



Women Up North

ANNUAL 20 REPORT 24



JINGI WALA TO THE WOMEN UP NORTH 2024 ANNUAL REPORT BY BEK LEHNER – FIRST NATIONS BOARD MEMBER

Acknowledgement of country

On behalf of Women Up North I acknowledge the Widjanul-Wyabul People's enduring connection to the Bundjalung Nation and their ongoing sovereignty as First Nations People. I pay my respects to all First Nations Elders past, present, and emerging. I recognise the essential role that First Nations Women play in ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and care of their Children and Kin, and acknowledge the leadership, guidance, wisdom, and intergenerational strength of all First Nations Matriarchs as that which strengthens First Nations Families and Communities.

Jingi Wala

The Widjabul-Wyabul People graciously allow Women Up North (WUNH) to live and work within their Country where our head office is located. In honour of the preservation of their Culture and Language... I say Jingi Wala and welcome you to our 37th Annual Report.

About Bek Lehner

My name is Bek Lehner, I am a proud Wiradjuri Woman. I am currently lecturing at Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, Southern Cross University, and will be undertaking my PhD in the near future. I joined the Board in 2024. Prior to my role as a First Nation's Board member, I worked in Bugalma Bihyn, Women Up North's First Nations team, delivering specific domestic family and sexual violence (DFSV) refuge and outreach DFSV programs and casework.

As First Nations Board members and workers, our role is to ensure respect for the needs and autonomy of First Nations Women and Children reaching out for support, and lessening the barriers experienced by First Nations Women and Children.

Our work as First Nations Workers and Board members has also led to our development of the Cultural Safety Role. I would like to thank Paula Coghill for launching this role and encourage you to read about the achievements of the role in this report.



About the Artist

We would like to thank Elana Hickling, proud Wahabul Woman and featured Artist for her artwork that has inspired this years Annual Report design.

Elana is a highly talented young emerging First Nations Artist. Please email shs@wunh.org.au to enquire about purchasing her original works.

*Emerging Artist Elana Hickling,
holding her beautiful painting.*

// A fresh start leaving violence behind...

Background

Women Up North was registered in 1987 and has been supporting Women, Young People, and Children for over 37 years. We are a not-for-profit charitable organisation with a tax-deductible gift recipient (DGR) status.

We operate in the Northern Rivers Area from Grafton to Tweed Heads and all the locations in between.

WUNH is a Tier 3 nationally registered housing provider; and has a long-term commitment to supporting Women and their Children to access and maintain private or social housing.

WUNH is a member of the Northern NSW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) consortium, which provides Specialist Homelessness Services to our First Nations Communities and Specialist Domestic and Family Violence services to Women and Children from Tweed to Grafton.

Since our establishment in 1987 we have committed a minimum of our housing nominations to 50% First Nations Women. Since 2013 we have worked with the First Nations Communities to deliver the Bugalma Bihyn First Nations Women's Refuge, providing culturally safe emergency accommodation, casework and support for First Nations Women and their Children.

WUNH has committed in our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and Associations Constitution that a minimum of 50% of the WUNH Board positions will be held by First Nations people.

Our Guiding Principles

We are a feminist organisation, delivering gender responsive, inclusive services. We are guided by these principles:

- » We value self-determination and support Women and Children to reach their full potential.
- » We acknowledge the important role of First Nations People in our Communities.
- » We actively support First Nations Communities and Organisations in ways that are guided by them and support self determination.
- » We believe all people are entitled to live in a safe environment.
- » We celebrate Cultural diversity and inclusiveness.
- » We are advocates for change in our community.
- » We are a learning Organisation.
- » We deliver quality, Culturally responsive and safe programs and services.
- » We collaborate and partner with Communities, Services, Government and others in support of our Vision and Purpose.
- » We are committed to delivering responsive, appropriate place-based services and supports.

Our Vision

Women and Children thrive in safe homes and Communities.

Our Purpose

We work in and with our community to stop and reduce the impact of domestic and family violence through prevention, support, housing and advocacy. We believe in Women and Children and work with them to create the life they hope for.

Our Values



RESPECT

We believe in the inherent worth of every person and actively show our respect by welcoming people where they are at, listening deeply, valuing their choices, being inclusive and non-judgmental in everything we do.



CARE AND COMPASSION

We care deeply for the people we work with, our colleagues and our community. We show this through the way we communicate, providing support and sharing with compassion.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

We stand up for what is right and just. We believe fiercely in equity and advocate to improve outcomes and a fairer share of access to resources for the people we work with, our community and our sector.



DETERMINATION

We don't give up easily. We stay alongside people and our community in the interests of getting outcomes, change and development.



COLLABORATION

We work well with others – we seek to have greater impact by working together.



WUNH team celebrating our 2024 Gala

Chairperson's Report

LOUISE LANCETT
*Chair of the Board,
Women Up North*



On behalf of the Board, I wish to acknowledge the Bundjalung Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work. We pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and future, as they hold the memories, traditions, Culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia. We will always remember that this land is, was and will always be Traditional Aboriginal land.

As I am retiring from the Board in December, this seems a good opportunity to look back on events over the 10 years I've spent with Women Up North (WUNH).

WUNH was established in 1987 and when I joined in 2014, it had a Management Committee of four people. Today, it has a Board of seven, with a constitutional commitment to reach 50% First Nations membership.

2014-15

During this year, there was a reshuffle of the entire sector, up until that time, WUNH had managed and supported 22 Families in transitional domestic violence houses; we had very little grant money, and our income was generated through our property management. Today WUNH has shared nomination rights with our alliance Partners to support transitional housing in the region, and our portfolio usually averages 10 transitional properties, as well as the Bugalma Bihyn First Nations Refuge.

2015-2016

This period saw us establish a Board, appoint a CEO and, out of necessity, reinvent our organisation. As one of our income streams ended, it was vital to source grant funding and pursue fundraising to ensure our Clients would continue to receive the same high level of service WUNH had previously provided.

2016-2017

The flooding of the back room of our headquarters for the first time in 2017, gave us a significant setback to overcome during this year. Little did we know, the flooding would occur three more times over the next four years.

2017-2018

A donation by the Wales Trust Foundation provided us with funding for a much needed refurbishing of the Bugalma Bihyn Refuge, making life easier for both our Clients and staff.

2019-2020

Just prior to the onset of the COVID-19, we completed the installation of a new phone system and the purchase of new computer equipment. This upgrade proved crucial over the next two years, as it enabled us to provide continuous services, even though our region was experiencing compulsory lockdowns during the pandemic.

2020-2021

During this year, WUNH received a grant to remodel the Bugalma Bihyn Refuge. We commenced work on plans, approvals and the many necessary steps to undertake this work, but after many holdups the project ran over into 2022. Subsequently it was delayed further by the Lismore floods and a shortage of tradespeople following the disaster event. I am pleased to say at last, in 2024, we will be confirming a start date for the works.

2021-2022

During the Lismore floods of February 2022, the depth of water was such that it entered our upstairs offices. Staff continued to work from home while our landlord undertook repairs in record time, and we place on record again our thanks to Len, Julie and the Durham family for their efforts in getting us back into our workplace.

2022-2023

In this year, we appointed two new Board members: Rebecca Lehner and Kygim Kim. Rebecca is a proud Wiradjuri Woman, and previously worked at Bugalma Bihyn Refuge, becoming the manager there while studying at Southern Cross University for her Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge. The knowledge Rebecca gained while working at the Refuge is an asset to the Board. Bek is now lecturing at SCU's Gnibi Indigenous College and preparing to commence her PhD. We are very proud to have her on our Board.

Born in Lismore, Kygim is a Bundjalung woman with an impressive legal background. She has chaired the Northern Rivers Family Law Pathways, and when she joined our Board, she was on the Federal Court Circuit as a Family Indigenous Liaison Officer. Kygim has now returned to her role as a Solicitor at the Northern Rivers Aboriginal Legal Service, and her Legal and Cultural knowledge is highly valued by the Board.

I would also take this opportunity to record my thanks to Dr. Margaret Hughes. Marg completed her PhD at Gnibi Indigenous College SCU this year, and we are grateful for her exceptional work and extensive knowledge in the Community sector, Management and Finances. Marg has used this knowledge and skill to support and mentor the Finance team and CEO.

As our Secretary and our legal go-to person, Fiona Spencer does a wonderful job. She brings a wealth of experience from her role as a lead Family Law Solicitor in a large firm, and from a rich legal background including roles such as Community Legal Practitioner in First Nations Communities. Thank you, Fiona, for your important contribution.

Our sincere thanks also go to Delilah Williams - your organisational skills and efficiency are greatly appreciated. Delilah is a Small Business Woman with a background within the Health and Community sector, and highly skilled in digital and electronic data management.

Meg Croydon is a First Nations member with a background in management and coordination at Bugalma Bihyn Refuge. When Meg moved to Melbourne, we asked if she was interested in joining the Board, and she has since been a backbone of Women Up North and a staunch rep for First Nations Community and Refuge matters. Meg attends our

Board meetings via Zoom, if she is not up here visiting family. Thank you, Meg, for always being available and for your ongoing contribution.

WUNH is in partnership with numerous similar Organisations throughout the Northern Rivers and beyond. Having these partnerships means we are able to offer a wider service and increased programs to our Clients.

Jillian Knight-Smith, our hardworking CEO, has led her wonderful team again this year. They are an amazing group of women: each and every one of them goes the extra mile in the interests of our Clients and aims. A huge thanks to all of you.

WUNH is also fortunate to have the help of generous Volunteers and Students, who give of their time and have chosen to work with us as an extension of the WUNH team. To our Volunteers and all those who work quietly behind the scenes, we thank you sincerely. What you do makes a difference in our Clients' lives.

The Board is immeasurably grateful to the Organisations and individuals who have contributed practically and financially this year. Without your help, we would not be able to help as many Families as we have.

Our sincere thanks for their ongoing support also must go to our Northern NSW Alliance Partners. The Board looks forward to our continuing partnership.

WUNH is known throughout the sector for excellence in service. It has been a privilege to be Chair of such a professional organisation for the past 10 years.

I have been proud to work alongside such a dedicated team of women, including my fellow Board members, our wonderful CEO Jillian, all staff, Students and Volunteers. The team is skilled and dedicated to helping our Clients have a future free of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV).

We have come a long way in the last ten-and-a-half years, and I know WUNH will continue to make a difference in the coming years.

A huge thank you to all who are part of WUNH for your commitment and dedication to the very important work you do, making a difference to the lives of Families in need.

// A Message from the CEO



JILLIAN KNIGHT-SMITH
Chief Executive Officer,
Women Up North

As we look back on 2024 our dedicated team of Board, Staff, Volunteers, and Partners has worked tirelessly to address the unique challenges faced by Women in our Communities.

We are incredibly proud of the progress WUNH has made to help expand services and acknowledge that there is still much work and change needed. We remain committed to our mission: supporting Women, Young People and Families—no matter where they live—has the resources and supports to live a life free of violence and thrive.

2024 KEY MILESTONES IN DOMESTIC, FAMILY, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE (DFSV)

This year Australia declared a national state of emergency in response to gendered violence, and we witnessed the historic appointment of Michaela Cronin as the country's first Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Commissioner. In New South Wales, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of refuges and the introduction of groundbreaking laws addressing Coercive Control.

As we reflect on these milestones, we also honour the Women, Advocates, and Organizations that paved the way for the services WUNH, and our partners now provide. Their tireless efforts continue to inspire the work we do today in supporting Women, Children, and Young People affected by DFSV and homelessness.

A YEAR OF GROWTH AND CHANGE AT WUNH

2023-24 has been a year of growth and change for Women Up North. Sadly, this includes the pending retirement of our Chair, Louise Lancett, after 10 years of exceptional service. Louise's

expertise in Governance, her dedication to our Mission, and her mentorship have made a lasting impact on our Organisation. It has been a privilege to work alongside her, and we are deeply grateful for her guidance.

We also extend our thanks to our invaluable partners—from individuals and members to sister services, fellow Not for Profits, Trusts and Philanthropists, Large Corporations, Ministers and Government funders. Your support has enabled our charity to provide critical emergency responses, expand our trauma-informed work, increase outreach and our prevention and early intervention training and support in schools, community and the workforce.

OUR FOCUS ON SAFETY, EMPOWERMENT, AND SUSTAINABILITY

At WUNH, we remain focused on safety, empowerment, and sustainability. We are committed to ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of our Clients, Workers, and Participants shape the services we offer. We are excited and humbled to be able to share in this report a voice from one of the women we have supported, through her featured piece Jodie's story. We also hope you will join us to celebrate the work of emerging First Nations Artist Elana Hickling featured throughout this report. Please contact us on shs@wunh.org.au if you wish to discuss purchasing an original piece of work from her.

In 2024, we proudly established an Aboriginal Cultural Safety role, expanded our First Nations workforce, and continued to promote our constitutional commitment of minimum 50% First Nations members on our Board.



LOOKING AHEAD

As we look to the future, we remain focused on closing the gap for First Nations Women and families. We will continue to advocate for more direct services and innovative housing solutions for vulnerable Women, Children, and Young People. Additionally, we are committed to shining a light on the ongoing needs of marginalized groups, such as Women and Children from multicultural backgrounds.

We will continue to strengthen our partnerships across our sector, with Government, the Corporate sector, and Not-For-Profit organizations, and community stakeholders, working together to create a lasting, positive impact for those affected by DFSV.

ONE DEATH IS ONE TOO MANY...

The statistics remain sobering: one Woman is killed every 9 days by a current or former intimate partner, and last year saw an 11% rise in sexual violence, which is now at a 30-year high. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women are 33 times more likely to be hospitalized due to family violence. At Women Up North, we are unwavering in our commitment to be part of the solution and to support the urgent change needed.

Domestic violence is a serious problem which impacts many NSW families. In 2021-22 an estimated 1.5 per cent of Australian Women aged 18 years and over experienced violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months.

Who experiences violence in Australia?

Data recorded by the NSW Police in 2023 shows that 1 in 10 domestic assault offenders are young people, three quarters of offenders are men and 7 in 10 incidents of domestic assault results in legal action.



It is estimated that 1 in 4 women (27%), and 1 in 8 men (12%) in Australia experienced violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 15 years. (ABS Personal Safety Survey 2021-22).

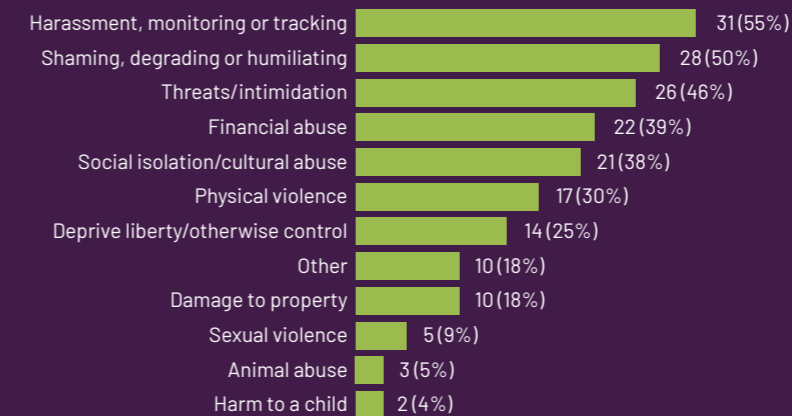
Justice responses to domestic violence

The Criminal Justice System can respond to domestic violence in various ways, including prosecuting offenders in court and issuing Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs)



Coercive Control

THE CHART BELOW SHOWS THE TYPES OF CONTROLLING BEHAVIOURS RECORDED BY NSW POLICE IN JULY AND AUGUST 2024.



Coercive Control Incidents can include one or more types of controlling behaviour. The most common behaviours recorded:

- Harassment, monitoring or tracking.
- Shaming, degrading humiliating.
- Threats or intimidation.
- Financial abuse.
- Social isolation or cultural abuse.

Cultural Safety Report

PAULA COGHILL

Cultural Safety Officer

It is my great pleasure to introduce myself as the 2023-2024 WUNH Cultural Safety Officer. I would like to highlight a few wonderful achievements of WUNH that I have had the honour to support and implement whilst establishing the role of Cultural Safety Officer.

WUNH's dedication of resources to the Cultural Safety position shows both commitment to and endorsement of what a culturally safe working place looks like.

I believe WUNH to be a culturally safe work environment for both Aboriginal Staff and Clients. Efforts to make WUNH a culturally safe place are embedded in its values and history and built upon the strong work of Aboriginal Workers and Board. WUNH is known to our Communities as a service that strives to be a safe and confidential service for Aboriginal Women and their Families.

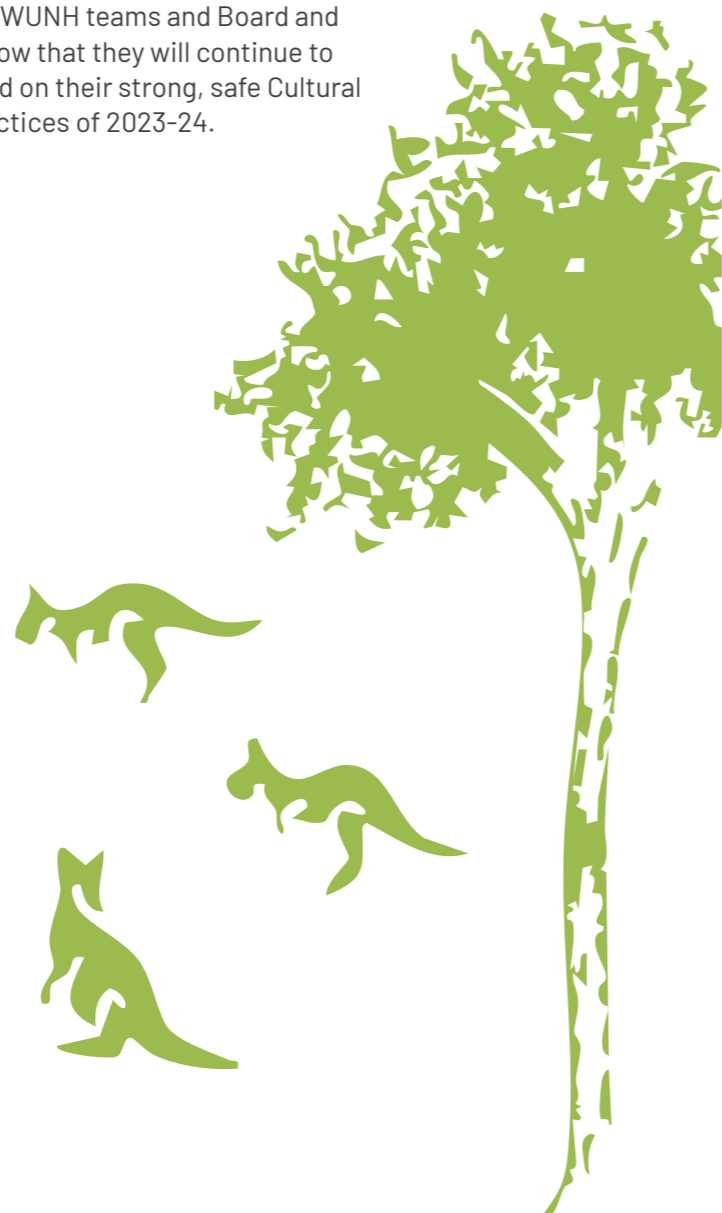
One of my tasks has been working with WUNH to finalise the Reconciliation Action Plan. I am excited to announce that our work on Women Up North's RAP has reached final draft and provisional approval.

As the Cultural Safety manager, I have appreciated the team and management creating space for the Cultural knowledge and understanding that we Aboriginal Workers bring to the table. It is good to know that workers and leaders trust and celebrate that we may need to do things differently, and have different ways of working, in order to best support and advocate for our Women and Families.

The highly enthusiastic participation by staff in Cross Cultural Safety training each year indicates to me that management and staff welcome a better understanding and strive for better outcomes for Aboriginal Women and Families.

I have also been fortunate to work with the Enhancing Workforce Responses to Sexual Violence Project training team to develop the Aboriginal content in this program and to deliver this out to the Aboriginal community Organisations and Agencies. This has been a long process, but an important project for the Aboriginal Communities. It is envisaged that delivery will be rolling out over the upcoming months.

It has been an honour to work with the WUNH teams and Board and I know that they will continue to build on their strong, safe Cultural Practices of 2023-24.



Jodie's Story

JODIE MATON

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the beautiful country on which we stand of the Widjabul, Wyabul Bundjalung Nation. I'd like to acknowledge the Elders, past, present and emerging.

My name is Jodie-lee Manton, I am a proud First Nations Worimi - Gamipingal woman from the northern foreshores of Port Stephens and was blessed to be raised on beautiful Bundjalung country.

In my Culture there is a saying, when you take an Aboriginal person from their country, their home, their land, you take with them the very soul, the very spirit that connects them to their ancestral lands.

I was forced to be raised off country. The mission/ reserve down home where my brothers and sisters were raised became too volatile to raise children. Volatile as in domestic violence as you walk out the door to the car, drugs and alcohol impacted our family members to the point where it was safer off the mish than it was on.

My whole life has revolved around some sort of violence, from my own dad to my blood brother's. Although I was sheltered from a lot of it, I still seen my fair share of it being the baby of 16 kids.

I was the protector of all the children that nobody cared about when the violence would start, I would grab the kids and either I would lock us all in my room and play loud music or take everyone to the park across the road from where we lived.

Unfortunately, living through what I did still didn't make me immune to going through it first-hand.

Last year brought the unthinkable along my path, the family violence that had been continuously swept under the rug over the years had caught up to me. Which left my two boys and I without a safe place to call ours and without anyone to call on for support. It was us 3 against the world. Until I found out about Women up North, gave them a desperate call and it was my little powerhouse Gem Crystal who answered the phone.... from then on it wasn't just the boys and I against the world anymore, we had Crystal to fight with us and for us.

Fight she did, she fought to get us out of non-appropriate emergency accommodation and into a local Children and Women's refuge where for the first time in 2 months we finally felt safe. After a couple of months of being in the refuge it all got a little too much for me and my mental health. It impacted me so violently that I tried to take my life last year, 8 days before my youngest sons' birthday. I wanted/ needed out of the hell that I had no choice of fighting and surviving through. I was thankful that this situation triggered Crystal to make calls to help support my mental health, I was referred on to Lives Lived Well where I met a great up and coming Psychologist in training who alongside Crystal changed my whole life and perspective on life.

Not long after I had received the best news, I had gotten all year. We were finally accepted for a transitional property! Finally! A place to call ours, a safe home, my first ever home that was ours (to an extent). Since putting our feet firmly on the ground and getting settled the boys and I have come leaps and bounds! Boys are in active counselling for their trauma and to learn how to deal with their diagnoses. As for me I now have a full-time job that I am loving and hopefully will be transitioning out of the transitional property and into a forever home before we know it. I see a strong, fierce female, mother, friend who walked through fire and back and is still trudging ahead to create change for her children and to break generational curses and cycles. I see a woman I've never seen before and for the first time in 32 years and I like her.

I have Women Up North Housing to thank. Without my powerhouse gem Crystal and the WUNH team I would not be here tonight sharing my story with you all.

So, in conclusion, I'd like to say thank you to WUNH who saved the boys and I, taught us a lifetime full of lessons that we will carry everywhere with us and thank you for the time you gave us. We will forever be grateful and thankful.

Women Domestic Violence Programs

MANDY ELLER

*Aboriginal Crisis
Accommodation Case Worker*

Bugalma Bihyn Women and Children's Refuge Report

I would like to acknowledge the Widjabul-Wyabul people of the Bundjalung Nation as the Traditional Owners and Custodian of the Country that Bugalma Bihyn and Women Up North reside upon. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This land was and always will be Aboriginal land.

My name is Mandy Eller. I am a proud Kamilaroi Woman from St. George in Southwestern QLD. I have been living on Bunjalung Country for many years and have been lucky enough to raise my children on this special country.

I have had the privilege over the last 16 months to be working at Bugalma Bihyn Aboriginal Women and Children's Refuge in the role of Aboriginal Crisis Accommodation Case Worker. This important role enables me to work directly with Aboriginal Women and Children affected by DFSV. I aim to assist Women and Children to achieve self-empowerment, independence and education whilst giving them an opportunity to begin to heal in a safe, Culturally appropriate environment.

It is an honour to walk alongside these courageous Women in their journey to healing and a life free from violence. I am continually inspired by the strength and tenacity of the Women who are coming to Bugalma Bihyn to keep themselves and their Jarjums safe. The team at Bugalma Bihyn strives to empower Women to have safe relationships. We achieve this by placing the client as the lead in decision making and case planning process and always working within a trauma-informed, strengths based and Culturally safe framework.

Bugalma Bihyn has a very exciting year ahead. We are expecting to undergo an extensive renovation in the first quarter of 2025. This renovation will enable the team at Bugalma Bihyn to better serve the needs of Clients and their children and to close the gap on domestic violence.

It has been inspiring working alongside such a strong, passionate group of women both at Bugalma Bihyn and WUNH. The team has a wealth of knowledge that they have shared with me every step of the way and I cannot wait to see what comes next.



The Red Inc Lismore team making a donation to WUNH Clients.

Brokerage Report 2023/24

BROOKE COTTEN

WUN spent just over \$158,000 in brokerage, servicing over 922 Clients in the last financial year. This valuable service has saved Women from evictions, assisted with holding deposits for new rental properties. It has enabled Women to relocate to safety after violence from their partners. Change locks, add security cameras to stay in their own homes. It has also given Women access to getting documents like birth certificates, licenses and police checks, which all assist in the rebuilding of Women's lives.

WUNH works with Wesley Mission to access escaping violence payments for our client. Whilst this amount of \$5,000 assists greatly, it often costs a lot more than that to rebuild after leaving DFSV. This is where the ability to assist with WUNH brokerage can really make a difference for our Clients.

WUNH has a small amount of funding for brokerage, but our main support comes from Partners, Sponsors and donations from Community Members that keep WUNH apart from the other services in our local area. The yearly Gala / Ball events held in partnership with challenger have been a godsend to assist in meeting the financial needs of our Clients. But these would not be a success without the support of the Lismore and surrounding Communities.

Alstonville Coles Christmas Appeal

BROOKE COTTEN

Christmas is traditionally a joyous time of the year, with gift giving and celebrations coming full steam ahead. After escaping from DFSV, Christmas can be a very overwhelming time for some of the families WUNH supports. This is why we cherish the relationship we have built with the Community that is Alstonville Coles.

2023 was the 8th year of WUNH partnering with Alstonville Coles to provide Christmas presents for the Clients and their Children. Thank you to the staff who put in so much effort in collecting the presents, and the Alstonville Community who have donated such quality items to the Women and Children who are rebuilding their lives.

WUNH looks forward to another successful Christmas appeal in collaboration with Alstonville Coles. We appreciate our partnership, especially at this time of year.

coles



Giving tree at Coles Alstonville.

Love Bites

KEANI BRYANT

Bundjalung Country Love Bites Committee
Coordinator

Love Bites is a Respectful Relationships Education Program delivered to young people throughout Lismore, Casino, Nimbin, Kyogle, Bonalbo, and Woodenbong. The primary prevention focus of Love Bites aligns strongly with The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children and NSW Sexual Violence Plan. The workshops aim to create a safe, collaborative space for young people to explore their rights and responsibilities in relationships, identify types of domestic/sexual violence, and develop their understanding of affirmative consent. Love Bites promotes the belief that young people can have healthy, violence-free relationships when equipped with the appropriate information and skills.

Bundjalung Country Love Bites Committee were proud recipients of a Run Against Violence (RAV) Grant in April 2024. This grant allowed us to host a free, two-day Love Bites Senior Facilitator Training at the Koori Mail. We worked closely with NAPCAN to plan and deliver the training to 22 participants, including Aboriginal Health Workers, Youth Workers, Health Promotions Workers, and WUNH staff. Our committee also won a \$9,600 grant from the Ingrained Foundation to assist with program delivery.



BUNDJALUNG
COUNTRY
NORTHERN
RIVERS
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COMMITTEE



FIND LOVE BITES ON



Empowering Self Defence 2024

CRYSTAL WHITNEY

One of WUNH's major new trauma-informed violence prevention programs for 2024 (Empowering Self Defence) was pitched at the annual NRCF Women's Giving Circle by program facilitator Crystal Whitney. WUNH was a successful finalist and allocated a \$10,000 grant.

The Empowering Self Defence program is a one-day

training which aims to teach basic physical self-defence, boundary setting, and emotional safety based on the 5 principles; Think, Yell, Run, Fight and Talk. Principles covered in the workshop include consent, boundary setting, assertiveness, intuition, situational awareness, communication, risk assessment, safety planning, healthy relationships, self-care and stress management.

Feedback from the first pilot that we ran indicated that participants increased their feelings of empowerment and keeping themselves safe by almost twofold.

After the first workshop, feelings of empowerment and individual safety increased from 56 to 86% and by the end of the second workshop from **60 to 92%**.

Even if the girls don't come out as Wonder Woman, they will feel safer, and more confident - and that actually means they are more safe.

It's not just touching the lives of participants, because we know that they are sharing what they are learning with their Daughters, Friends, Sisters, and Mothers.

We are removing barriers that can so often prevent Women from participating. So far, our intersections include older Women, Women with mobility issues, Women with different learning abilities, Mothers with Children and Culturally and Linguistically diverse Women.

The proceeds of this grant will go towards improving the resources and facilitating Empowering Self Defence Workshops on a quarterly basis in the region, to reach as many participants as possible and to have another facilitator trained within the next year.

Coercive Control Research Collaboration

DR SUSANNE LOHMANN PHD.

Dr Susanne Lohmann, PhD is a Clinical Psychologist and researcher who has completed her PhD with the University of Melbourne. Susanne's research investigates the trauma and mental health impacts of intimate partner violence, with a particular focus on coercive control and complex PTSD (CPTSD).

Back in 2021, Susanne entered a research agreement with WUNH to conduct a qualitative interview-based research project to explore the mental health impacts and mental health support needs of women who have been exposed to coercive control. This study was embedded in a community based participatory research approach, which is an approach that aims to enhance understanding and integrate knowledge with action to improve the wellbeing of those most affected (Goodman et al., 2018). In line with these principles, WUNH provided vital guidance and support during the recruitment and interview process, which made it possible for 16 women with lived experience to volunteer to participate in this important research project.

The first paper based on this research project titled "It's Like You're a Living Hostage, and It Never Ends": A Qualitative Examination of the Trauma and Mental Health Impacts of Coercive Control (Lohmann et al., 2024), was recently published in Psychology of Women Quarterly (<https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843241269941>), a peer-reviewed international academic journal. The paper addressed two research questions: (1) How do women describe their experiences of

coercive control and (2) How do women describe the impact of coercive control exposure on their mental health? Findings identified entrapment and insidiousness (characterised by subtlety, intangibility, and gradual worsening), as underlying dimensions of coercive control that were central to the trauma and mental health reactions of the women who participated in the study. These women also described a range of trauma and mental health reactions (e.g., anxiety, hypervigilance, emotional dysregulation, negative self-concept, and disturbances with trust and relationships).

The findings have important implications for research and practice, highlighting the pressing need for the provision of trauma and coercive control-informed, and integrated psychosocial care by frontline services, health care providers, and mental health professionals who support Women who have been exposed to coercive control.

A second paper using data from the same interviews, which will specifically focus on the support needs of Women who have experienced coercive control, is presently in preparation for publication.

For questions or further information about Susanne's work please contact her by emailing susanne@dynamicchangepsychology.com or by calling 0474 473 052.



Enhancing Workforce Responses to Sexual Violence

ELENA MANNING

Learning and Development Manager; Project Manager; Subject Matter Expert; Lead Trainer; Training Writer

Enhancing Workforce Responses to Sexual Violence Project (EWRSV), is funded by the Department of Communities and Justice under the NSW Sexual Violence Fund commenced in 2023. The project is funded in partnership with the Family Support Network in Lismore. The project is managed by a Project Steering Group, comprising both Organisations and the Project Manager.

The overall objective of the DCJ NSW Plan and Fund is to address the epidemic of male violence against Women and sexual violence.

The EWRSV project is being implemented by a mix of WUNH staff and contractors via a matrix of workers- the training team, project support team, online project team and an Aboriginal Training Team. These teams are effectively working together to deliver this complex project on time and within available resources.

The project is primarily focussed on development and delivery of bespoke training to workers and Organisations providing services in the Northern NSW region.

The training has been designed to deliver three learning outcomes:

- 1 Increased understanding of the gendered nature of violence against Women and Children
- 2 Increased knowledge of how to respond appropriately to disclosures of sexual violence
- 3 The call to action: Has the participant identified actions they can take to contribute to ending gendered violence.

This training material acknowledges the role of colonisation. It uses a feminist, human rights, survivor-voiced, gendered, trauma-informed, truth-telling approach and involves challenging myths about sexual violence which contribute to lack of support and appropriate response. It places full accountability on perpetrators and encourages individual and community action to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual violence.

To date, the team has organised **30** face-to-face training sessions, **22** of which have already been delivered. **342** community sector workers have been trained to date, in seven locations across the region (Lismore, Ballina, Byron Bay, Tweed Heads, Casino, Kyogle, Grafton).

The training evaluations have been very positive with the Learning Outcomes being met in **96-100%** of responses.

99% of respondents noted that they felt empowered to take some action to help eliminate violence against women.

100% of respondents were able to self-manage any distress they may have felt in the session.

157 participants (68%) rated the training as excellent, and **61** (27%) as good.

Given the challenging, potentially traumatising subject matter and truth-telling training approach, these results are remarkable and pleasing.

The next phase of face-to-face training is to focus on the general workforce, and complete development of an online version of the face-to-face training which is due to be operational by January 2025.

Milestones are being met on time and within resources. It has been a great honour to work with our highly skilled and committed team to bring this program to the Northern Rivers.



Tech Abuse

Wome Up North provide safety phones to Clients through the WESNET esafety program. We advise Clients to ensure their phones and devices are protected and staff attend training for workers on Tech abuse.

What is tech abuse?

Technology-facilitated abuse in domestic violence is on the rise around the world, as increased reliance on digital devices and online platforms provides perpetrators with more opportunities to exploit technology to control and harm their victims.

Tech abuse is an extension of coercion and harassment, and has serious potential consequences for victims of domestic and family violence who need to be safe from their perpetrators.

Messaging and Social Media

Perpetrators may use digital communication tools, such as text messages, emails, or social media, to send threatening or harassing messages. They might use these platforms to humiliate, degrade, or shame their victims publicly.

They may create fake social media profiles to impersonate the victim or spread false information.

Mobile phones and GPS Tracking

Perpetrators may demand the PIN codes for mobile phones to scrutinise messages and email, and to enable GPS location-tracking features. They may install spyware or other apps on the victim's phone or laptop to monitor and track the victim's online activities, location, and communications. Tiny GPS tracking devices intended to attach to a keychain have been repurposed to track a victim's every move. These devices are the size of a coin and can be easily hidden in a vehicle or a pram, a child's toy, or a handbag. Victims must be aware and vigilant of this danger.

Online and Identity Fraud

Perpetrators may demand to be given access to online bank accounts in order to control the victim's finances or commit identity fraud. They may use the victim's online shopping accounts for financial advantage or take out loans in the victim's name.

Home Networks and IOT Devices

Home networks provide unique opportunities for perpetrators to gain or retain access to home devices like security cameras, baby monitors, and other, "Internet of Things (IOT)" devices that are in or outside the home. Perpetrators may be able to control these devices remotely. This could include popular home voice assistant devices: a perpetrator with the know-how can "drop-in", on these devices remotely and listen to the conversation in the room.

Isolation and Gaslighting

Perpetrators may attempt to isolate their victims from friends and family by controlling their access to communication tools. They might restrict or monitor their internet and phone usage, preventing them from seeking help or support. Perpetrators may use technology to distort reality and manipulate their victim's perception of events. They may edit or fabricate digital evidence, making the victim doubt their own memory and sanity.

An Insidious Threat to Victims

Tech abuse enables perpetrators to exert control and intimidation in ways that are often difficult to detect, prove or stop. Combating this threat requires awareness, education, legal measures and support systems to protect and empower victims.

Resources

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is an independent statutory office supported by the Australian Communications and Media Authority. The eSafety website offers a wide range of information and support for women experiencing tech abuse that intersects with domestic violence: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence>

// Domestic Violence Response Enhancement Program

JENNY WARRINGTON

The Domestic Violence Response Enhancement Program (DVRE) is an after-hours domestic violence response program funded by the NSW Specialist Homelessness services program stream of the Department of Community and Justice (DCJ).

Responses included after-hours support to Clients, support to the refuge residents and after-hours emergency work. The support includes

the provision of emergency accommodation, transport, food and personal care products.

Being part of this program allows WUNH to keep our community safe, by breaking down the isolation of domestic and family violence and enabling at-risk Women and Children to feel safe and supported.

// Student and volunteer program

KEANI BRYANT
Field Educator

WUNH is deeply grateful for the support and hard work of our Students and Volunteers. Students are provided with diverse opportunities to translate their theoretical knowledge into tangible skills. Students learn how to identify domestic, sexual, and family violence, assess risk, and conduct strengths-based safety planning.

WUNH hosted Arts Therapy student Christina Howie in 2024. Christina enhanced the wellbeing of Clients and staff through provision of supervised Arts Therapy sessions.

We also hosted 3rd year Social Work student Lucy Coleman, in partnership with the University Centre for Rural Health. Lucy has supported the Case Management team, assisted with Love Bites program delivery, and represented Women Up North via Reclaim The Night Collective.



// A student experience

LUCY COLEMAN

As a student finalising my Social Work degree, Women Up North has been one of my first peeks into what a social work career can look like. After years of studying the academic theory from behind a screen at University - which, truth be told, never inspired me much - I have found great inspiration and passion for social work through working hands-on with the Women Up North team. To begin learning how to support and empower Women from diverse backgrounds and at differing stages of their journey standing up to DFSV has been an truly enriching and constructive experience.

I was welcomed by a team who were more than happy to share their knowledge with me and support me to find my feet, but also gave me agency and extended trust to me which provided me the space to step-up, get involved and learn in my own way.

I am grateful to have had a formative experience working within an organisation holding on to its grass-roots Values and going above and beyond to service its community with integrity. I have had a snapshot into how flexible and creative Organisations in rural areas have to be and have been continually struck by the breadth of knowledge and community connections the workers have to offer their Clients.

It's particularly special to me to see how Women Up North not only works with Victim-Survivors firsthand, but also does community outreach programs like Love Bites to tackle DFSV at the source. This holistic, trauma-informed approach is a learning and method of working I intend to carry with me.

// SHS Program

AMARA BARTLETT

WUNH provide strengths based, person centred and trauma informed support services and case management to our clients in the Northern Rivers region with a wraparound case management approach. Alongside experiencing DFSV, clients experience many additional barriers identifying as First Nations, young mums, LGBTQI+, women with a multicultural background and or having mixed or different abilities.

We support our clients with:

- » Access to financial assistance through Escaping Violence Payment and Victims Services.
- » Social housing products such as the 'Rent Start - Start Safely' program as well as bond loans. We also support families to access financial assistance to purchase basic household items.

- » Advocacy for mothers and children with legal matters and referrals to government services and benefits.
- » Programs such as Rize Up, Friends With Dignity and Baby Give Back who provide home set up and items for women and their children escaping DV as well as Momentum, who support women and children in affordable, transitional housing.

It is such an honour to work alongside women and young people, resourcing them to achieve their goal and the team at WUNH who strive to improve their practices continuously and embed culturally respectful and trauma informed service delivery across the organisation.

// Summary: Demographic Report for Women's Housing Scheme

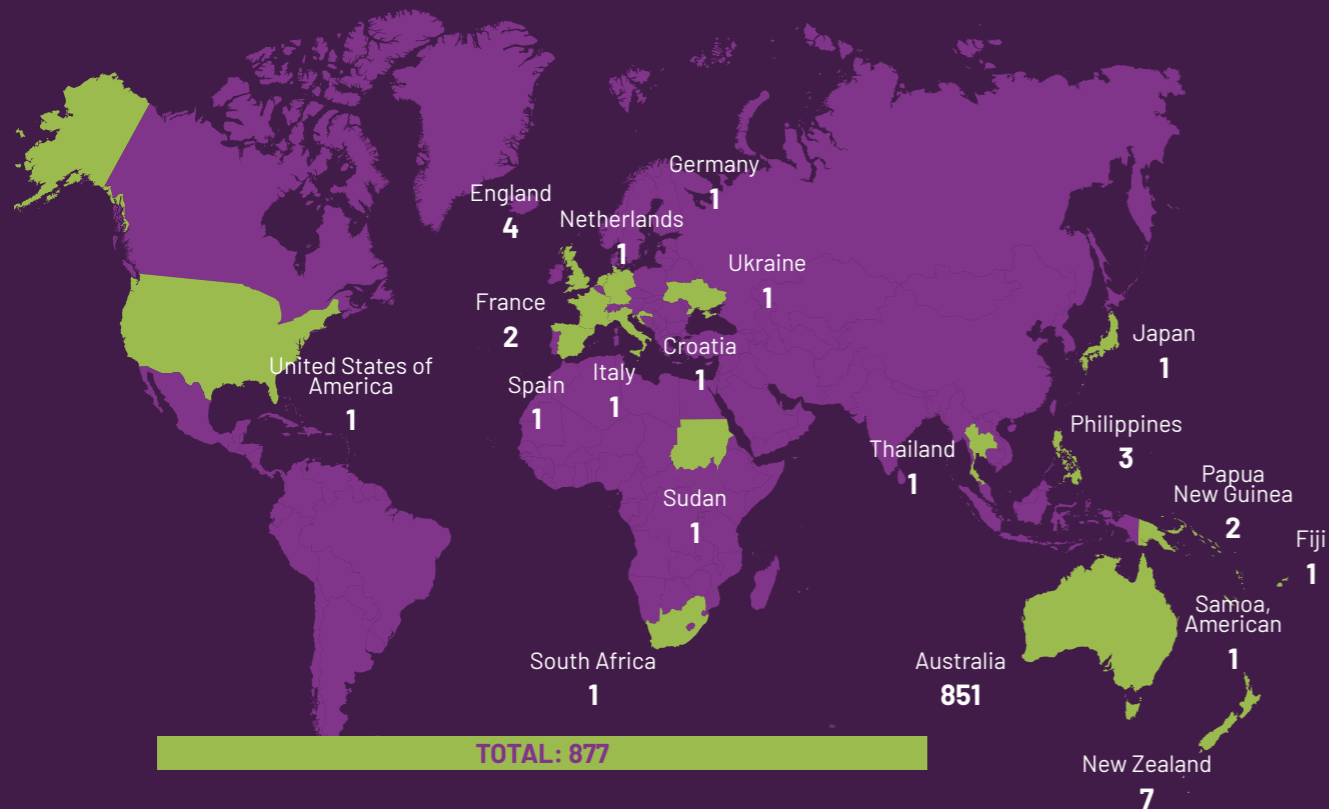
Period 01/07/2023 to 30/06/2024

Key Information

Total distinct persons having recorded contact	917
Total recorded contacts made	21,638
Number of these persons with an open plan of three months during report period *	643
Total payments made	\$158,590.21
Total recorded time working with these persons	13,478 hr 23 min

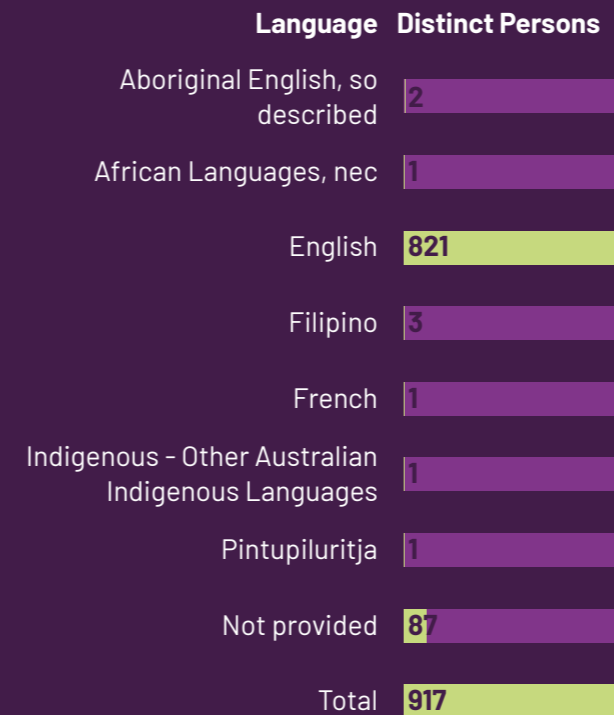
*Records number of Clients with a plan open during the reporting period. If the same client has more than one plan with this workgroup it is still only counted as 1.

Country of Birth by Distinct Persons



*Map does not include not provided details of 40 additional people

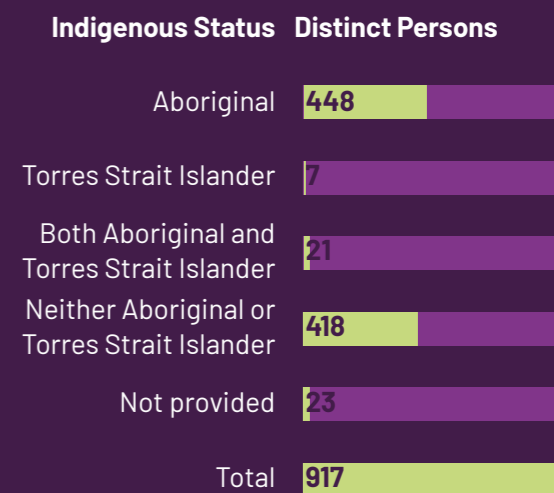
Language spoken at home



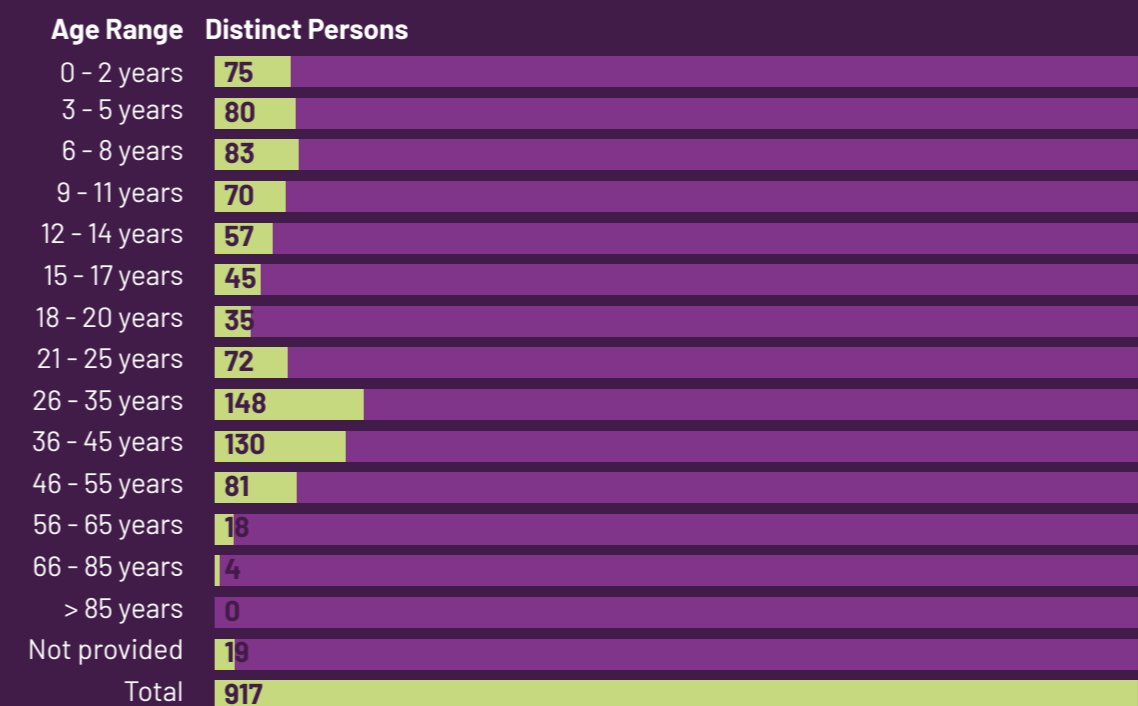
Gender by Distinct Persons



Indigenous Status by Distinct Persons



Age Range by Distinct Persons



Treasurer's Report

MARG HUGHES



Women Up North Housing provides vital services to meet the needs of Women, Children and Young People who experience domestic and family or sexual violence.

Over the last few years, our programs have grown to include workforce and community sexual violence education and training and an increase in our partnerships to facilitate outreach and support to more Remote Communities. To fund this work, we have diversified our income with additional contracts, an annual fundraising gala, and donations from Philanthropic Organisations

and individual contributions. As evidenced by this year's financial statements, Women up North is in a stable and healthy financial position. However, demand for our services continues to outstrip Government funding and we rely on the ongoing support of the broader community. If you would like to learn more about Women Up North and make a contribution, please visit www.wunh.org.au

Finance report

Women Up North Housing Full Audited Financial Statements for the 2023-24 financial year are tabled at the Women Up North Annual General Meeting December 10, 2024, and shared on the ACNC website.

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
Revenue	3	1,538,113	1,326,600
Employee expenses		(818,083)	(639,804)
Other expenses	4	(795,209)	(582,482)
Profit before income tax		(75,181)	104,313
Income tax expense		—	—
Total comprehensive income for the year		(75,181)	104,313

Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	2,966,389	3,222,594
Trade and other receivables	6	6,000	—
Other assets	8	20,255	4,126
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		2,992,644	3,226,720
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	7	61,450	—
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		61,450	—
TOTAL ASSETS		3,054,094	3,226,720
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	9	48,236	149,430
Employee benefits	11	109,677	88,369
Contract liabilities	10	1,901,175	1,908,054
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		2,059,087	2,145,853
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Employee benefits	11	3,920	14,600
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		3,920	14,599
TOTAL LIABILITIES		2,063,007	2,160,452
NET ASSETS		991,087	1,066,268
EQUITY			
Retained earnings		991,087	1,066,268
TOTAL EQUITY		991,087	1,066,268

// Donors and Partners

Your generous donation helps us provide many enriching, rewarding and supportive programs and groups to support Women and their Families.

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Little Friends Scholarships
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 Northern NSW SHS Alliance
 Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre
 NSW University Rural Centre Lismore
 Reclaim the Night Collective members
 Rise Up Baby Give Back
 Safety Acton Meeting members
 SHS partners Momentum, Clarence Domestic Violence Services, Guregheim, Northern Rivers Community Gateway.
 TAFE Northern NSW

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Multicultural NSW
 Northern Rivers Secondary Schools



Women Up North