partners or neighbours use reporting to enforce minor infractions. ¹⁰ This intensified scrutiny creates an environment where women feel continuously monitored and judged, undermining their confidence and sense of belonging during the critical reintegration period.

The consequences of this stigma are profound and far-reaching. It drives social isolation, undermines self-worth, and creates practical barriers to housing, employment, and family reunification. Unlike men, who may be able to separate their offending behaviour from their identity, women are more likely to experience stigma as a fundamental judgment of their worth as individuals and particularly as mothers - a perception that can significantly impede recovery and reintegration.



TRANSITIONING FROM INCARCERATION

Women transitioning from incarceration in NSW face numerous challenges that can hinder their successful reintegration into society. One of the most pressing issues is securing safe and affordable housing. Many women struggle with limited financial resources, societal stigma, and legal barriers, which can result in housing instability or homelessness.

¹¹ KWOOP. (2025). *Collective action for change – Parliamentary breakfast briefing*. Sydney Community Foundation.

¹² Sydney Community Foundation, Zonta Club of Sydney, SHINE for Kids, Miranda Project, & Women in Prison Advocacy Network. (2017, October). *Keeping women out of prison: Position statement*.

¹³ Abbott, P. A. (2018). *The health needs and healthcare experiences of women leaving prison* [Doctoral thesis, Western Sydney University]. Western Sydney University Research Portal.

¹⁴ Lobo, J., & Howard, M. (2021, March). *Women in prison: An examination of the support needs of women in custody with children* (Research Brief No. 4). Corrective Services NSW.

The Keeping Women Out of Prison Coalition (KWOOP) notes that the lack of women-specific diversionary programs and the high economic costs of imprisonment exacerbate this issue. Without access to stable housing, women are at an increased risk of returning to prison, highlighting the importance of addressing housing insecurity as a priority for effective reintegration. KWOOP reports that approximately one third of women enter prison from homelessness, and over half are released into homelessness. ¹¹

In addition to housing challenges, finding employment post-release is another significant barrier for women. Criminal records, gaps in employment history, and limited access to educational opportunities often deter employers. The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) emphasises that many women in the criminal justice system face compounded difficulties when seeking employment, as they often lack support or vocational training. This issue is further exacerbated by societal perceptions and the stigma attached to having a criminal history, which can significantly hinder women's chances of securing stable, long-term work. ¹²

Access to adequate healthcare is also a critical concern for women exiting incarceration. Many women experience ill mental health and substance use dependence, which are often exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive treatment during their time in prison. Research highlights the concept of “medical homelessness,” where women face barriers to both prison and community-based care. The lack of continuity in healthcare can leave women vulnerable to untreated medical conditions, further complicating their reintegration efforts. ¹³

Rebuilding family relationships is another significant challenge for many women post-release, especially when children are involved. Women leaving prison often face difficulties in regaining custody of their children or in reestablishing trust within their families. The disruption caused by incarceration can strain family relationships, and legal and logistical obstacles may prevent mothers from being reunited with their children. Programs that offer support in this area are crucial for successful reintegration and reducing recidivism. ¹⁴

Why From Now is Needed Transitioning From Incarceration

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *Mental health of people in Australia's prisons: Summary*.

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *The health and welfare of women in Australia's prisons* (Cat. no. PHE 281). AIHW.

¹⁷ Australia. Parliament. Senate. Legal and Constitutional References Committee. (2004). *Legal aid and access to justice* (Parliamentary Paper No. 124/2004). Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁸ Lyons, K. (2024). *Debt, danger or a decade of fighting: How a lack of legal services leaves DV victims with dire choices*. The Guardian.

¹⁹ Abbott, P., Davison, J., Magin, P., & Hu, W. (2016). 'If they're your doctor, they should care about you': Women on release from prison and general practitioners. *Australian Family Physician*, 45(10), 728–733.

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

The prevalence of ill mental health amongst incarcerated women is alarmingly high. Up to 63% of women in prison have a mental health condition, a rate significantly higher than men in prison (49%) or the general population (32%).¹⁵ Many of these women have experienced complex trauma, domestic and family violence, and substance dependency, and often receive limited mental health care while incarcerated.

Additionally, the separation from their children exacerbates psychological distress, increasing rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and self-harm.¹⁶ Without access to targeted post-release mental health support, many women struggle to manage stress and emotional dysregulation, which directly impacts their ability to secure housing, maintain employment, and avoid reoffending.

REGIONAL BARRIERS TO REINTEGRATION

Women exiting prison in NSW face acute legal barriers in regional and remote communities. Parliamentary evidence shows that large swathes of rural NSW have no legal aid or community legal centre, forcing women to travel long distances, often without reliable transport, to satisfy parole or court obligations; the resulting costs and missed appearances heighten the risk of breach and re-incarceration.¹⁷ Limited legal services also mean women must self-represent in complex family-law matters, a burden documented nationwide by Guardian Australia.¹⁸ Access to healthcare is also severely limited, with few prisoner-friendly general practitioners and mental health professionals located outside of urban centres. Women reported particular difficulties in rural locations where GPs had longer waiting lists. Delays in seeing a GP caused stress and resulted in discontinuing medication.¹⁹ Without these critical services, women struggle to manage chronic conditions, access mental health support, or receive necessary rehabilitation services, which can undermine their reintegration efforts. Additionally, safe housing options are scarce in regional areas, leaving many women without access to transitional accommodation upon release. As a result, the likelihood of homelessness and reoffending increases, further entrenching them in the justice system and cycles of marginalisation.



PRISON IS NO PLACE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

There is limited publicly available data on the number of pregnant women currently in Australian prisons, including in NSW, which is a significant concern. This lack of transparency hampers efforts to address the specific health, safety, and support needs of incarcerated pregnant women, highlighting a critical gap in prison healthcare oversight and policy.

²⁰ Walker, J. R., Hilder, L., Levy, M. H., & Sullivan, E. A. (2014). *Pregnancy, prison and perinatal outcomes in New South Wales, Australia: A retrospective cohort study using linked health data*. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth, 14, 214.

From the available data, incarcerating pregnant women in Australia raises significant ethical, health, and social concerns. Prisons are often ill-equipped to provide the specialised care necessary during pregnancy, leading to adverse outcomes for both mothers and their babies. Research conducted in NSW found that babies born to women who were imprisoned during pregnancy were significantly more likely to be born pre-term, have low birthweight, and require hospital admission compared to those born to non-incarcerated women. ²⁰ This evidence supports to notion of inter-generational impacts on unborn children when their pregnant mothers are incarcerated.

HEALTH RISKS AND INADEQUATE CARE

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kim, S. B., White, B., Roberts, J., & Day, C. A. (2023). Substance use among pregnant women in NSW prisons. *The International journal on drug policy*, 122, 104256.

Pregnant women in NSW prisons often face inadequate healthcare, leading to adverse perinatal outcomes. Research indicates that incarceration during pregnancy does not improve perinatal outcomes, with a history of imprisonment being a strong predictor of poor perinatal results. ²¹ Additionally, a study found that 84% of pregnant women (n=141) entering NSW prisons reported recent substance use, and 36% had injected drugs, highlighting the need for comprehensive healthcare services that are inaccessible within prisons. ²²

LACK OF CONSISTENT POLICIES AND SUPPORT

²³ Kafle, Y., Fenton, L., Lobo, C., & Brar, H. (2024, May). *Antenatal Care in Prison (ACIP)* [Poster]. Agency for Clinical Innovation.

NSW lacks consistent policies for the care of pregnant women in prisons. Currently, pregnant women are often transferred to metropolitan correctional centres to access antenatal care, which can disrupt continuity of care and separate them from their support networks. ²³ Moreover, the absence of standardised procedures means that care varies across facilities, potentially compromising the health of both mother and child.

MOTHER AND CHILDREN PROGRAMS

²⁴ Gribble, K. (2020, March 6). *Submission to the Inquiry into Support for Children of Imprisoned Parents in New South Wales* (Submission No. 23). Better Care Network.

While programs exist in NSW to allow incarcerated mothers to reside with their young children, these initiatives have limitations. The Mothers and Children's Program permits eligible mothers, within minimum security prisons, to have their children live with them in custody, however access is restricted, not all applicants are approved and this is in no way a culturally safe space for marginalised groups. Furthermore, the prison environment is inherently unsuitable for child-rearing, and the institutional setting can negatively impact maternal caregiving and infant mental health. ²⁴



CASE STUDY

SYLVIA'S FULL CIRCLE JOURNEY



Sylvia entered the From Now Program directly from a 3-month live-in drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. Sylvia successfully completed rehab and was referred to our From Now Program and accommodation.

Sylvia an Aboriginal woman was 5 months pregnant at the time of entry into the From Now Program. Prior to rehab Sylvia was in custody for a few months and was homeless and couch surfing prior to that. During the time in the program and through conversations with Sylvia and case management meetings, Sylvia expressed wanting to focus on her baby's birth and health, staying out of custody and re-connecting with her family and culture.

As part of connecting with Family, Sylvia would use the weekend to travel through public transport for up to 6 hours in a day to reconnect and meet with family and would always return to the From Now accommodation on time in line with curfew.

Staff could clearly see that Sylvia was doing her best to engage in the program and its guidelines as well as build a connection with her family and country. From Now supported Sylvia by allowing overnight sleepovers with family to support with her goal of building family connection.

Staff could see that Sylvia was extremely protective over her unborn child and would always adhere with all program expectations and rules. After being in the program for 4 months, Sylvia gave birth to a healthy baby and staff observed her to be a very nurturing supportive and protective mother.

Sylvia continued to reconnect with her parents after her child was born and would regularly update staff about the improvement made between her and her mother and her overall family. Sylvia said that she was super grateful and that this was the first time since being a child that she had a positive and normal relationship with her family.

A few weeks after the birth of her son, Sylvia had her sentencing court date, which she had been waiting for over a year and a half, and she was deeply worried about the possibility of a custodial outcome that would separate her from her child. Staff had supported her throughout her time in the program and liaised with her legal team and

support regarding this sentencing and provided supporting documents for this purpose.

After 5 months of Sylvia being in the program, Sylvia had her sentencing matter heard in court. Sylvia was supported at court by staff, the legal team, her biological parents and both maternal and paternal grandmother.

Although court is very nerve wracking and worrying due to the unknown, the judge genuinely recognised what Sylvia had endured since being a child and acknowledged her traumas and how troubling circumstances such as being taken advantage of by older men due to her need for attachment and care led her to being in challenging situations and committing certain crimes. The judge apologised to Sylvia on behalf of all men and the outcome of court was an intensive corrections order (ICO) and all area restrictions dropped.

A relative of Sylvia offered her an independent living space, which was affordable, close to family and near the beach where she has previously described as being one of her favourite places to be.

After court, Sylvia spent a few weeks in the program and was super motivated and excited to start her new chapter. During a house lunch, residents were speaking about reflections and goals. Sylvia announced to staff that she was approached by her legal team and asked if she would be interested in working as a mentor with women who have experienced injustice and are facing legal matters to support and advocate for them, Sylvia was informed that she will attend the training and a course for the role and was extremely excited for her and her child's future. Sylvia is still supported by the From Now program on an outreach basis and reports that her and her child are doing extremely well.

Why From Now is Needed Prison is No Place For Pregnant Women

²⁵ Homelessness NSW. (2022). *Safe, accessible & available? The role of temporary accommodation in pathways out of homelessness in NSW.*

²⁶ Walker, J. R., Baldry, E., & Sullivan, E. (2019, May 17). *Babies and toddlers are living with their mums in prison. We need to look after them better.* UNSW Newsroom.

It is important to highlight the significant shortfall in the availability of safe and appropriate housing for women exiting prison in NSW, particularly for those who are mothers or pregnant. According to Homelessness NSW, women leaving custody face extreme difficulty accessing crisis and transitional accommodation, with very few women-specific and trauma-informed refuge spaces available. ²⁵ These facilities are often at full capacity, leaving many women, especially those with complex needs or criminal histories, without stable housing upon release.

KWOOP has consistently raised concerns about the lack of women-specific diversionary pathways and reintegration services, noting that without access to stable housing, women are significantly more likely to return to custody. This structural gap not only undermines the goals of rehabilitation but also exposes women and their children to ongoing cycles of trauma, instability, and systemic disadvantage.

As an alternative for prison, advocates have consistently argued the approach of alternative sentencing options being prioritised for pregnant women to ensure better health outcomes and maintain family unity. In addition, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, this would lower rates of overrepresentation in the justice system as well as the flow on effect of children entering the out of home care system. The priority needs to be on programs that support mothers in the community, rather than in prison, and are recommended to provide a more conducive environment for child development and maternal well-being. ²⁶

WAGEC'S FROM NOW PROGRAM DIRECTLY ADDRESSES THE MULTITUDE OF CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN TRANSITIONING FROM INCARCERATION IN NSW.

By offering holistic, trauma-informed support that spans safe housing, employment pathways, healthcare access, and parenting support, the program provides a vital alternative to punitive systems that often fail to meet women's needs. From Now helps to disrupt cycles of disadvantage by ensuring women have access to stable accommodation, culturally appropriate healthcare, and the tools to rebuild family connections - all of which are essential to preventing recidivism.

Crucially, the program recognises that prison is no place for pregnant women and champions community-based, gender-responsive approaches. By centring women's dignity, safety, and autonomy, WAGEC is creating pathways for sustainable reintegration and long-term wellbeing, especially for those who are most marginalised, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from regional areas. In doing so, From Now offers a powerful model of justice that prioritises care over punishment and healing over harm.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

From Now is a fit-for-purpose program by Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) that provides two distinct streams of support for women leaving prison across NSW:

DEDICATED SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

A safe, stable accommodation for women exiting custody, with intensive case management and wraparound support.

OUTREACH SUPPORT

Tailored case management and housing assistance for women who are unable to access the accommodation program but still need post-release support.

Include participating in therapeutic groups and life skills.

²⁷ Edwards, L., Jamieson, S.K., Bowman, J. et al. Above n 6.

With 63% of incarcerated women being mothers, ²⁷ the lack of stable housing upon release creates significant barriers to rebuilding their lives. Many women remain in remand custody solely due to having no fixed address, while others struggle to reunite with their children because they do not meet housing requirements. From Now removes these barriers by providing dedicated transitional housing, trauma-informed case management, and legal support, ensuring women can secure long-term stability.

From Now aims to transform crisis and transitional accommodation by expanding housing capacity and providing flexible, trauma-informed support. It ensures that women who are often excluded from mainstream homelessness services due to criminal records, Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO), or high levels of trauma have access to safe housing, addressing critical service gaps and unmet community needs.

²⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *The health and welfare of women in Australia's prisons* (Cat. no. PHE 281). AIHW.

The From Now program follows the fundamentals of the Bugmy Bar Book (BBB) and guides the program through addressing the underlying disadvantages that contribute to women's involvement in the justice system. Studies show that a significant proportion of women in prison have experienced domestic and family violence, homelessness, and ill mental health. ²⁸ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, in particular, are overrepresented in the criminal justice system due to the compounded impacts of colonisation, systemic discrimination, and intergenerational trauma. ²⁹

²⁹ Australian Law Reform Commission, Above n 7.

The BBB highlights that trauma and socio-economic disadvantage affect a person's ability to make rational choices and engage with rehabilitation – "Healing and rehabilitation approaches must be culturally grounded, and require community-level, rather than simply individual-level, responses that build on the strengths of community and culture to revitalise connections to community and culture". ³⁰ The From Now program puts this principle into action by delivering culturally responsive and trauma-informed support, recognising that imprisonment alone does not address the root causes of offending. By offering supported accommodation, case management, parenting support, and pathways to education and employment,

³⁰ Edwige, V., & Grey, P. (2021). *The significance of culture to wellbeing, resilience and success: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander review*.

Program Outline

³¹ Ibid.

From Now helps break these cycles and supports women in achieving long-term rehabilitation and reintegration.

Additionally, the BBB emphasises the importance of culturally safe and person-centred support, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. From Now ensures that women, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, receive services that are culturally responsive that nurture cultural identity, strengthen community connections, promote healing and tailored to their unique needs. This approach is critical in reducing recidivism, as research has shown that programs incorporating culturally appropriate support significantly improve rehabilitation outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. ³¹

The BBB also underscores the need for judicial officers to consider the historical and systemic factors contributing to an individual's offending.

FROM NOW SUPPORTS THIS OBJECTIVE BY PROVIDING LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS TO SYSTEMIC DISADVANTAGE, ENSURING THAT WOMEN EXITING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM DO NOT RETURN TO ENVIRONMENTS THAT PERPETUATE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME.

By tackling structural barriers, including access to safe housing and economic independence, From Now contributes to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal women in prison and preventing cycles of reoffending.



A SYSTEMIC INTERVENTION

The intersection of housing, justice, and child protection creates major barriers for pregnant women and mothers exiting prison.

Without stable accommodation, they face re-incarceration, homelessness, and family separation. However, many mainstream housing services exclude women with criminal records or AVOs, leaving them with no safe options. This forces them into unstable living conditions, violent relationships, or homelessness, increasing their risk of reoffending. From Now challenges this systemic failure by providing transitional housing, ensuring women have a stable foundation upon release, regardless of their legal history.

Additionally, this program reduces pressure on crisis services by preventing homelessness and repeated justice system involvement, lowering demand on overcrowded shelters, legal aid, and emergency interventions. As a cost-effective, transformative community investment, From Now not only saves public funds but also creates lasting change for women and children too often failed by mainstream responses.

PREVENTING FAMILY SEPARATION

Mothers in the criminal justice system face an overwhelming risk of permanent family separation.

Instead of addressing the root causes of incarceration, they face child removal, systemic barriers to reunification, and housing ineligibility that make regaining custody nearly impossible. The consequences are devastating:

- Children in out-of-home care experience higher risks of trauma, instability, and future justice system involvement.
- Women without stable housing are deemed unfit to regain custody, despite the system itself preventing them from securing accommodation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are disproportionately affected, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 12.1 times more likely to enter out-of-home care ³² and are imprisoned at 26 times the rate of non-Indigenous children and young people. ³³

This is a systemic issue driving long-term harm across generations as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 22 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous women ³⁴ and are 15.7 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be held in custody while awaiting trial. This is also higher than the rate experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. ³⁵

From Now ensures that pregnant women and mothers, particularly Aboriginal women, receive:

- Stable accommodation and legal support to secure custody of their children.
- Targeted reintegration services to reduce recidivism and provide pathways to independence.
- Culturally safe, trauma-informed support that keeps families together and breaks cycles of intergenerational trauma.

Without targeted interventions like From Now, pregnant women and mothers will continue to be trapped in cycles of incarceration, homelessness, and child removal. This program is not about short-term relief, it is about systemic change.

By ensuring women have access to stable housing, culturally informed case management, and wraparound support, From Now aims to:

- Reduces recidivism by removing barriers to reintegration.
- Keeps families together, preventing children from entering out-of-home care.
- Breaks intergenerational trauma cycles, providing long-term stability for women and their children.
- Challenges systemic discrimination, advocating for justice, housing, and child protection reforms.
- Creates an Aboriginal-led alternative to ineffective mainstream responses.
- Supports re-entry into education and employment, with pathways to mentoring and personal development through WAGEC's Access program.

Without From Now, women will continue to be punished for their marginalisation, trapped in a revolving door of incarceration, homelessness, and family separation. This program provides opportunities for healing, reintegration, and long-term stability, transforming the lives of women and their children.

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025, February 27). *Child protection Australia 2022–23: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care*.

³³ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2024, October 9). *Statistics about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls*.

³⁴ Keeping Women Out of Prison Coalition. (2025, March 19). *KWOOP Parliamentary Breakfast 2025: Collective action for change*. Sydney Community Foundation.

³⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission, Above n 33.

**INCARCERATION
IS PART OF
A WOMAN'S
STORY, BUT IT
IS NEVER THE
WHOLE STORY.**

HOW FROM NOW LINKS IN WITH CURRENT INITIATIVES



NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022–2032

From Now aligns with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 by providing stable housing and support services for women exiting prison, many of whom have experienced domestic and family violence (DFV).

This program directly addresses the Plan's focus on early intervention and recovery by offering wrap-around support, including case management, parenting education, and trauma-informed care. By empowering women with safe accommodation and pathways to independence, helps break the cycle of violence and reduces their risk of reoffending or returning to unsafe environments.



NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP

From Now contributes to Closing the Gap by addressing key targets related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including reducing overrepresentation in incarceration (Target 10), improving youth justice outcomes (Target 11), ensuring safe housing (Target 9), and increasing access to culturally appropriate services (Target 13).

Aboriginal women are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, often due to systemic marginalisation and intergenerational trauma. By offering culturally responsive support, From Now helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women transition out of the prison system, reconnect with their families, and access the resources needed for long-term stability.



NSW DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PLAN 2022–2027

From Now program supports the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027 by providing tailored assistance to women who have experienced Domestic and Family Violence and are at risk of homelessness upon release from prison.

It aligns with the Plan's commitment to strengthening victim-survivor recovery and reducing the risk of re-victimisation. By offering safe housing, trauma-informed case management, and pathways to education and employment, From Now addresses the barriers women face post-incarceration and helps them build secure, independent lives free from violence.



NSW HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2025-2035

From Now aligns closely with the goals and principles of the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025–2035, which aims to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

From Now contributes to this vision through its targeted focus on early intervention and prevention, supporting women exiting custody - many of whom are at immediate risk of homelessness - to access transitional and priority housing pathways. The program's wraparound model reflects the Strategy's emphasis on integrated support services, offering coordinated access to mental health care, alcohol and drug counselling, and trauma-informed recovery support. From Now also plays a crucial role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women through culturally safe practices and has expressed plans to implement individual cultural plans, echoing the Strategy's commitment to inclusive and responsive service delivery. Furthermore, the program highlights the importance of workforce development and inter-agency collaboration by advocating for more trauma-informed practice, flexible risk assessment frameworks, and cross-sector coordination to ensure long-term housing outcomes for women coming out of incarceration.



OUR APPROACH

From Now provides safe accommodation to up to 5 women and their children at any one time for 3-6 months following their release from prison. During their time living in From Now accommodation, the women have intensive daily support to ensure they are learning living skills and provided with the tools for success as they re-integrate back into community. After exiting the intensive period of the program, the women are referred to accommodation in the community where they will continue to receive wrap around support 2-3 times per week.

The support provided through From Now for women include:

- Accommodation for women and their children enabling them to live safely and connect with one another
- Support learning self-regulation and coping skills
- Domestic violence education (including knowledge about what domestic and family violence is, the Power and Control Wheel, the cycle of violence)
- Parenting Skills Groups - a safe environment to reflect on their own childhood and how they were parented, their roles as mothers, and re-establishing connections with their own children
- Independent living skills - empowering women to make new choices and relationships, support in setting up a new home to give best chance of success
- Tailored support for children and their mums as they transition back to spending time and living with one another. This includes children living in From Now accommodation with their mum or visiting on weekends, depending on each family's individual needs
- Wrap around support and case management connecting women to other WAGEC programs and opportunities with their local community
- Targeted programs for children and young people through programs which enriches the Social, Emotional and Educational Development of children and young people
- Support through WAGEC's Access mentoring program helping women to build their economic independence by connecting them with a volunteer mentor and access to training, education and employment pathways
- Referral pathway to WAGEC's transitional accommodation in Sydney's Inner West, with additional support available for parenting, family reconnection, and rebuilding independence through tailored case management and referrals.

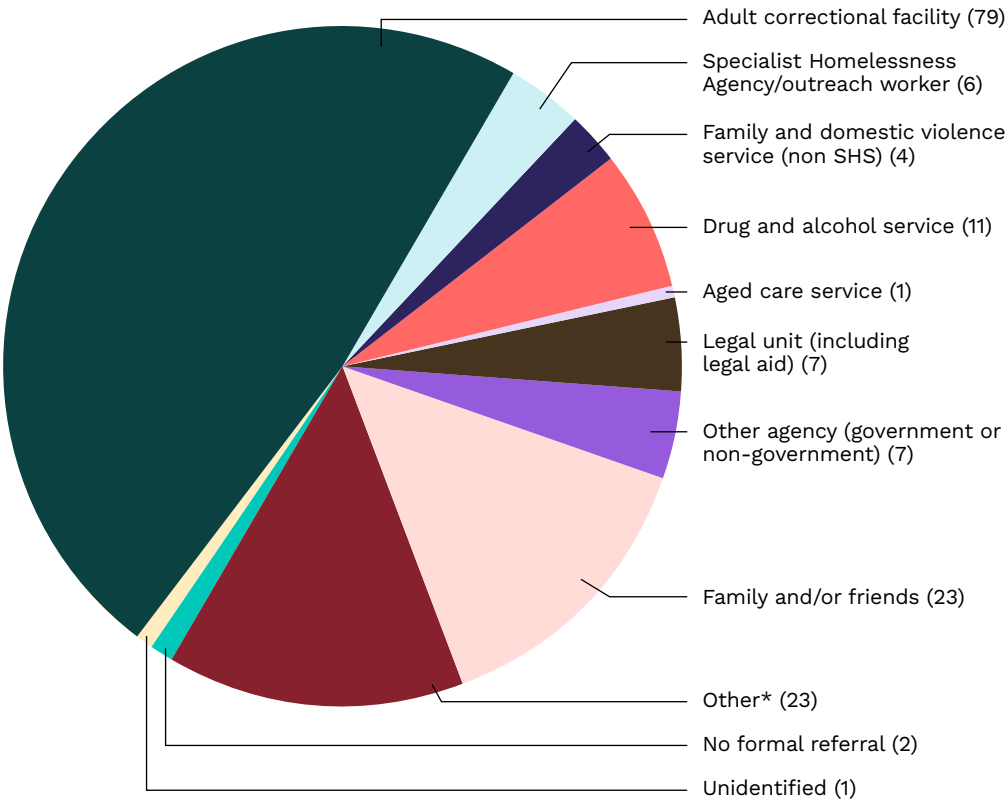


TARGET AUDIENCE

FROM NOW FOCUSES ON PRIORITISING:

- Pregnant women
- Women with children
- Women who have been incarcerated
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- Children of women

SOURCE OF REFERRAL



*Other refers to self referral, a service unknown to WAGEC or an Aboriginal Medical Centre

OUTCOMES

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION DATA

Women experience decreased risk of exiting incarceration into homelessness

	Target	Outcome
Accommodation	12 women receive accommodation and wrap around support	19 women
Community outreach	26 women receive community outreach support	115 to date
Tenancy	70% women maintain tenancy during program	100% to date (3 women in transitional)

Women experience increased confidence to live independently

	Target	Outcome
Connection to services	90% of women report an increase in connections to women's local community services	100%. This is currently measured via case management.
Case management	80% women consistently participating in case management sessions	100% of women have participated in case management. The Program has two forms of service delivery
Soft skills	80% of women participating in activities that support living independently (e.g., work, volunteering, education/training, support groups, hobby)	100% of women in accommodation E.g. of this includes; Signing up for parenting courses, anger management and engaging in life skills in the accommodation setting.

Women experience increased confidence in parenting

	Target	Outcome
Children	112 children are supported through From Now program	109 both in accommodation setting and outreach program
Parenting education	70% of women completed parenting education program	85%

Outcomes Supported Accommodation Data

Women experience increased confidence in parenting	Target	Outcome
Parenting confidence	70% of women report increased confidence in their parenting	85%
Parenting support	70% of women report increased connection to community-based parenting supports	80% of both accommodation and outreach clients.
Women increase contact with their children	Target	Outcome
Increased contact	50% of women (who do not have their children living with them) report increased contact with their children	33% through the support of direct case management.
Positive interactions	(Of the children that WAGEC has contact with), 50% of children report increased shared positive experiences with their mum	Majority of children in accommodation have been newborn so unable to determine. 100% of children in accommodation between 5 yo to 16 yo have expressed increase positive experiences.
Women have increased awareness of the impacts of DFV on themselves and their children	Target	Outcome
DFV training	70% women complete DFV education program	100% of accommodation participants 50% Outreach
Support seeking	90% of women who have experienced DV are linked to services that support women to navigate impacts of DFV (e.g. police, counsellor, legal service)	70% both Accommodation and outreach clients.

OUTREACH SUPPORT DATA

SUMMARY: DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT FOR WAGEC FROM NOW PERIOD 01/01/2024 TO 10/04/2025 (EXCLUDES FILENOTES)

* ‘Distinct Persons’ refers to individual clients engaged during the reporting period. ‘Person Contact’ includes not only direct communication and meetings with these individuals, but also the extensive case coordination, advocacy, and multi-faceted supports involved in case management. This data reflects both the breadth and intensity of support required to meet the complex needs of clients.

REPORT FOR PERSONS WITH
SUPPORT PERIOD OPENED
IN REPORT PERIOD

154

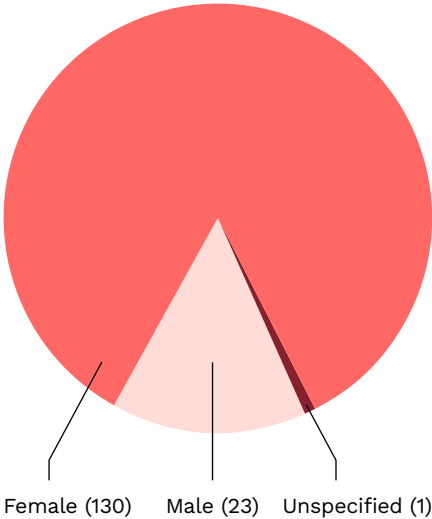
Total distinct persons
having recorded contact
with WAGEC From Now

1963

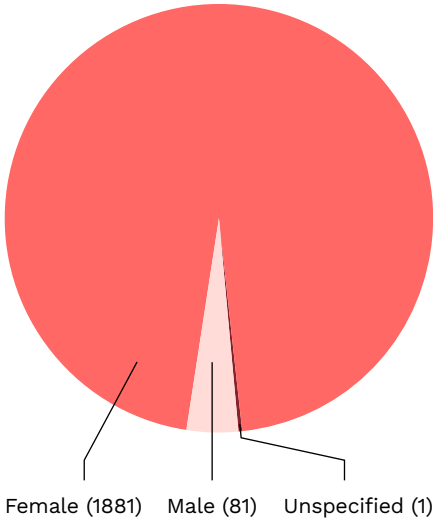
Total recorded contacts
made by WAGEC From Now

GENDER STATUS

Distinct persons*

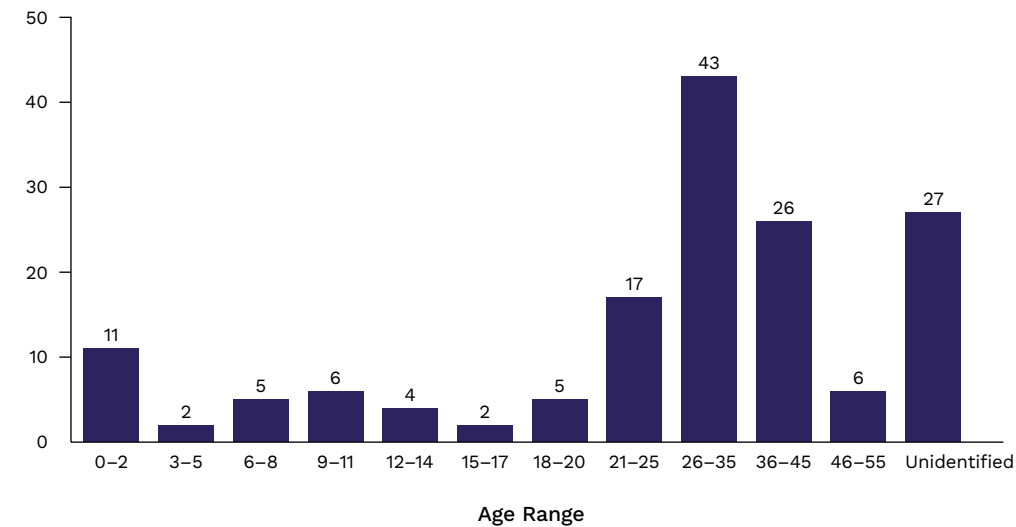


Person contacts*

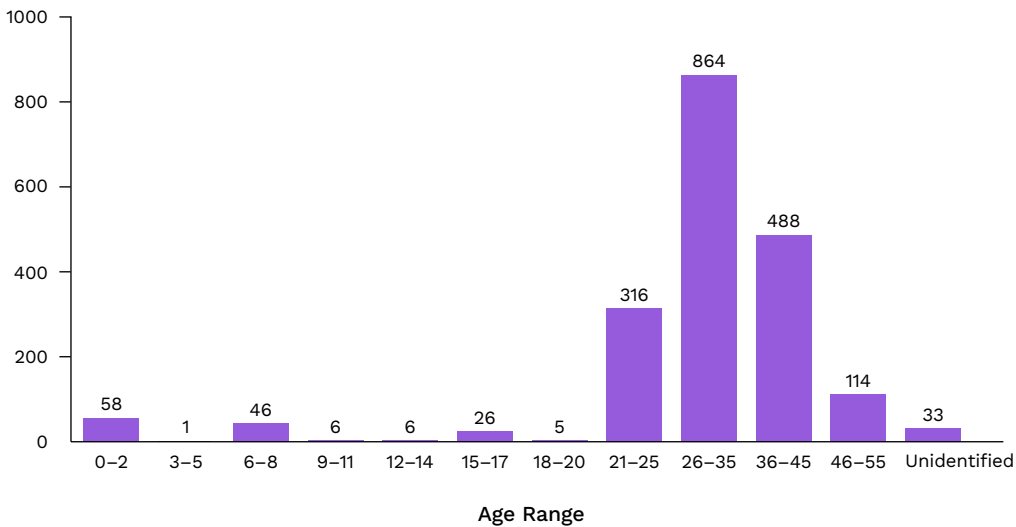


AGE RANGE

Distinct persons*

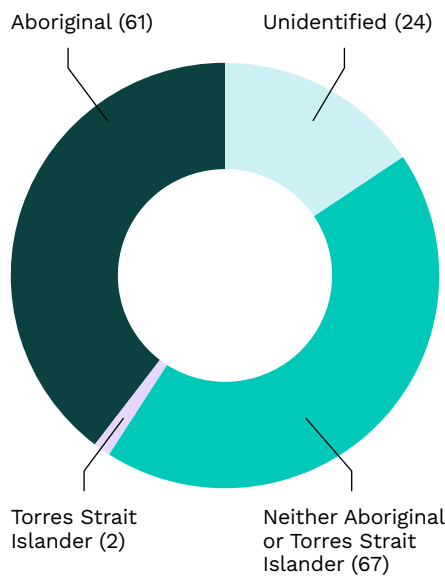


Person contacts*

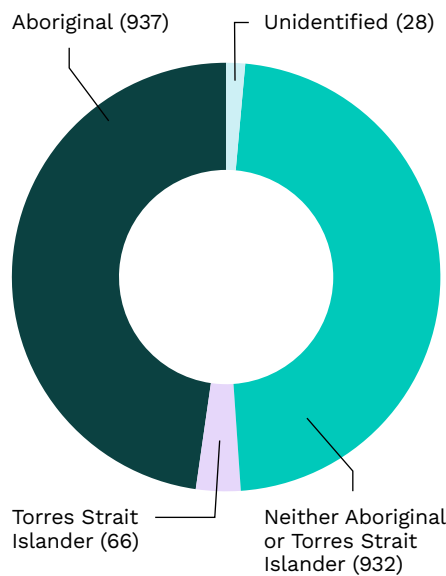


ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STATUS

Distinct persons*

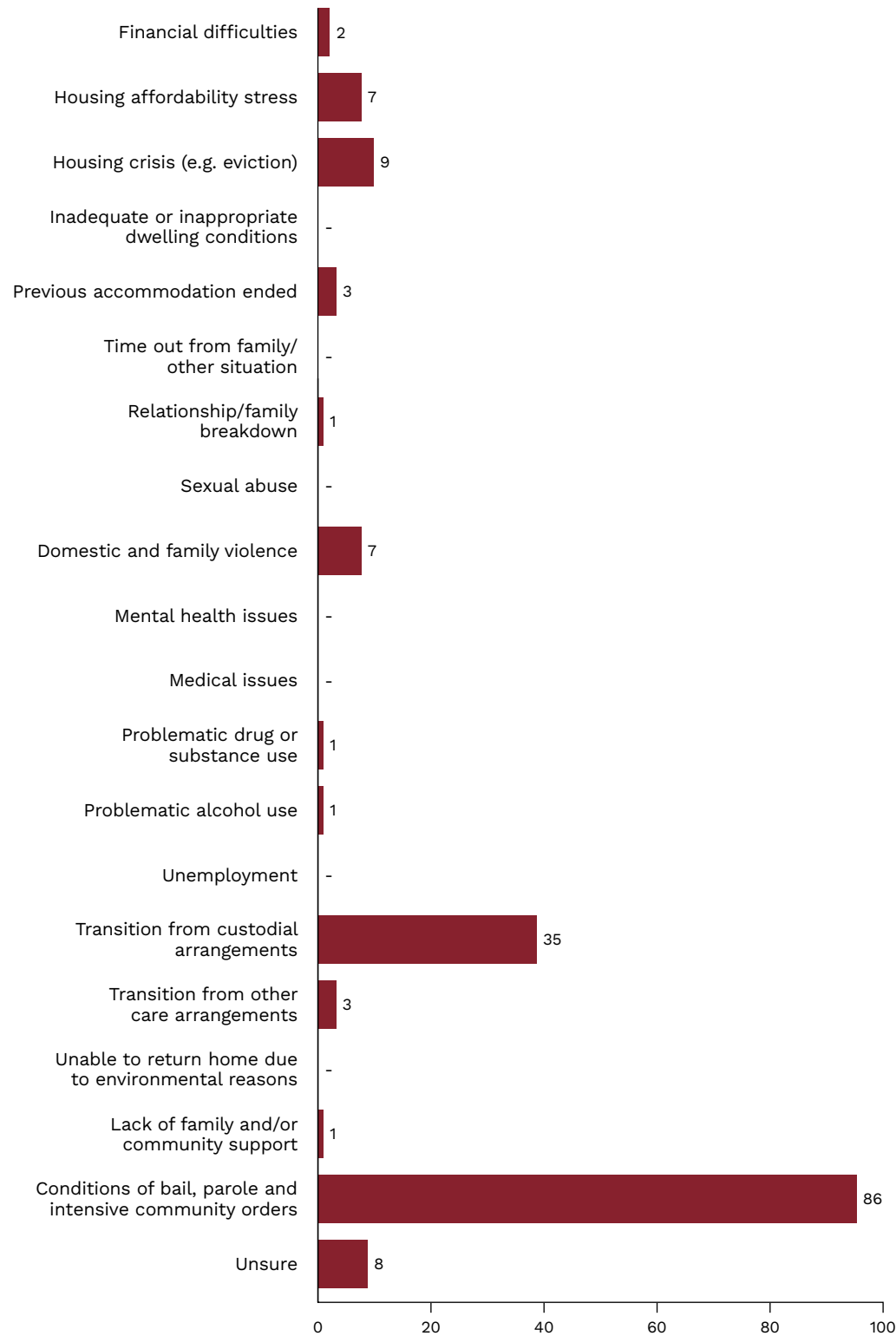


Person contacts*



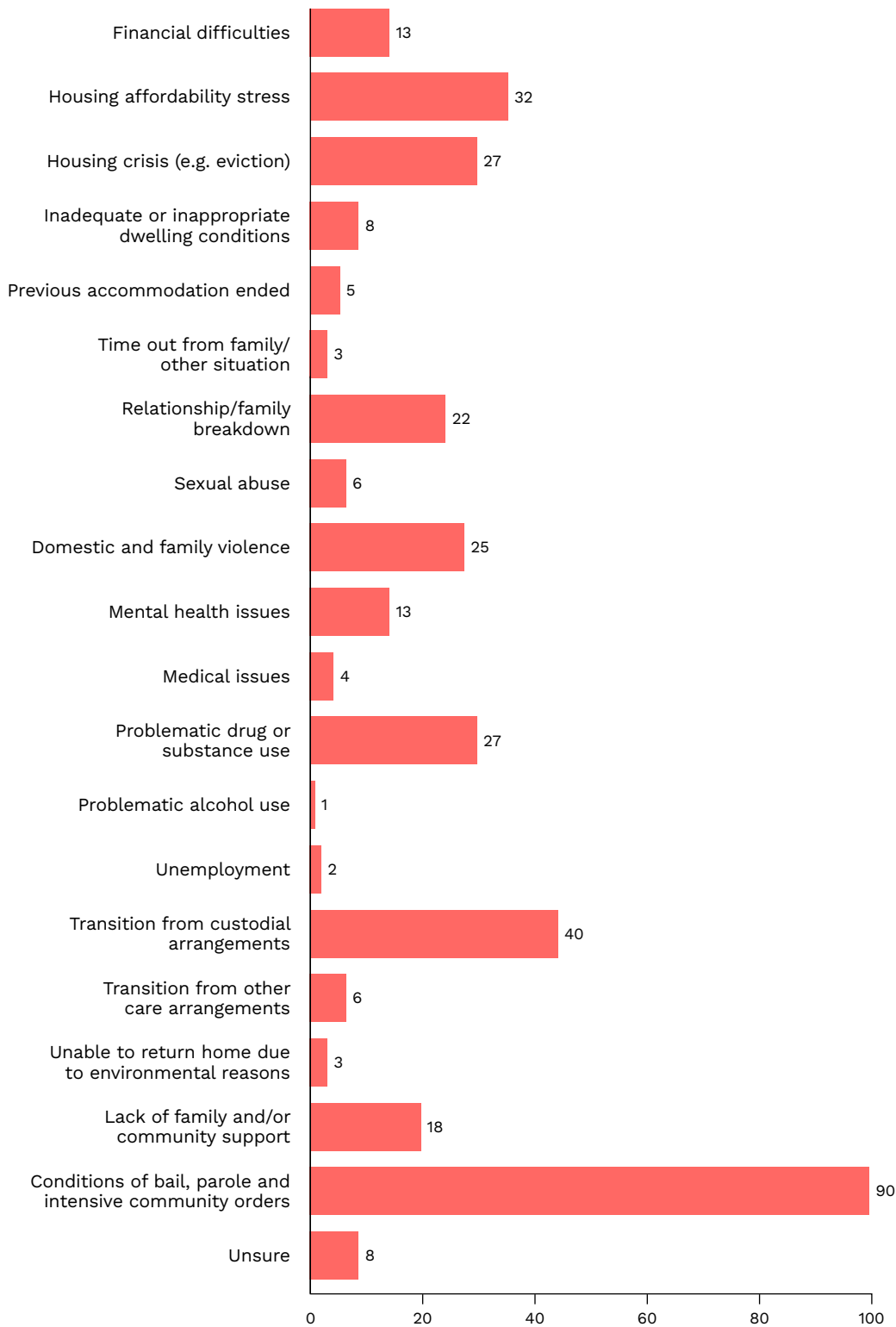
REASONS FOR SEEKING ASSISTANCE

Main reason for seeking assistance



While the data presented in ‘Main Reason for Seeking Assistance’ highlights the primary drivers for client engagement, it does not reflect the full range of additional supports provided. These supports often extend well beyond the initial presenting issues and demonstrate the depth of ongoing case management required. This broader picture is more fully captured in the ‘All Reasons for Seeking Assistance’ data.

All reasons for seeking assistance



PROGRAM SUCCESSES

SYSTEM-LEVEL IMPACTS

JUDICIAL RECOGNITION AND ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING

Courts in NSW have begun to recognise From Now as a supportive program and are granting bail to women who might otherwise remain in custody. Some women are receiving community orders instead of prison sentences, due to their involvement and commitment to the From Now program.

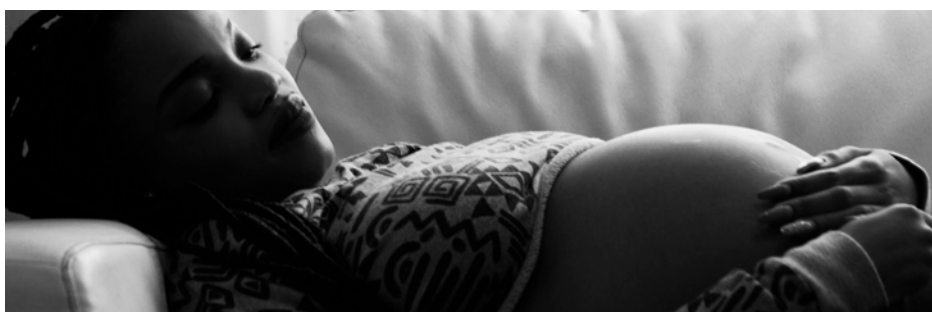
³⁶ Sisters Inside. (n.d.). SEQ programs.

These outcomes align with findings from Sisters Inside's Supreme Court Bail (SCB) Support Program, which provides holistic support to women throughout the bail application process and post-release. This approach has resulted in a 100% success rate since 2003, primarily by securing housing and essential services that directly address magistrates' concerns around granting bail. ³⁶

INCLUSIVE APPROACH SERVING MARGINALISED WOMEN

From Now addresses a critical service gap by offering an inclusive, purpose-built program for women who are typically excluded from mainstream support due to rigid eligibility criteria.

Many services turn away women with histories of substance use, current parole orders, or ongoing criminal charges - precisely the individuals most in need of support. From Now not only accepts these women but is also equipped to meet their complex needs by aligning with bail conditions, including curfew monitoring and alcohol and other drug (AOD) management. This adaptability ensures that women who would otherwise fall through the cracks have access to safe, structured support. By removing these common barriers to entry, From Now plays a vital role in reducing recidivism and promoting meaningful reintegration for women at the highest risk of marginalisation.



HOUSING AND STABILITY OUTCOMES

SUCCESSFUL HOUSING PLACEMENTS AND HOUSING SECURITY

From Now has achieved meaningful housing outcomes for women exiting custody, an achievement made more significant by the complex and often exclusionary housing landscape in New South Wales.

Within the past nine months alone, three women have successfully transitioned into long-term transitional housing, while others have secured a place on the priority housing waitlist through sustained advocacy and support.

These outcomes are crucial, as stable housing is widely recognised as the single most important factor in preventing recidivism and supporting successful reintegration. Research from Homelessness NSW highlights that access to secure and affordable housing is critical for women's safety, recovery from violence, and ability to rebuild their lives, including reconnecting with children and engaging in health, employment, and community supports ³⁷

From Now plays a critical role in overcoming the structural and psychological barriers women face in navigating housing systems. For many clients, especially those with experiences of trauma, domestic violence, or substance use, interfacing with complex bureaucracies like Homes NSW can be overwhelming. As one staff member explained, even staying on the phone for an hour to advocate for housing can feel impossible for someone whose life has been shaped by survival, mistrust, or mental health challenges.

Through intensive, consistent support, the program helps women build housing eligibility, navigate application processes, and maintain the stamina required for successful placement. These efforts not only result in housing outcomes but also foster confidence, stability, and forward momentum for clients, ensuring that housing becomes a launchpad for long-term change rather than a temporary reprieve.

CREATING SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

From Now has succeeded in creating a safe, non-judgemental environment where clients feel at home.

The program's physical and emotional space has been described as "homely," providing women with potentially their first experience of safety and stability. A key strength of From Now lies in its dual focus on therapeutic healing and practical education. For many women leaving prison – and for all those who have taken part in From Now – experiences of domestic and family violence are a common thread. This program provides a rare opportunity to pause, reflect, and understand the underlying causes of their past decisions. Through psychosocial support groups and targeted education, clients are supported to explore the impact of ill mental health, substance use, housing instability, and trauma, including the loss of their children. This process not only fosters self-awareness and accountability but also empowers women to rebuild self-esteem and develop the skills needed to avoid repeating harmful patterns.

THE STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT GIVES THEM THE SPACE TO ASK, OFTEN FOR THE FIRST TIME, “WHAT WENT WRONG?” - AND TO BEGIN THE WORK OF MAKING LASTING CHANGE.

³⁷ Homelessness NSW, Above n 22.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPROVEMENTS

SUBSTANCE USE RECOVERY

From Now provides a structured, supportive environment that facilitates recovery from substance use, with many women engaging in AOD support for the first time in their lives.

As an abstinence-based program (with allowance for pharmacotherapy programs), From Now incorporates clear routines, curfews, and expectations that help women build the consistency required for recovery, particularly important for those who are pregnant, parenting, or seeking reunification with children.

The program's 8:30 p.m. curfew, daily check-ins, and scheduled responsibilities promote stability and align with conditions set by the justice system, such as bail, Intensive Corrections Orders (ICOs), or parole. These structures are not punitive but purposeful, reinforcing healthy routines that are often a prerequisite for family restoration and for meeting DCJ requirements. In addition to routine, From Now conducts random AOD testing, reinforcing accountability while maintaining a compassionate, therapeutic approach.

Importantly, the program connects clients with AOD counselling and intensive case management, recognising that sustained recovery requires more than abstinence – it requires addressing underlying trauma, mental health needs, and social challenges. For many, the accountability mechanisms within the program, such as the use of support letters to demonstrate engagement to legal and child protection bodies, serve as powerful motivators for sustained participation. Through this blend of structure, support, and responsiveness, From Now empowers women to begin or continue their recovery journeys in an environment that fosters both personal responsibility and healing.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND THERAPEUTIC SUPPORTS

Women engaged in the From Now program have made significant progress in accessing psychological and trauma-informed mental health support, addressing one of the most critical yet historically unmet, needs for justice-involved women in New South Wales.

³⁸ Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network. (2023). *10-Year Strategic Plan 2023–2032: Together for Healthier Tomorrows*. NSW Government.

Research from the Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network (NSW) identifies mental health care as one of the most significant gaps for women exiting prison, with many leaving custody without diagnoses, treatment plans, or connections to community-based services. The Network's 10-Year Strategic Plan 2023–2032 highlights the critical need for continuity of care during the transition from custody to community, emphasizing that this period is a high-risk time for patients and that seamless handover to community mental health teams is essential. ³⁸

The program has successfully facilitated access to a broad range of therapeutic services, including psychological appointments for women experiencing PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Clients have also engaged with AOD counselling and support through providers such as the Langton Centre, Canterbury Drug Health, RPA Drug Health Services, Odyssey House, and Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre. Additionally, clients have been supported to access online recovery supports like Narcotics Anonymous and to utilise Victim Services counselling, which not only addresses past trauma but also supports victim compensation claims and recovery.

Outcomes

Program Successes

For many women, these interventions mark the first time they have received sustained, structured mental health support. Importantly, the combination of trauma-informed therapy and substance use treatment has not only improved psychological wellbeing but also contributed to reduced reoffending and relapse. Program staff report that women who have engaged in counselling have maintained abstinence (confirmed through substance-free screening outcomes), developed greater insight into the pathways that led to their incarceration, and progressed meaningfully through the From Now program.

By creating supported pathways into these services, From Now empowers women to better understand their experiences, heal from trauma, and build the resilience needed to remain in the community and avoid future justice system involvement.

CASE STUDY



CLAIRE'S STORY REBUILDING TRUST

A knock came at Claire's front door late one Friday night. It was the police. This wasn't the first time they had paid her a visit, but she could sense that this time was different. After experiencing legal and financial abuse at the hands of her ex-partner, Claire's house had been sold and she and her children were facing homelessness.

Until the age of 40, Claire had never interacted with the police – she didn't have so much as a parking fine on her record – but this was her eighth arrest in two years. After being misidentified as the primary perpetrator of domestic violence, Claire was accused of breaching an AVO that should have been placed for her instead of against.

During her period of incarceration, Claire was disconnected from her children. Her children were split between youth refuges and living with her ex-partner, the perpetrator of the violence.

Upon her release, she learned that the extreme stress of living in refuge away from his mother was causing her eldest son to struggle with his mental health. Claire was under daily pressure from DCJ to find a place for them both to live, but with no

income or assets this proved an impossible task. Eventually she secured crisis accommodation in a local shelter, but this was only temporary.

When her Parole Officer referred her to From Now, she had 'no trust left to give'. It was hard for her to trust case workers when she had been let down by systems so many times before.

During her interaction with the program, she was supported to seek education and employment opportunities. Claire described her interaction with From Now as the 'sliding doors moment that saved my mental health from complete disintegration'. Entry into From Now was the first step in her healing, recovery and eventual re-entry into the community.



FAMILY RECONNECTION

From Now plays a vital role in preserving and restoring family relationships, particularly for women with children, many of whom are navigating active involvement from the DCJ.

THE PROGRAM HAS CONSISTENTLY PREVENTED CHILD REMOVALS, WITH EVERY WOMAN ENTERING FROM NOW WITH AN OPEN DCJ CASE SUCCESSFULLY RETAINING CUSTODY OF HER CHILD.

This outcome is a direct result of the program's early intervention, structured support, and collaborative case management, which includes preparing for reunification, facilitating communication with children in out-of-home care, and ensuring a stable home environment.

For mothers, the program offers specialised parenting support that not only helps maintain or regain custody but also strengthens parenting skills. This approach directly responds to long-standing calls from AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, which warn that policies separating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mothers inflict "ongoing trauma" on families and perpetuate inter-generational cycles of removal.

Outcomes Program Successes

Moreover, From Now has succeeded in reestablishing fractured family connections beyond the parent-child relationship. Some clients have reconnected with extended family members who now actively support them, including attending court hearings, offering accommodation opportunities and providing emotional and practical assistance. These renewed relationships offer critical social and emotional support, reinforcing the program's holistic model of recovery and reintegration.

CULTURALLY SUPPORTIVE

From Now provides culturally responsive support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Reflecting this reality, around 80% of women who have accessed supported accommodation identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The program embeds cultural safety and connection as core principles of care, recognising that healing from incarceration, trauma, and systemic marginalisation must be culturally grounded.

Key features include the presence of an Aboriginal staff member available for yarning and relational support, as well as an access to the Aunty in Residence, offering women cultural mentoring and connection in a nurturing, community-led way.

Cultural activities such as coolamon making with Aboriginal artists, trauma-informed yoga led by Aboriginal Elders, and participation in significant cultural events like NAIDOC Week, Sorry Day, and other local celebrations and events further embed cultural identity and community into the healing process.

The program also acknowledges areas for growth, including the need for greater investment in staff training around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural needs, and is actively working towards developing individualised cultural plans for every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman in the program. This ongoing commitment ensures that support is not only culturally appropriate but also tailored to each woman's background, identity, and goals - fostering a deeper sense of belonging, empowerment, and trust.

PROGRAM METHODOLOGY EFFECTIVENESS

BALANCE BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND AUTONOMY

From Now strikes a critical balance between providing structure and restoring autonomy, offering a unique and effective model for women transitioning from prison.

Unlike highly regulated environments such as rehabilitation facilities, this program establishes clear conditions to ensure safety and stability, while still allowing clients the freedom to make informed decisions about their lives. This autonomy is pivotal for women who have long been denied agency, whether through incarceration or controlling relationships. By fostering a sense of control within a supportive framework, From Now helps women rebuild confidence, practice decision-making, and gradually reclaim ownership over their futures. This balance makes it an ideal transitional space, preparing clients for independent living while still offering the guidance and accountability needed for long-term success.

Clients have “safety with us, and they’ve got their things that they need to do with us, but they have full autonomy to do what they need to do with those conditions.”

FLEXIBLE AND PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

A defining feature of the From Now program is its flexible, client-centred approach that prioritises meeting women where they are, rather than forcing them to fit within rigid service models.

This adaptability is consistently highlighted as one of the program's key strengths. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model, From Now tailors its responses to each woman's unique circumstances, needs, and goals, all while maintaining the core integrity of the program.

One powerful example of this flexibility involved a pregnant woman whose bail conditions initially prevented her from returning to her family and community. Through strategic advocacy, the program worked with the legal system to amend her bail conditions, allowing her to live on Country with family support. From Now continued to provide wraparound outreach support, attending court proceedings with her, liaising with her legal team, and coordinating conversations with her partner to ensure a safe and sustainable home environment.

This person-centred ethos is embedded throughout the program's design. While supported accommodation is a cornerstone offering of From Now, staff recognise that it may not suit every referral. In such cases, the benefit of From Now being embedded within WAGEC allows for seamless internal referrals to other accommodation or service streams, ensuring that no woman is turned away simply because she doesn't fit a specific model.

INSTEAD OF REQUIRING CLIENTS TO CONFORM TO RIGID CRITERIA, FROM NOW BUILDS FLEXIBLE PATHWAYS AROUND THEM, AN APPROACH THAT ENHANCES BOTH ENGAGEMENT AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES.

SUPPORTING THROUGH SETBACKS

A core strength of the From Now program is its compassionate, realistic approach to setbacks - particularly in the context of recovery and reintegration. Rather than applying a zero-tolerance model, the program supports women through mistakes, recognising that healing is a non-linear process.

For example, a positive drug test does not automatically result in the client being exited; instead, it becomes the basis for a conversation, reflection, and support. This approach builds trust with women who may have previously been excluded or penalised by other services for similar behaviour.

When a woman does need to exit the program, typically after repeated breaches of the rules, the decision is made with care and responsibility. Clients are not left without support; instead, they continue to work with the From Now team in an outreach capacity or they are referred to other WAGEC programs or services better where applicable.

This philosophy reinforces the program's commitment to dignity, safety, and long-term outcomes. By responding to setbacks with consistency and compassion, From Now offers women a rare opportunity to experience accountability without punishment, promoting stability and trust in a way that is often absent in the broader service system.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

From Now has developed effective collaborations with other services, including the Community Restorative Centre (CRC) and the Miranda Project, providing complementary support without duplication.

³⁹ NSW Law Reform Commission. (2015). *Parole* (Report No. 142).

The compartmentalisation of support roles prevents clients from becoming overwhelmed or having to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences. Different agencies focus on distinct aspects of support (for example, Miranda Project providing transportation that From Now may lack capacity for), creating a comprehensive support network. This coordination addresses the fragmentation often experienced by women attempting to navigate multiple services post-release, as identified by the NSW Law Reform Commission. ³⁹ From Now is also embedded within sector-wide advocacy efforts as an active member of the KWOOP Coalition, with WAGEC's CEO serving as Co-Chair, ensuring the program's insights inform systemic reform.

CASE STUDY



JOURNEY TO HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Amidst the shadows of historical domestic and family violence, a 22-year-old woman, 22 weeks pregnant, found sanctuary within our program.

During her stay in our accommodation service, From Now staff were able to explore some of her longer-term goals for her well-being and housing. Through our support, she reconnected with her sister and mother, both residing in Queensland.

Together, they devised a plan for her return home to welcome her baby, surrounded by love and support of her inter-state family. From Now case managers, supporting services and family supported

the woman to re-engaging with drug and alcohol services and the Antenatal Clinic at the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital, crucial initial steps for her as she embarked on a journey of healing and empowerment. The discovery of her baby's gender through a 3D scan brought joy and reassurance, marking a significant milestone in her path to recovery and has given her great strength.

**SUPPORTIVE
COMPASSIONATE
REALISTIC
INCLUSIVE
MEANINGFUL
FLEXIBLE
CONSISTENT
THERAPUTIC
EVIDENCE-BASED
SUCCESSFUL.**

PROGRAM LEARNINGS

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

ACCESS CHALLENGES AND REINTEGRATION

Women transitioning from prison into the community face a range of systemic and structural barriers that undermine their ability to successfully reintegrate and access support services. One of the most significant challenges identified by staff at From Now is the difficulty in accessing women while they are still in custody.

Efforts to initiate support pre-release are often hampered by inconsistent processes across correctional facilities, such as changing contact systems, limited cooperation from custodial staff, and delays in booking phone calls. This makes it extremely difficult for caseworkers to build rapport, assess needs, or begin through-care planning. While relationships with key individuals (e.g., Justice Health pregnancy and substance use coordinators) can facilitate smoother access for pregnant women, non-pregnant women often receive far less coordinated pre-release support.

This disparity results in frontline staff entering the post-release phase with limited or no information about a woman's medication needs, mental health history, substance use, or legal constraints, such as existing AVO's all of which are critical to safe and effective care planning. As staff noted, "we're coming in really blind," which raises both safety concerns and the risk of missed support opportunities.

Post-release, women encounter further bureaucratic and practical barriers to reintegration. Re-establishing identity, banking, Medicare and Centrelink access can be a logistical maze. To open a bank account, a woman needs valid identification; to access Centrelink, she needs a bank account. Yet many women leave prison without accepted forms of ID, and release certificates are not always recognised. This creates a cascade of delays and frustration in securing income, housing, or healthcare, often within the first 24 hours after release. As one staff member reflected, "it's a huge day... they don't want to be overwhelmed," yet the system offers little pre-release support to ease this burden, particularly for women on remand, who are excluded from many in-custody programs and preparatory services.

These challenges have been recognised at a systemic level where the NSW Inspector of Custodial Services⁴⁰ that women are routinely discharged "with limited support to arrange post-release accommodation and services," and has recommended the creation of dedicated bail-and-resettlement coordinators to provide coordinated through-care planning. The same office's 2022 inspection of Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre found that 220 women were transferred in and released again within seven days, leaving "little opportunity for formal release planning"⁴¹ Homelessness NSW's report shows that the temporary exemption from producing identification while in custody ends at the prison gate; women who cannot

⁴⁰ NSW Inspector of Custodial Services. (2020). *Women on remand: A report into the conditions, treatment and outcomes for women on remand in custody in New South Wales*.

⁴¹ NSW Inspector of Custodial Services. (2023). *Inspection of Silverwater Women's and Dillwynia Correctional Centres 2022*.

⁴² Hartley, C., & Barnes, E. (2023). *Safe, accessible and available? Examining the temporary accommodation system in NSW*. Homelessness NSW.

⁴³ Abbott, P., Davison, J., Magin, P., & Hu, W. (2016). 'If they're your doctor, they should care about you': Women on release from prison and general practitioners. *Australian Family Physician*, 45(10), 728–731.

⁴⁴ NSW Auditor-General. (2020). *Their Futures Matter: Governance and partnerships* (Performance audit); NSW Auditor-General. (2021). *Responses to homelessness* (Performance audit); Audit Office of New South Wales. (2021). *Access to health services in custody* (Performance audit).

immediately supply photo-ID or a postal address have their social-housing applications closed, effectively pushing them straight into homelessness. ⁴²

A clear need exists for structural reform, including consistent pre-release planning across all correctional facilities, not just for pregnant women. This would involve enforced policies requiring timely information-sharing with community services and expanded access to in-custody programs that prepare women for the practical realities of life post-release. Without these systemic changes, women, particularly those without existing advocacy networks, will continue to fall through the cracks at a critical juncture in their recovery and reintegration journey.

INTERAGENCY COMMUNICATION GAPS AND SYSTEMIC INACCESSIBILITY

From Now regularly encounters significant barriers to effective interagency communication, which impede its capacity to support women leaving custody, particularly those reconnecting with children, navigating health systems, or seeking essential services.

These gaps are not isolated but systemic, reflecting broader fragmentation across the justice, child protection, housing, health, and social service sectors.

A persistent challenge lies in engaging with external services responsible for children in out-of-home care. Staff report long delays in receiving information from organisation associated with DCJ, or DCJ themselves, with cases where mothers themselves located their children before caseworkers could confirm their whereabouts. The lack of clear referral pathways and accountability in outsourced service provision often leaves program staff without the information necessary for family reunification planning. This breakdown directly undermines efforts to “close the gap” and uphold the principles of policies such as Bringing Them Home, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

These issues extend to the health and social support systems. Caseworkers frequently face difficulties liaising with Centrelink and Medicare, even when advocating directly alongside clients. Women are often dismissed or disbelieved when attempting to advocate for themselves, especially those with criminal histories or disrupted custody of their children. One staff member described how clients are treated dismissively until a caseworker intervenes, highlighting a broader issue of institutional stigma and the invisibility of formerly incarcerated women within mainstream services. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners also found that women often struggle to reconnect with primary care post-release, especially when facing housing instability and stigma. ⁴³

Language and cultural barriers further compound these problems. Although services for women with non-English language needs may exist, long wait times, limited interpreter access, and bureaucratic complexity make timely support nearly impossible. The result is often re-traumatisation, as women must repeatedly tell their stories to different agencies without coordination or sensitivity.

These experiences reflect broader findings from the NSW Auditor-General, who has noted persistent failures in interagency collaboration within the justice sector, particularly between corrections, housing, health, and family services. ⁴⁴ When systems do not communicate women fall through the cracks, especially those navigating multiple vulnerabilities. Bridging these gaps requires policy-level coordination, improved data sharing, mandated pre-release planning, and sustained investment in culturally safe and trauma-informed service networks.



STRUCTURAL HOUSING CONSTRAINTS

Women transitioning from incarceration face significant challenges in securing stable housing, exacerbated by the statewide affordable housing crisis and structural discrimination.

⁴⁵ Coulter, K. (2025). *The rental crisis leaving women with an impossible choice: Stay with a violent partner or become homeless*. Women's Agenda.

Recent data show that affordable listings have almost disappeared: Anglicare Australia's 2025 Rental Affordability Snapshot found that only 0.7 per cent of more than 51 000 advertised dwellings were affordable for a single mother on the minimum wage, and none were affordable for renters on income support. ⁴⁵ Front-line workers interviewed for the national AHURI study *Exiting prison with complex support needs* describe the private-rental barrier for releasees as "formidable... scarcity of affordable properties, gaps in rental histories, and discrimination," observing that landlords commonly rule out applicants as soon as a criminal record is disclosed. ⁴⁶

THESE WOMEN - MANY OF WHOM HAVE EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE, FINANCIAL ABUSE, SUBSTANCE USE, AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA - ARE LEFT WITH EXTREMELY LIMITED PATHWAYS TO SAFE, LONG-TERM HOUSING.

⁴⁶ Martin, C., Reeve, R., McCausland, R., Baldry, E., Burton, P., White, R., & Thomas, S. (2021). *Exiting prison with complex support needs: The role of housing assistance* (AHURI Final Report No. 361). Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited.

⁴⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). *The health of people in Australia's prisons 2022* (Cat. no. PHE 33). AIHW.

⁴⁸ Kelly, C. (2024, May 26). *Public housing regularly being offered to people on NSW waitlist who have died*. The Guardian.

Access to priority social housing is also a major barrier. In NSW, eligibility often depends on narrowly defined criteria, such as having a formal diagnosis of mental illness or disability to be prioritised. However, not all women are diagnosed, nor do they always have access to assessment services while incarcerated. This poses a critical equity issue. Many women leaving prison carry significant trauma but cannot "prove" their vulnerability within rigid assessment frameworks. These women, often Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, survivors of violence, and systemically marginalised, are left out of a system ostensibly designed to support the most in need.

This exclusion is despite the fact that the majority of women in prison come from profoundly marginalised backgrounds. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 63% of women entering prison report a history of mental health conditions, 75% report a history of substance use in the preceding 13 months, and over half report being homeless in the month prior to incarceration. ⁴⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are particularly overrepresented in the prison population and experience disproportionate housing insecurity due to intergenerational trauma, child removal, and systemic racism.

The situation is further compounded by the overwhelming demand for social housing in NSW. As of 2024, more than 57,000 households were on the public housing waitlist, with average wait times exceeding five years in many areas. A recent investigation by The Guardian revealed that at least 77 people died while on the NSW public housing waitlist between 2019 and 2024. While the causes of death were not disclosed, the findings underscore the severe strain and prolonged uncertainty experienced by those awaiting safe and secure housing. With over 55,000 applicants on the list and median wait times exceeding a decade in some areas, the data highlights the potentially life-altering consequences of systemic housing inaccessibility and delays. ⁴⁸

For women exiting prison, these combined factors create an environment in which recovery and reintegration are significantly undermined. Securing stable accommodation becomes a full-time barrier, and without systemic reform, particularly greater recognition of trauma and disadvantage in housing assessments, women will continue to fall through the cracks.



SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES

MEDICATION MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Access to consistent, appropriate medication is a critical aspect of post-release support for women exiting prison, yet it remains one of the most overlooked areas of transition.

Women frequently leave custody without prescriptions, continuity plans, or even knowledge of how to access essential medications. This failure in transitional healthcare not only compromises physical and mental wellbeing but also undermines the progress made through programs like From Now.

Caseworkers report that it is common for women to spend months in custody awaiting mental health assessments or medication reviews. Even when a diagnosis such as ADHD, an eating disorder, or substance dependency, is made, many women are released without medication or referral plans. For example, women who are prescribed Buvidal, Methadone, or psychiatric medication inside prison often exit without scripts, creating a dangerous gap in care. This lack of continuity can trigger withdrawal symptoms, destabilised moods, or relapse into substance use, all of which place women at heightened risk of reoffending.

One caseworker described how a client came out of custody newly diagnosed but entirely unsupported: “She came out with no medication, no prescription, nothing.” The result is that services like From Now are left to manage the fallout, clients in distress, at risk of crisis, or experiencing rapid deterioration in their mental health. For women with histories of trauma, substance use, and marginalisation, these moments of instability can undo months of progress in days.

This is not an isolated issue. Improving release planning and ensuring continuity of care, including access to prescribed medications, has been identified as a key strategic priority by the NSW Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network, particularly for women and individuals with complex health needs upon exiting custody. This reflects a broader recognition that healthcare disruptions during the transition to community can have serious consequences for recovery and reintegration. ⁴⁹ National evidence echoes this pattern, where a study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found systemic delays in medication access within prison and limited planning for continuity of care in the community. ⁵⁰ Similarly, a medical record review of women in Australian prisons revealed that many were released with no clear plan for ongoing treatment, despite known needs. ⁵¹

Ensuring that women leave custody with the medications they need, and with a clear pathway to ongoing care, is not only a basic health right, but a critical component of successful reintegration. Without it, the burden falls on frontline programs to manage preventable crises, and women are set up to fail before they’ve even had a chance to begin.

⁴⁹ Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network. (2023). Above n 38.

⁵⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2016). *Medication use by Australia's prisoners 2015: How is it different from the general community?* (Bulletin No. 135; Cat. no. AUS 202). AIHW.

⁵¹ Abbott, P., Magin, P., Lujic, S., & Hu, W. (2017). Supporting continuity of care between prison and the community for women in prison: A medical record review. *Australian Health Review*, 41(3), 268–276.

EXPANDING ACCESS AND SUPPORT PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN POST-CUSTODY

One of the most significant structural barriers facing women exiting prison is the lack of access to suitable, supportive accommodation due to restrictive risk assessment practices and rigid funding criteria.

Many housing services in NSW utilise assessment criteria that, while not explicitly discriminatory, effectively marginalised women with criminal records. These criteria often include considerations of past behaviour, perceived risk, and stability, which can be adversely interpreted in the context of a criminal history. As a result, women exiting prison may find themselves deemed ineligible for housing support, despite their need for stable accommodation to aid reintegration.

⁵² Domestic Violence Service Management. (2016). *Are you ready for me? Women leaving correctional services project report*.

The “Are You Ready for Me?” report highlights that women exiting the criminal justice system often face a complex interplay of challenges, including mental illness, substance dependence, and histories of trauma and abuse. ⁵² These factors, compounded by systemic biases in housing assessments, contribute to a cycle of marginalisation and exclusion.

Whilst From Now offers critical first-stage support, there is often nowhere for women to transition to when they need longer-term housing or if they need to be exited from From Now before program completion, due to breaching From Now’s guidelines. Caseworkers describe the emotional and ethical strain of having to exit women, sometimes with children, from supported accommodation into unstable accommodation because of the lack of suitable housing.

Many of these women are subsequently denied entry into other refuges due to narrow risk matrix assessments that focus solely on indicators like AVOs, bail conditions, or criminal charges. This narrow approach fails to take into account the full context of a woman’s life and increases the likelihood of becoming homeless which in turn significantly increases the likelihood of reoffending and returning to prison. This creates a harmful cycle of incarceration, exclusion, and instability that many women struggle to break out of throughout their lives.

Program staff emphasised the importance of educating other services on trauma-informed practice, particularly in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, whose experiences of incarceration, colonisation, and child removal are often misunderstood or dismissed. Risk assessments that rely heavily on criminal records or legal labels fail to recognise the nuances of coercive control, intergenerational trauma, or the role of systemic failure in women’s justice system involvement.

As one staff member noted, “we’re not going to refer a woman that would put another service at risk, we are invested in their success,” calling for trust and reciprocal relationships between services.

There are examples of success: some refuge managers have taken the time to discuss referrals directly and have accepted women with support from From Now caseworkers. These individual partnerships point to a scalable model, one that builds trust, provides continuity, and avoids penalising women for their criminal records alone.

The disparity between support options available for men and women post-incarceration also reflects deep systemic neglect. While multiple services (e.g., Matthew Talbot’s, Rainbow Lodge) accept men exiting prison, there is no equivalent network for women. Programs like CRC have long supported women post-release but often lack accommodation capacity. Without expanding supported housing pathways that recognise the complexity of women’s post-custody needs, a growing population of women will continue to be excluded from housing, an outcome that contradicts community safety, wellbeing, and equity goals.

RESOURCING GAPS AND WORKFORCE PRESSURES UNDERMINING PROGRAM DELIVERY

From Now is experiencing increasing demand from women exiting prison, many of whom present with complex and intersecting needs.

While the program has demonstrated strong outcomes, the current level of resourcing and staffing limits its capacity to expand and consistently deliver structured, holistic support at scale. Without additional investment, the program's ability to respond to the growing need, particularly for women requiring intensive or specialist support, risks being constrained.

A core issue is the over-reliance on staff from WAGEC as a whole, rather than just the From Now team, for delivering therapeutic and life skills groups. While staff are deeply committed, they are also responsible for their own programs and other range of tasks. As a result of growing demand and limited capacity, scheduled groups are sometimes postponed or cancelled, which disrupts program continuity and can create frustration for clients who are expected to engage consistently. Staff have highlighted the need for greater structure and reliability in group delivery, noting that this could be addressed through additional resourcing, such as engaging external facilitators or establishing a dedicated role within From Now. A dedicated role would reduce the pressure staff, allow for greater reliability, and, importantly, create safer spaces for clients. Women may feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics with facilitators who are not involved in their case management, reducing fear of judgement or repercussions.

The program would benefit from additional staffing focused on operational coordination and client transition support. This could include a dedicated worker responsible for ensuring the residential environment remains safe, welcoming, and trauma-informed, as well as a support role to assist with complex client transitions - such as coordinating arrivals from custody and facilitating access to essential appointments. These roles would enhance the overall stability and responsiveness of the program, allowing caseworkers to focus more effectively on therapeutic and case management support.

Funding limitations also constrain the program's ability to develop and deliver culturally responsive support. Staff highlighted the desire to create meaningful cultural plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, which would involve not just documentation but tangible support, such as funding for women to return to Country, access cultural healing programs, or connect with Elders and community-based services. However, due to time constraints and budget limitations, such plans are often deprioritised.

⁵³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Above n 16.

In addition, there is insufficient dedicated funding for family support, despite evidence that a significant proportion of incarcerated women are mothers. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that 54% of women in prison are mothers of dependent children ⁵³ Many of these women require intensive, long-term assistance to rebuild relationships with their children after release - a need that cannot be met without dedicated, specialised resources.

Ultimately, the service's impact is being constrained by structural under-funding and the absence of targeted roles and resources.

INVESTING IN DEDICATED STAFF, EXTERNAL FACILITATORS, AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORTS WOULD NOT ONLY STRENGTHEN PROGRAM DELIVERY, BUT ENSURE WOMEN RECEIVE THE CONSISTENT, TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE THEY NEED TO SUCCESSFULLY REINTEGRATE.



THE TIME IS NOW.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUSTAINABILITY, EXPANSION, AND SYSTEMIC IMPACT

To build on the success of From Now and ensure its continued impact beyond the pilot phase, we recommend the following strategic steps:



SECURE CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAM

Ensure that From Now is sustained in its current form, with stable long-term funding to maintain and deepen its impact. In response to clear demand, we also recommend scoping the feasibility of opening a second residential property in Sydney, followed by a third in a regional location. This expansion would provide much-needed support to more women exiting custody, particularly those from under-served or geographically isolated areas.



ESTABLISH A FORMAL UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

Formalise an academic partnership to lead a rigorous, independent evaluation of From Now. This will provide high-quality evidence on program outcomes, best practices, and systemic impact.



IMPLEMENT COMPREHENSIVE DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING SYSTEMS

- Quantify cost savings to justice, health, and child protection systems: Systematically track the financial benefits generated by the program to demonstrate its cost-effectiveness and value to public systems.
- Document long-term housing stability outcomes: Monitor housing trajectories post-release, including the transition to and sustainability of independent living, to evidence the program's success in securing lasting housing outcomes.



ADVOCATE FOR LONG-TERM GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Engage in strategic advocacy to secure funding through relevant streams such SHS and Corrective Services NSW. Demonstrating both cost-effectiveness and strong client outcomes will be key to achieving sustained investment.



STRENGTHEN SECTOR COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Continue active engagement with KWOOP and align with its broader advocacy goals, including the campaign to halve the number of women in prison by 2030. From Now should not only support women exiting prison but also contribute to broader efforts to prevent incarceration through systemic reform, diversion, and early intervention.

CORE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

DEDICATED STAFF EXPANSION: FUND SPECIALISED ROLES FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS:



DESIGNATED INTAKE COORDINATOR

An intake coordinator will streamline prison release transitions, providing a seamless and supportive entry into the program for women exiting custody.



DEDICATED FAMILY AND CHILD WORKER

To be able to support new mothers and mothers resuming care of their child.



DEDICATED ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKER

To provide culturally safe, community-informed support, this role would focus on building trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, supporting their healing journeys, and strengthening cultural connections through engagement with families, communities, and culturally relevant services.

LIVED EXPERIENCE PEERS AND MENTORS:



INCORPORATE PEERS AND MENTORS WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO THE PROGRAMS TO:

- Facilitate groups with clients, providing relatable guidance and fostering a sense of community and trust.
- Offer mentoring, helping clients navigate their transitions with the support of those who have successfully navigated similar challenges.

Dedicated staff member with lived experience and experience in therapeutic and life skills groups who can deliver consistent, structured programs and reduce the burden on internal staff, allowing for more focused case management.

PROGRAMMATIC ENHANCEMENTS

THERAPEUTIC PROGRAMMING

To enhance the effectiveness and consistency of therapeutic programming, it is recommended to invest in the external facilitation of trauma-informed group sessions. This investment will offer multiple benefits:



REDUCE CANCELLATIONS DUE TO CASE MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES

By outsourcing the facilitation to external experts, the program can ensure that therapeutic sessions are conducted regularly without being disrupted by the day-to-day responsibilities of internal staff. This consistency is crucial for maintaining the program's credibility and effectiveness.



CREATE SAFER SPACES FOR WOMEN TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE TOPICS WITHOUT FEARING JUDGEMENT FROM THEIR DIRECT CASE MANAGERS

External facilitators can provide a neutral and confidential environment where clients feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and challenges. This can significantly enhance the therapeutic impact of the sessions.



ALLOW INTERNAL STAFF TO FOCUS ON CRITICAL CASE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

By relieving internal staff from the responsibility of facilitating these sessions, they can dedicate more time and energy to comprehensive case management. This includes addressing the individual needs of each client, coordinating with other services, and providing personalized support.



INVOLVEMENT OF A DEDICATED COUNSELLOR WITH SPECIALISED SKILLS TO WORK WITH BOTH THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN ATTACHED TO THE PROGRAM

This would enable faster, more responsive therapeutic intervention tailored to the complex trauma histories of this population, and ensure a consistent level of professional mental health support embedded within the service.

CULTURAL PROGRAMS ENHANCEMENT

Enhancing cultural support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women requires dedicated funding and resources. The following recommendations aim to create a holistic and culturally responsive program:



DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALISED CULTURAL PLANS FOR EVERY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMAN

Each client should have a personalised cultural plan that reflects their unique background, needs, and goals. This plan should be developed in collaboration with the women themselves, ensuring that their voices and preferences are central to the process.



RESOURCES FOR WOMEN TO RETURN TO COUNTRY

Providing necessary resources and support for women to return to their ancestral lands can facilitate healing and reconnection with their cultural heritage. This may include travel expenses, accommodation, and logistical support.



CONNECTIONS WITH ELDERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Establishing strong connections with community Elders and culturally relevant services can offer ongoing support and guidance. Elders can play a vital role in mentoring and providing cultural wisdom, while community services can offer practical and emotional support.



EXPANSION OF CULTURAL HEALING ACTIVITIES

Investing in a diverse range of cultural activities can support the holistic healing of clients. This may include traditional arts and crafts, storytelling, cultural ceremonies, and participation in significant cultural events. By incorporating these activities, the program can foster a deeper sense of belonging and cultural pride among the clients.



PRE-RELEASE AND SYSTEMS COORDINATION

INTEGRATED THROUGH-CARE PLANNING - PRE-RELEASE ENGAGEMENT

To ensure successful reintegration and support for women transitioning from incarceration, it is imperative to establish robust pre-release engagement strategies. The following recommendations focus on creating formal partnerships with Corrective Services NSW to facilitate seamless transitions:



IMPLEMENT CONSISTENT PRE-RELEASE ASSESSMENT PROTOCOLS ACROSS ALL CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Develop and enforce standardised pre-release assessment procedures to be uniformly applied in all correctional facilities. This ensures that every woman receives a comprehensive evaluation of her needs, risks, and support requirements prior to release.



SECURE RELIABLE ACCESS TO WOMEN WHILE STILL IN CUSTODY

Establish clear and consistent communication channels to provide community services and support organisations with dependable access to women during their incarceration. This includes scheduled visitations, phone calls, and virtual meetings to build rapport, assess needs, and begin through-care planning.



DEVELOP STANDARDISED INFORMATION-SHARING AGREEMENTS TO PREVENT “BLIND” TRANSITIONS

Create formal agreements between correctional facilities and community service providers to ensure the timely and accurate exchange of information. This includes details on health status, medication plans, legal constraints, and any specific needs identified during incarceration. Effective information sharing prevents critical gaps in support and allows for tailored through-care planning.

By adopting these recommendations, we can create a structured and supportive pre-release environment that addresses the complex needs of women exiting prison, thereby enhancing their chances of successful reintegration and long-term stability. This in turn can give greater stability to their children and supports safer communities through decreased risks of recidivism.

STRENGTHENING PROGRAM VISIBILITY & EVIDENCE BASE

DEVELOPMENT OF A STATEWIDE PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

From Now has demonstrated that stable housing combined with trauma-informed, culturally responsive support leads to significantly improved outcomes for women exiting prison - showing that early intervention can drive lasting, intergenerational change.



To build on this success, WAGEC should develop a **Framework and Toolkit for Supporting Women Exiting Prison into SHS Services**. This resource would be designed to help SHS providers strengthen their capacity to work with criminalised women by offering practical tools, trauma-informed approaches, and culturally safe practices. It would also deepen sector understanding of the legal system, women's lived experiences of incarceration, and the underlying trauma, violence, and systemic disadvantage that often precede criminalisation.

Importantly, the toolkit would support services to reflect on cautious intake practices that may unintentionally limit access for women with custodial histories, and provide guidance on safe, informed ways to expand inclusion. By equipping SHS providers with the knowledge and confidence to respond more effectively, this Framework can help reduce service barriers, promote family reunification, and ensure justice-involved women are not left behind in housing pathways.



CONCLUSION

The From Now program represents a pioneering intervention in addressing the complex challenges faced by women transitioning from incarceration in NSW. As this report demonstrates, the program provides a vital alternative to punitive approaches that have historically failed to support women's successful reintegration into the community.

From Now's holistic model addresses multiple dimensions of need through dedicated supported accommodation, intensive case management, and wraparound services. The evidence presented in this report highlights the program's significant impact in several key areas: providing stable housing pathways, supporting recovery from substance use, facilitating family reconnection, and delivering culturally responsive care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The program's balanced approach, offering structure while restoring autonomy, distinguishes it from traditional service models and creates an environment where women can heal from trauma, build critical skills, and work towards sustainable independence. This person-centred flexibility has proven particularly effective for women with complex needs who are often excluded from mainstream support services.

Through its implementation, From Now has not only demonstrated measurable successes at the individual level but has also highlighted critical systemic gaps in the justice, housing, and family support sectors. The program's ability to create meaningful change despite

these structural barriers speaks to both its innovative approach and the dedication of its staff.

As the program evolves, there are clear opportunities to strengthen its impact through enhanced resourcing, expanded partnerships, and systemic advocacy. By addressing the identified service delivery challenges and building on demonstrated successes, From Now has the potential to transform outcomes for justice-involved women across NSW, with particular benefits for pregnant women, mothers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The time for transformative investment in programs like From Now is now. With targeted funding and cross-sector commitment, we can create pathways out of imprisonment that prioritise dignity, safety, and healing - breaking intergenerational cycles of trauma and building stronger families and communities. The From Now program offers a powerful blueprint for this change, demonstrating that with the right support, women exiting prison can rebuild their lives, reconnect with their children, and contribute to their communities.



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GLOSSARY

APPREHENDED VIOLENCE ORDER (AVO)

A legal order issued to protect a person from violence, threats, or harassment.

CASE MANAGEMENT

A collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for options and services to meet an individual's comprehensive health needs.

CULTURAL SAFETY

An environment that is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe for individuals, where their identity and culture are respected.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

Services that are tailored to the cultural needs and preferences of individuals, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Initiatives that redirect individuals away from the criminal justice system and towards supportive services.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Strategies and programs aimed at addressing issues before they escalate, particularly in the context of preventing reoffending.

INTENSIVE CORRECTIONS ORDER (ICO)

A sentencing option that allows offenders to serve their sentence in the community under strict conditions.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

The transmission of trauma from one generation to the next, often seen in communities affected by systemic oppression.

REINTEGRATION

The process of re-entering society after a period of incarceration, including accessing housing, employment, and social services.

THROUGH-CARE

Continuous support provided to individuals from the time they enter the justice system until they reintegrate into the community.

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

An approach to care that recognises and responds to the impact of trauma on individuals.

WRAPAROUND SERVICES

Comprehensive support services that address multiple needs of individuals, including housing, healthcare, and social support.

ACRONYMS

AOD Alcohol and Other Drugs

AVO Apprehended Violence Order

BBB Bugmy Bar Book

BOCSAR NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research

CRC Community Restorative Centre

DCJ NSW Department of Communities and Justice

HCH Helping Children Heal

ICO Intensive Corrections Order

KWOOP Keeping Women Out of Prison

PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

SHS Specialist Homelessness Services

WAGEC Women and Girls Emergency Centre

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