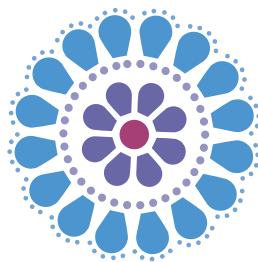
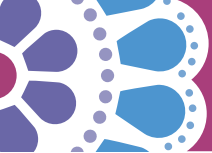


**WestCASA**

Western Region Centre Against Sexual Assault

Annual Report  
2022-2023



# WestCASA

## WestCASA Annual Report 2022-23

Western Region Centre Against Sexual Assault  
(ABN 29 351 352 921)

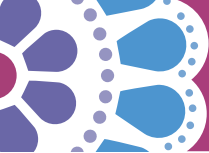
Wyndham MDC,  
Level 2, 236 Hoppers Lane, Werribee  
Victoria 3030

(03) 9216 0411 (Admin)  
(03) 9216 0444 (Counselling)

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## Natasha Smith WestCASA Board Chair

Natasha Smith is a not-for-profit sector leader and senior mental health clinician who underpins her work with strong values of intersectional feminism, integrity, accountability, justice, and compassion. She is currently the Operations Manager of the headspace's nation-wide Early Career Program and brings to the WestCASA Board over 12-years of combined experience in board directorship, clinical governance and leadership, operations management, program implementation and service provision. She is passionate about developing strong frameworks that shape and maintain positive organisational culture and enhancing the engagement and sustainability of not-for-profit workforces.

Natasha is a strong advocate for lived and living experience leadership and participation in service design, delivery and governance. She has served on multiple clinical governance and management committees for LGBTIQ+ community led organisations such as Switchboard Victoria and LGBTIQ+ Health Australia and has led diversity and inclusion action plans within mainstream organisations to improve responsiveness to queer, transgender and gender diverse young people seeking mental health and medical care. She was previously an active member of Q-West, a consortium of community and health services who worked collectively to advocate for and improve the LGBTIQ+ inclusion in health and wellbeing services in Melbourne's western region.

As a Youth Mental Health Clinician/Psychologist, Natasha worked extensively with young people in Melbourne's west and is deeply passionate about ensuring local communities receive high quality and accessible services. She looks forward to continuing to bring to WestCASA's Board her governance, not-for-profit sector and local community knowledge.



## Kathryn Culmsee WestCASA Board Secretary

My interest in social justice, feminist leanings and drive to see the elimination of sexual violence in society makes me passionate about WestCASA's success. I am an accomplished company secretary with diverse experience in corporate governance and have been a lawyer for more than 20 years. I am skilled in governance and have a Graduate Diploma in Corporate Governance from the Governance Institute of Australia and am a graduate of the Company Directors Course at the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Being a member of the WestCASA Board for the past six years has been an incredibly rewarding experience. I have learned a lot from this dedicated group of women, with differing backgrounds and experience, who are working together to make the world a better place, free from the fear of sexual violence and where victim/ survivors of sexual assault are treated with care and respect to recover and heal.

In addition to the Board Secretary role, I am currently involved with the following WestCASA subcommittees:

- Board recruitment; and
- Policy and Governance.

I look forward to the continued growth of WestCASA and the increasing diversity of services we deliver to make the world a safer place.

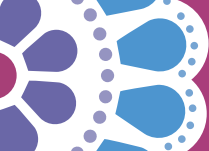
*Bachelor of Laws,  
University of Western  
Australia 2001*

*Bachelor of Science  
(Honours), University  
of Western Australia  
1999*

*Graduate – Australian  
Institute of Company  
Directors 2013*

*Diploma of  
Applied Corporate  
Governance 2015*

*Admitted as Barrister  
and Solicitor of the  
Supreme Court of  
Western Australia  
2002*



**Katie James**  
WestCASA Board Treasurer

Katie has built her skill base to date within major multinational organisations. Her roles have contributed to the strong performance of her employers, at the same time working hard to manage her working relationships and promoting a Safe for Life mindset and managing and promoting best practice and change within organisations.

As a qualified Forensic Chartered Accountant, Katie's commercial skills are based on a strong sense of integrity, financial controlling and analysis skills, governance, risk management, forecasting and supplier management. She has extensive experience developing and reporting, communicating health and safety outcomes, operational performance, financial results and forecasts. This is coupled with an extensive ERP knowledge, including SAP, Ellipse & Maximo.

With a down to earth, yet professional nature, Katie can lead, negotiate and promote change at all levels of the organisation. Katie is a hard working, enthusiastic and motivated individual, who thrives on challenges. She is a high achiever, recognised for a common sense approach and 'can do' attitude.

Katie looks forward to continuing to provide strong fiscal oversight and guidance to the WestCASA Board and the organisation as a whole, as it grows from strength to strength in coming months.



**Helen Barnes**  
WestCASA Board Member  
Policy & Risk Subcommittee Member

Being a member of the WestCASA board for the past nine years has been a rewarding experience. Joining a group of dynamic and passionate women committing their time to such an invaluable cause, I would describe as nothing less than heartening.

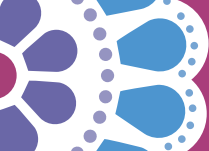
A particular inspiration is the women who make up WestCASA. The relentless drive, skill and compassion in making a difference for many vulnerable members of society is so evident within this organisation. Through rapid growth and change, caused by internal and external influences, WestCASA has weathered the storms with both tenacity and open-mindedness.

My personal values strongly resonate with the values of WestCASA – promoting a feminist environment where equality is the norm and living in a world free from violence. For me, joining WestCASA as a board member allows me to contribute to this mission.

Change and Program Management is my profession, I bring to the board skills within this discipline. Throughout my tenure, I have been involved in various subcommittees: Change Management for the transition to the MDC, board recruitment during 2019 and 2020 and currently the Policy and Governance subcommittee.

I look forward with anticipation to helping shape the future of WestCASA as we collaboratively move towards making the world a better place.





# WestCASA Board of Governance



**Dr Skye Kinder**  
WestCASA Board Member

Dr Skye Kinder is a passionate advocate for marginalised patients and their communities, particularly women. In addition to her clinical work as a doctor in the field of mental health, she is a prolific writer and award-winning speaker and health commentator. Dr Kinder seeks to address health inequality through extensive volunteerism, charity work and public advocacy efforts.

Dr Kinder was recognised as 2017 VIC Junior Doctor of the Year and finalist for Australia and New Zealand Junior Doctor of the Year. She was later named 2019 Young Victorian of the Year and 2019 VIC Young Australian of the Year. Dr Kinder has been featured on the Australian Financial Review 100 Women of Influence list and is a Forbes 30 Under 30 honouree. She was recently inducted onto the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.



**Kate Raseta**  
WestCASA Board Member

I'm a program manager in youth mental health with extensive experience working with and leading teams in cross cultural settings in health, gender and media. My current role is focused on enhancing mental health services for culturally and racially marginalised young people, work that I'm passionate about because I want to see a health system that provides safe, culturally response care to all who need it.

Before working in health I had a long career at the ABC and in international development, including working on the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, the Australian aid program's decade-long program to increase gender equality in the Pacific region. I joined the WestCASA Board in 2021 to support a community organisation that's guided by intersectional feminist principles. The team at WestCASA do such important work to support people whose lives have been affected by sexual violence and I feel honoured to contribute to these efforts through my membership on the board.



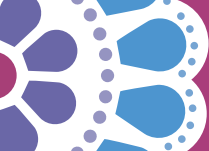
**Cath Williams**  
WestCASA Board Member

Cath has been the Chief Operations Officer for the Australian Community Support Organization (ACSO) for over 5 years. She oversees 450 employees across Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland working across the drug and alcohol, mental health, disability and justice sectors and systems.

Prior to working with ACSO she had over 17 years' experience in federal and state government health departments, has managed a wide range of service design, implementation and delivery, policy development and significant commissioning of services.

Her driving passion is to create better pathways and integration across services to enhance holistic wrap around support for disadvantaged populations and an absolute commitment to creating opportunities for people to overcome adversity and thrive. She has huge admiration for the work WestCASA does and both a personal and professional understanding of impact of sexual violence.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism), a Graduate Certificate in Public Relations and a Graduate Diploma in Management. She has also completed an Executive Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership at the renowned Duke University in 2019 and is currently completing a Master of Leadership in Human Services.



**Loza Tseguye Ruga**  
WestCASA Board Member

Loza is an Ethiopian National and lawyer by profession, human-rights advocate who has worked to transform her society and nation with a focus on vulnerable communities for the past 10 years. She has established a number of organizations such as the Haramaya University Disabled Student Association, the Ethiopian wing Girls Guide Association (EGG) and Ethiopian Law Society for Development (ELSD). A few years ago, she was the Project Coordinator for Ethiopian Women Scholars Support Program implemented in partnership with SOAS, the University of London and Setaweet Movement. The first annual All-Women in Ethiopian Academia Conference (AWEAC) in November 2019 and research followed by presentation to the case study to reform the Ethiopian Criminal Procedure Code were her key achievements, among others.

She started living in Melbourne, Australia in January 2020. Following the complex impact of COVID-19, she volunteered and researched its unprecedented effect on CALD women at Africause in September 2020. Currently, in her capacity and her obvious passion in serving women and girls, Loza has started to lead new research on the impact of migration in the context of professional women in Europe and Australia.

In 2012, she graduated from the Haramaya University (LL.B) focused on International Law. In addition, she has studied Sustainable Development and Human Right Law, a short-term post-graduate course at University of Antwerp/ Belgium. Loza was selected as one of the fellows for 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship-the flagship of President Obama and attended Civic Leadership at University Illinois/ Urbana-Champaign.



**Mohana Mahadevan**  
WestCASA Board Member

Mohana Mahadevan is a migrant from Singapore. She came to Australia in 2007. She is a proud queer woman of Ceylonese Tamil heritage and an advocate for equality and equity specifically for people of colour in the workplace.

Mohana is a social worker by profession and has worked in the industry in various sectors (asylum seekers/refugees; child and family services; family violence, youth) over the last 10 years. In recent years, she has mainly been in program development and management of family violence portfolios and teams. She is passionate advocate for diversity and inclusion. She believes that inclusion in all forms starts at a governance level. It should always be considered and recognised as a strength to good decision-making processes and sustainable relationships.

Mohana has been a board member at WestCASA for five years.

# Chair's Report

Natasha Smith and Skye Kinder

It has been a pleasure for us to support the WestCASA Board, leadership and staff as we collectively shepherded the organisation into a new chapter.

This year, the board and leadership set WestCASA's new three year strategic plan, defining our vision for WestCASA's future and building upon an astonishing history 38-year history. Through this process we gave particular attention to our core business: the ongoing delivery of WestCASA's gold-standard clinical services. We discussed ways to better measure our impact and to ensure that we continue to centre the voices of victim-survivors in our work, now and always.

Through this process we also considered the diverse needs of the rapidly growing communities of Melbourne's West, restating our commitment to cultural responsiveness. We reflected on the impacts of global issues like climate change, economic instability, social media, and the continued consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the rates and nature of sexual assault and family violence.

We would like to publicly thank the strategy committee members, both board members and staff, who contributed to the development of our strategic plan. We feel proud of our new strategy and our role in the stewardship of this incredible organisation through its implementation.

It also continues to be a privilege to witness the wonderful work of the WestCASA staff as they begin to operationalise our shared vision. Each staff member plays an essential role towards WestCASA's mission to support and advocate for survivors of sexual assault and family violence and educate the community to reduce the impact of this trauma. The board would like to thank WestCASA's staff for the unwavering commitment, skill and compassion that they bring their work.

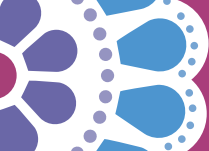
This year we sadly said goodbye to our CEO, Elisa Buggy, who has taken up another leadership role in the sector. During her tenure, Elisa implemented many important operational changes that have laid the foundations for WestCASA to achieve its new strategic vision. Elisa was instrumental in maturing the organisation's operations structure and inspiring a culture of courageous leadership and innovation. Her passion, clear-eye dedication to justice, and humour will be missed by Board and staff alike. The board thanks Elisa for her contribution to WestCASA and wishes her the best with her next venture.

We would like extend our gratitude to our fellow members of the Board of Governance. We are honoured work with such an incredible group of women who bring a rich perspectives, and passion for this work. Thank you to all the board members who have voluntarily contributed many hours of your time and energy to WestCASA throughout this year.

Finally, we want to thank the victim-survivors who have entrusted WestCASA with their care, recovery and growth. We are committed to hearing your voices and through that, improving the access and quality of the support and advocacy that WestCASA can provide.

We look forward to an exciting 23/24 financial year where we will welcome our new CEO and continue to build on the rich history and wisdom of WestCASA.





# A Message from the Chief Executive

Elisa Buggy

The 2022-2023 financial year was one of unparalleled growth and improvement at WestCASA. In our 38 year history, WestCASA has never had more of an important role in supporting survivors of sexual assault through trauma informed counselling and advocacy services. WestCASA continues our important mission to support and advocate for victim/survivors of sexual assault and family violence and educate the community to reduce the impact of ensuing trauma.



It gives me great pleasure to deliver the 2022-23 WestCASA Annual Report.

Melbourne's western suburbs represent one of the fastest growing, most culturally and linguistically diverse communities in both Victoria and Australia as a whole, with some of the highest levels of demand for sexual assault trauma support in the state.

More than 1220 new clients sought access to sexual assault counselling at the Western Region Centre Against Sexual Assault (WestCASA) last financial year, representing strong demand for specialist support across the community. Despite our limited resources, WestCASA was able to support 360 new clients access specialised sexual assault counselling, with hundreds more across our catchment area set to start in the future while supported through other measures.

Survivors of recent sexual assault have also been supported by our Crisis Care Unit through in-person advocacy and counselling during the reporting process and forensic examination, to ensure they are informed of their rights and options after the event.

In addition, through WestCASA's partnership with the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety, 475 women and gender diverse people were referred to WestCASA for trauma informed therapy and advocacy at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, with 172 people undergoing counselling.

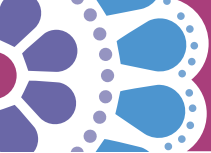
We were excited and honoured to be able to deliver this service to a small group from within the men's prisons as well. In addition to the mid to long term counselling we provide to people who are incarcerated, (the majority of whom are on remand), WestCASA also provides specialist trauma counselling and advocacy services including pre and post release support, group programs, staff training and a 'wrap around' support for each individual client.

WestCASA has also delivered community education training sessions to a wide range of organisations this year, including the Vietnamese Women's Association, Victoria University, Orygen Youth Services, Western Health, and local football clubs in our catchment, among others.

Education sessions have focused on issues from respectful relationships and managing and responding to the disclosure of sexual assault, to supporting policy development and procedures to support organisations to continue this focus ongoing.

Continued overleaf...





Prevention education has had profound success in reducing the stigma around this particularly complex trauma and empowering people in the community to support survivors in their recovery from sexual assault.

It has indeed been a busy year for WestCASA, and the opportunity 'post-COVID' to strengthen our partnerships within the MDC and the broader community has proven invaluable in deepening the essential services and support we provide to people who seek our assistance.

I would sincerely like to thank the members of our Board of Governance, our staff who have worked tirelessly to support our clients, our funding partners including Family Safety Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety, as well as a range of individual and organisational donors, as well as all of our partners at the Wyndham MDC and members of the community for supporting our services.

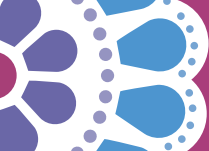
And most of all I would like to thank the people we have supported, for their strength, their patience, and their quiet tenacity. It has been an honour to walk alongside you. Lastly, as this will be my last annual report, I would like to thank you all for my time as CEO of WestCASA and I know this organisation has a brilliant future, as do the people within it.

With deepest respect,

Elisa Buggy  
*Outgoing Chief Executive Officer*

We thank outgoing WestCASA CEO Elisa Buggy  
for her incredible service since 2021.





## A year in review: Operations

Karen Woolford – Head of Operations



In the complex operational environment of WestCASA, it has been an utmost pleasure to support so many steadfast individuals across community counselling, Specialised Trauma Support and Counselling in correctional facilities, education and training and the Crisis Care Unit at Sunshine Hospital.

With the refinement of WestCASA's key Operational capabilities completed this financial year, we have laid the foundations for growth of key client services in coming years in a way which respects almost four decades of service to our community to date. The potential of this growth at WestCASA will mean more clients being supported in our core specialist

sexual assault trauma counselling services, and the ongoing provision of specialist trauma therapy service for women and transgender folk in the Justice System – specifically the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, (the only program of its kind in the state), more convenience and choice for clients presenting for Crisis Care sexual assault support and a broader reach of our trauma informed education and training services.

It is my pleasure to report on the successes and challenges overcome in the Operations space at WestCASA in the 2022-23 financial year as we look forward to more achievements in the years ahead.

### Community Counselling

The 2022-23 year was a year of incredible growth in WestCASA Community Counselling. We were able to onboard six new Counsellor Advocates working in face to face counselling at the Werribee MDC, as well as our outreach locations at Footscray and Melton with crisis support provided at Sunshine Hospital's Crisis Care Unit.

More than 1220 new clients sought access to sexual assault counselling at WestCASA last financial year, representing the strong demand for specialist support across our community.

### Specialised Therapeutic Trauma Counselling in the Justice Department

WestCASA continues to provide women and gender diverse people at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC), the majority of whom are on remand, specialist trauma informed therapy and advocacy, including pre and post release support, group programs, staff training and a 'wrap around' support for each individual client.

We were also grateful to recruit one Counsellor Advocate to the team supporting our work in the justice system.





## Dame Phyllis Frost Centre – Specialist Trauma Service

In the 2022-23 financial year, through WestCASA's partnership with the Justice Department, 475 women and gender diverse people were referred for trauma informed therapy and advocacy at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, with 172 people undergoing counselling. With a high number of women and gender diverse people being on remand referring to our service (65%) many were not able to be provided with an ongoing therapeutic service, however were supported through a brief intervention with a single session, pre-release support and advocacy, and also some brief post-release connection to help support their transition back into the community.

WestCASA has provided an outreach sexual assault counselling service to women in the DPFC since 2006.

In 2016, WestCASA expanded its service to women and gender diverse people in prison by broadening the eligibility criteria for counselling. Now WestCASA provides support to those who have experienced any form of trauma including family violence at DPFC.

This Specialist Trauma Service (STS) was made possible due to increased funding from the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), following recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Most women and gender diverse people in prison have experienced some form of family violence throughout their lives, usually from multiple perpetrators over a prolonged period of time.

For those who have been revictimized through patriarchal violence throughout their lives, learning to stay safe and maintain an instinctual survival mode can become 'the norm'. This is a common theme in the therapeutic work with the STS, and many clients find themselves in prison due to survival means. Some clients have even stated in the work that prison, unfortunately, is the safest place for them to be, which continues to highlight the ongoing gaps of service support, and in particular safe housing, for many women and gender diverse people facing the ongoing threat of serious FV. Many of the people the STS support in DPFC will have also experienced sexual violence within the context of family violence, whether it be in childhood, adulthood or both, and it is usually the latter. Importantly, the Australian Government has started to acknowledge that there are often experiences of underlying trauma for women and gender diverse people in prison.







## Specialised Trauma Support and Counselling in other correctional facilities

WestCASA also delivered the STS to a small group from within the men's prisons in the 2022-23 financial year. Initially this support came from a collaborative relationship with the Beyond Brick and Bars program supporting trans and gender non-confirming folk in all Victorian prisons. This service provides advocacy and case management for individuals experiencing higher risks of violence and discrimination within both society and the prison system, and many of the people they support have complex histories of trauma and violence. The team at Beyond Bricks and Bars reached out to the STS to ask if we had the capacity to support some of the trans women within the men's prison system, and this was seen as an opportunity to contribute to the support and recovery of those who have been most harmed within our communities.

Since this service began, we have also been asked to include cisgendered men in providing a trauma therapy service and we have been able to pick up two cisgendered men for some remote work. While we do not receive the funding to branch out completely into the men's system, we have been able to hold a very small caseload of clients who we are working with remotely in their trauma recovery. The feedback from both clients and staff in the men's system clearly highlights a significant gap in trauma informed counselling opportunities for all people incarcerated within the men's system. The following feedback from some staff in different men's prisons has been provided to the Justice Area Lead throughout the course of the year:



*"There's very little support for the fellas I support with mental health and these blokes aren't gonna tell the psych nurse about their trauma in a 15 min appointment. Many of these fellas tell me about their trauma, and I can't deal with it as I am not trained in therapy and I also have my own story of trauma. These men have stories of abandonment and neglect as well as physical and sexual abuse stories. They need a service like yours – something that is long-term and paced at their level, and this would also support my role too."*

**– Aboriginal Welfare Officer (AWO)**

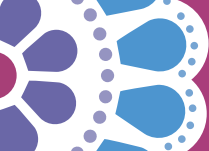
*"This service would help so many of these men, especially those with intellectual disabilities and ABI's. We have been noticing more men are disclosing histories of sexual abuse and trauma and all we can do is support a referral to see the psych nurse for a one-off appointment."*

**– Specialist Care Supervisor in the men's system**

*"I can see there is a definite link between the men's offending behaviour and trauma. Over half the men in our programs have current IVO's against them for FV and this indicates that these men have been taught through life experiences and upbringings that violence is the way to stay in control. Many of them talk about being raised in violent homes both witnessing and being directly affected by FV. There are also Royal Commissions happening and men are sharing their stories of trauma in these spaces with no therapeutic supports to assist them through the process. All we can do is make a referral to the psych nurse."*

**– Programs Manager at a men's prison**





## Crisis Care Unit Response Team

In the 2022–23 financial year, WestCASA counsellors supported 56 client call outs to the Crisis Care Unit at Sunshine Hospital Emergency Department.

Sunshine Hospital is one of only three locations in the state where clients can receive a forensic medical examination attended by the Clinical Forensic Medicine practitioners from Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM).

In the 2023–24 financial year, a new Crisis Care Unit is expected to be operational at the Wyndham MDC, which will support clients in the same catchment as WestCASA and beyond.

Crisis care operates within an established therapeutic model consistent with the Victims' Rights Model and principles of crisis intervention, which:

- Acknowledges the importance of victim/survivors exercising control over decisions and the therapeutic importance of regaining power.
- Recognises Crisis Intervention Theory and principles of feminist practice
- Prioritises access for recent victim/survivors of sexual assault
- Provides access to interpreters, identification of appropriate cultural, language, special and developmental needs for victim/survivors
- Offers victim/survivor support to take steps to encourage their physical safety
- Promotes child-focused principles to ensure the safety, protection and wellbeing of children and young people (NB: Young people and children (U18) are referred to the Gatehouse Centre at Royal Children's Hospital).

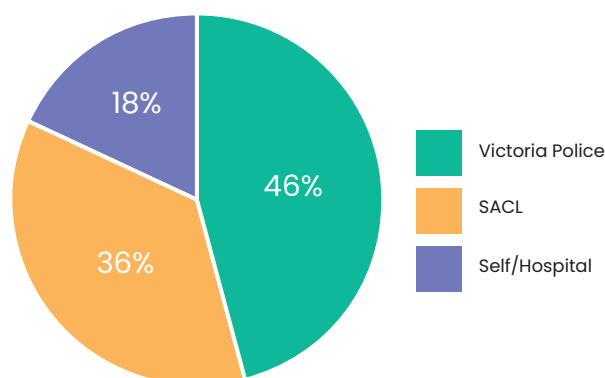
## The role of the Counsellor / Advocate at the CCU

Our CAs spend time with the client, explaining our role as a crisis care worker and the supports offered by WestCASA.

This may involve establishing rapport and assessing the client's capacity to participate in this process, explaining the client's legal and medical options, offering support during a forensic medical examination (FME) and facilitating discussions regarding their decisions around talking to police, a doctor, their family.

WestCASA then offers longer term assistance to clients to further their welfare through steps including counselling and advocacy.

### 2021–22 CCU Referral Sources



## Thank you to Cindy Tarzon, WestCASA Crisis Care Coordinator, 2011-2023

It is our pleasure to thank Cindy Tarzon for an incredible 12 years of service at WestCASA as Crisis Care Coordinator. In Cindy's time she has supported hundreds, if not thousands of clients seeking access to crisis support.

We thank Cindy for her extensive dedication in this busy and challenging role and wish her all the best in the future. We also thank the many counsellor advocates who have supported Cindy's tireless efforts to successfully manage the 24-hour support roster for clients accessing the CCU.

## Group Programs

### Program Development and Community Education

WestCASA has delivered community education training sessions to a wide range of organisations during the 2022-23 financial year, including the Vietnamese Women's Association, Victoria University, Orygen Youth Services, Western Health, and local football clubs in our catchment, among others.

WestCASA has delivered community education on issues from respectful relationships and managing and responding to the disclosure of sexual assault to local businesses, sporting clubs and educational facilities.



Prevention education has had profound success in reducing the stigma around this particularly complex trauma and empowering people in the community to support survivors in their recovery from sexual assault.



### Victoria University Partnership

WestCASA is proud of the more than five year partnership with Victoria University to deliver a range of training programs and on-campus counselling for students to support victim survivors of sexual assault.

Monthly training programs for staff and educators across multiple campuses of Victoria University have empowered leaders to support people through the difficult disclosure of sexual assault and reduce further trauma.

This training aims to sensitively help and support survivors of sexual assault tell their story and educate them on how further services may be of assistance to their recovery.

### On-campus counselling support

In addition, our partnership with Victoria University has extended to an on-campus counsellor advocate supporting clients at the Footscray campus with trauma informed counselling and advocacy.

As the VU student base is very multiculturally and gender diverse, the needs of clients recovering from either recent or historic sexual assault require extremely specialist support.

The on campus counselling support commenced mid last year and has been so successful it will be extended for a further 12 months to assist more students requiring sexual assault counselling.

Twenty clients accessed this support in the 2022-23 financial year with several more being supported while on the waitlist.





## Body Based Therapies

### 'My Body, My Home' — Coming Home to Safety & Connection

The 2022/23 financial year was the first year WestCASA offered group work again to the community, post pandemic.

From October 2022 to December 2022, My Body My Home group (MBMH) was facilitated in the community for the first time (previously offered at DPFC in 2019).

MBMH is a trauma informed body-based group program that has been developed by Counsellor/Advocates Narelle Fowler and Kristina Sass-Nielsen. It was offered to community clients of WestCASA (people of marginalised genders including women, non-binary folks & trans women).

MBMH is an eight-week group program of weekly sessions based on the Polyvagal Theory (the science of safety & connection), Somatic Experiencing, Trauma Informed Yoga & Art Therapy. The program's content is a blend a blend of psychoeducation & experiential practices with emphasis on reshaping the autonomic nervous system towards safety, regulation & relationship – it's story telling with body mapping – an expressive art therapy process that allows the participant to feel into and creatively communicate stories that live in their body.

The purpose for participants is to experience a greater sense of wellness + embodied liberation + enhanced social connections + give voice to the body & mind.

### Feedback from participants:

*I feel somewhat more free, lighter, more room for positive feelings inside*

*Acceptance of my body's needs, wants, sensation and emotions*

*An experience that was full of enriching moments that allowed me to tune in to myself by using yoga and art therapy*

*Friends whom understand me*

*A sense self, safety and trust – connections – belief in myself*

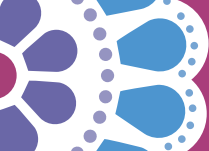
*More freedom – I have learned ways to ground myself in times of turmoil – I have come further on my journey of loving and accepting myself – I am not alone*



### In House Exhibition

Two months after completion of the 'My Body, My Home' group program, WestCASA held an 'in house exhibition' for the group participants with the purpose of re-connecting and honouring their body maps and stories.





## How clients found the group environment:

*I found the whole group supportive – as the weeks went on, we became a much closer group – I loved the yoga and contemplation that we did – very grounding*

*Centering/grounding at the beginning – yoga to connect with the body which lead to connecting to the soul through art*

*When others shared their feelings, it made me feel more supported and less alone*

*Extremely helpful and supportive – so relaxed I fell asleep during the yoga session*

*The variety of approaches – having time to share/reflect – draw, create and move*

*Choices! Inclusive of all of me – Being seen – affirmed – all the tools and facilitation of everyone's cues*

## Client's perceptions of the strengths of the facilitators:

*The facilitators inclusiveness, holding space for everyone, making me feel safe – my experiences were accepted in the space*

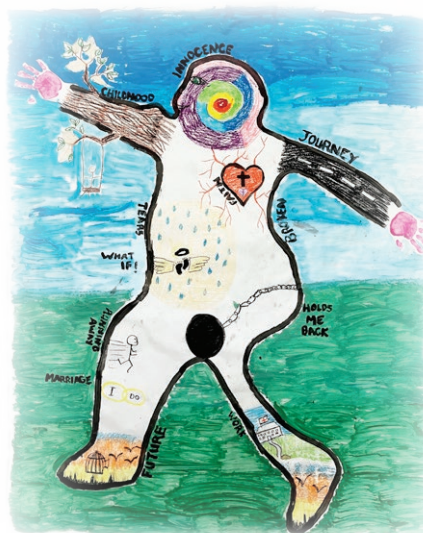
*Attunement, skills in facilitating a vulnerable space – their own emotional regulation*

*Understanding, open, compassionate, held space*

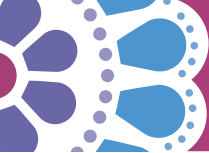
*Their knowledge, ability to stick to their approach*

*Caring, gentle, non-judgemental, confident*

*Their ability to read the cues of the group*







## Trauma-Informed Shiatsu

Shiatsu is a Japanese bodywork style that includes awareness of body posture, breathing and movement. The practice gives participants the space to explore the changes in their body from physical pain to the emotional effects on the body such as anxiety and the effects on the digestion.

The bodywork style can include joint rotations, stretching and gentle appropriate pressure to various parts of the body. Self-care suggestions may be included, such as dietary information or movement practices to be explored between sessions.



Shiatsu bodywork is traditionally practiced on a futon on the floor, instead of a massage table. There is a futon in the Body Based Therapy Room for those who feel comfortable with lying down, but others might prefer to sit in a chair to receive the shiatsu or participate in body-based therapies that do not include touch from the practitioner. Participants remain fully clothed throughout the sessions and when on the futon they are also covered by a light sheet.

Individuals can discuss with the practitioner what feels right for them. The sessions proceed slowly, at a pace that feels right for each person.

In the 2022-23 WestCASA supported two sets of four clients through their eight week semester to experience the benefits of Trauma Informed Shiatsu.



## Shiatsu client feedback:

*My trust was increased by having the shiatsu in CASA. It is the same space I am used to for my counselling.*





## A year in review: Clinical Services

WestCASA provides 'trauma-informed care' which is central to providing effective services for sexual assault survivors and provides a safe and supportive environment where clients are treated with respect and dignity. This approach recognizes the impact of trauma & seeks to minimize re-traumatization.

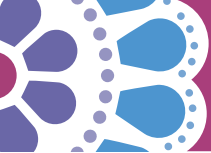
In Clinical Services, WestCASA has undergone organisation change with the implementation of the restructure and development of the new Counsellor/Advocate work force. WestCASA continues to hold strongly to our theoretical framework which is influenced by intersectionality, feminism and trauma informed practices. This framework is multidimensional and ever changing, addressing the breadth and depth of experience from the macro influences to the micro impacts by systems of power and dominance on the clients we work alongside.

Over the year, Counsellor/Advocates engaged in a range of training and professional development opportunities to grow their practice both individually and our practice framework as an organisation. Four CAs had the opportunity to engage in the yearlong orientation program ran by SAS Vic to develop emerging CAs in the sexual assault sector. Each CA across the organisation completed the Single-Session Training offered by The Bouverie Centre, to continue the development of our Brief Intervention model and support clients on our waitlist. WestCASA with our VACCA colleagues underwent training in LivingWorks ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) to continue to support our clients with the wide range of support needs.

At WestCASA, Counsellor/Advocates have been able to develop deeper connections to their work and as a team through group supervision offered by Blue Knot on a 6-weekly basis. These spaces are opportunities for the community team, DPFC team, and VACCA colleagues to come together to explore their practice working with people who have experienced trauma and complex trauma, critically reflect on their role as a CA and what may influence and impact on our work with the clients we serve. The STS team at DPFC has continued to connect with Jill Faulkner who offers a space for the CAs to explore the incredible work as well as tensions or dilemmas that may arise in this specialised context.

Collective development has also emerged in a fortnightly practice development group with CAs who are new to WestCASA and to the sexual assault sector. This group has developed into a space to bring learning edges, professional development training and practice sharing. In the broader organisation our community team, DPFC team and VACCA colleagues have begun to come together on a four weekly basis to engage in peer supervision. This space as been a place to begin to reflect on our theoretical frameworks that underpin our practice and possibilities to learning moving into the new year.





## Welcome Bernadette Dagg

In June 2023, WestCASA welcomed the appointment of Bernadette Dagg as Acting Head of Clinical Services on a 12-month contract covering for Maria Papadontas.

Bernadette has extensive experience across Government in working collaboratively in service co-design models, change management, service delivery and governance in the health and mental health sectors both domestically and internationally. As a Mental Health Clinical Lead, Bernadette worked extensively in clinical and policy roles focusing on young people and their families in Sydney to support families experiencing mental health and/or drug & alcohol problems whose children were reported with a substantiated risk of significant harm on one or more of their children. NSW. Having managed a clinical governance team for many years and participating in multiple clinical governance and management committees, Bernadette is carrying out the critical key role of developing a Clinical Governance Framework at WestCASA.

## About the Clinical Governance Framework

The WestCASA Clinical Governance Framework, set for delivery in the first half of 2024, aims to ensure that systems are in place to ensure clients attending receive safe high-quality counselling, advocacy, and support.

The framework is based on trauma-informed care principles and will articulate a comprehensive system and structure ensuring the delivery of high quality care for victim survivors.

The framework will encompass a set of principles, processes and policies to govern every aspect of clinical practice, from client safety and effectiveness of care to staff training and continuous improvement.

A Clinical Governance Risk Advisory Group was recently established to provide input into the Framework, using a co-design model in its development.

## WestCASA counselling client feedback:

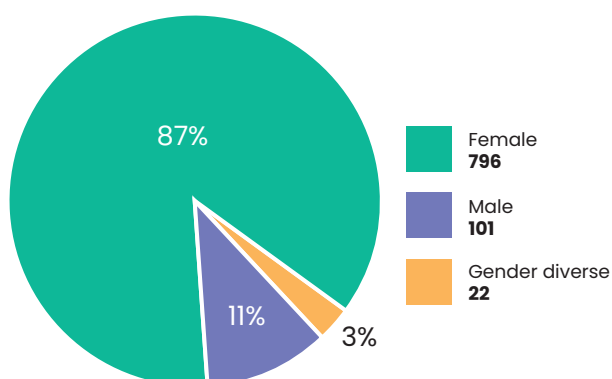
*Your kindness, humanity, understanding and safety has been pivotal for me to open doors to understand why I am who I am, and help me to make sense of my experiences; and that I matter.*



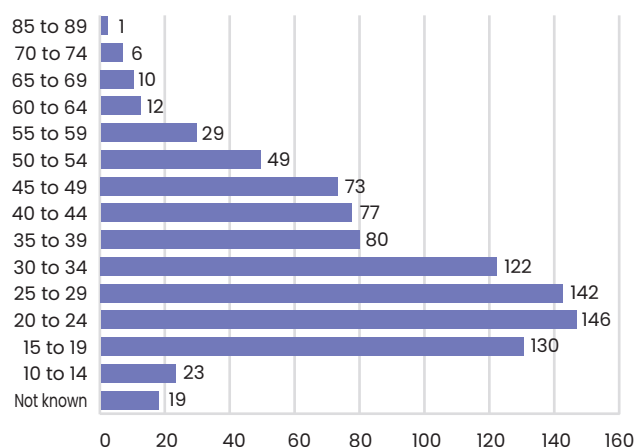


# About our client base

## Clients by gender orientation



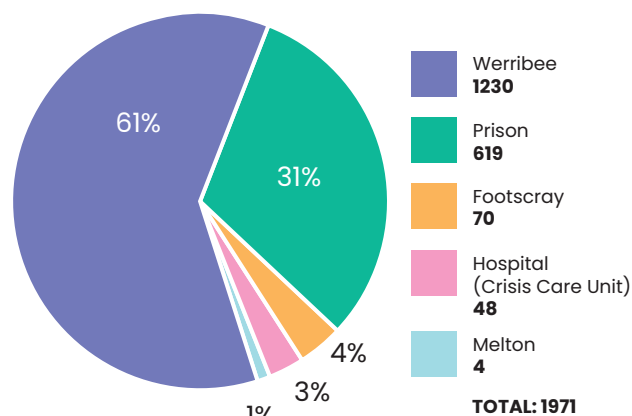
## Client age range



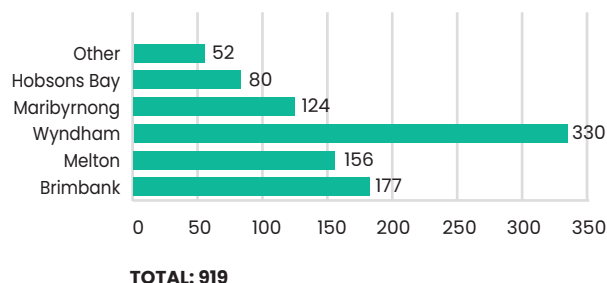
## Client referral source

Centre Against Sexual Assault / SACL / 1800Respect	115
Corrections / Remand / Prison / Court Service / CISP	234
Mental Health Worker / Service (AMHS, pyschologist, specialist-other)	101
DHHS: Child Protection, Disability, other	12
Drug & Alcohol Service	6
Family Violence Service	20
Family / friend / carer / existing client / support group / family service	48
Forensic Officer/Forensicare	11
Hospital (General, other, support) / All CCUs	72
Indigenous Service / Djirra	6
Legal Service / Coroner	10
Medical: GP, Specialist, Maternal, Health	42
Other Welfare / Community Support Agency	31
Police	162
Redress Scheme	2
School or Tertiary Institution	46
Search Engines	5
Self	1026
Unknown	2
Victims Assistance Program / VOCAT	4
SOCIT	14

## Counselling location



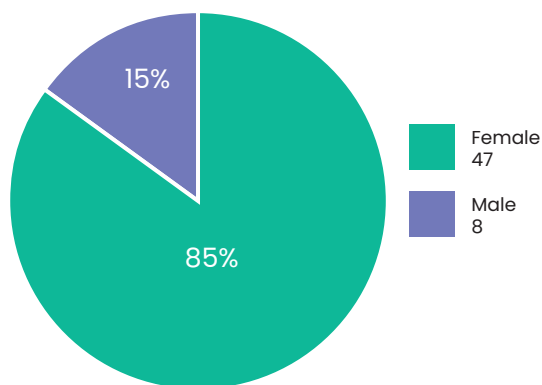
## Clients by local government areas



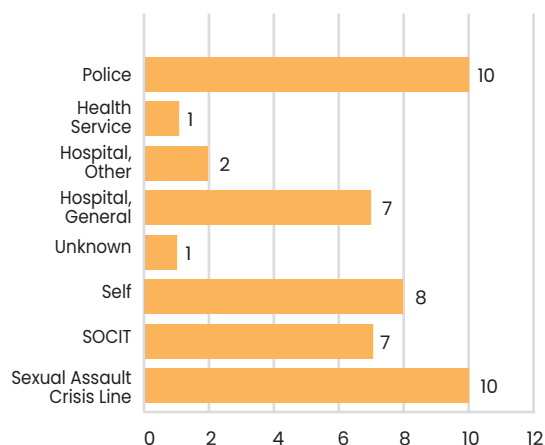


## Crisis Care Unit Services

**Crisis Care Unit presentations**

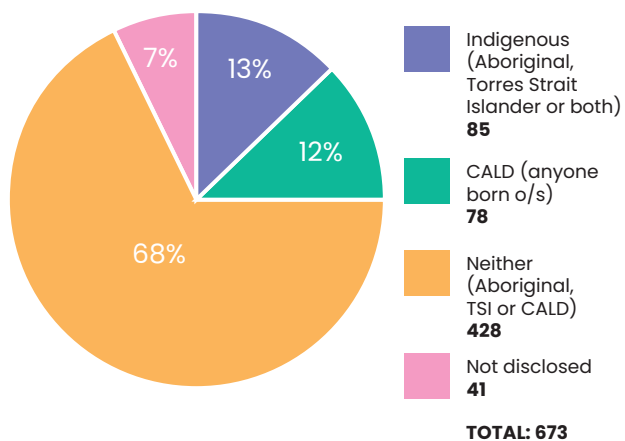


**Crisis Care Unit referral sources**

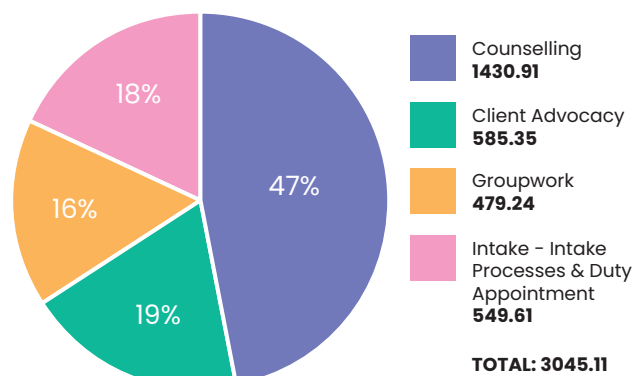


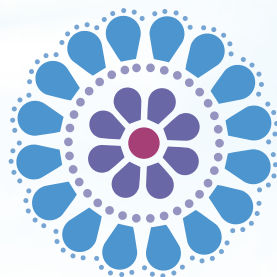
## Prison Services

**Diversity of clients receiving service in prison**



**Service delivery hours in prison**





WestCASA

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