nova
for women and children

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026



nova
for women and children

WOMEN AND CHILDREN MATTER

Acknowledgement of Country

Nova for Women and Children acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land where we operate and our staff work - the Awabakal and Worimi people. We honour and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to the people, their cultures and Elders past and present.

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A plaque next to the artwork reads:

Bulbul Nukang Wonai - Heart for Women & Children

Saretta Fielding

Lived Experience

We know that our clients have invaluable wisdom that can help us improve our service delivery and shape the future of our organisation to best meet the needs of our clients. The lived experience, strength and resilience of our clients is embedded in the way Nova operates to support and lift our clients.

In 2026, Nova for Women and Children established a Lived Experience Advisory Committee, who provide invaluable insight and feedback on Nova's operations and organisational plan. The Lived Experience Committee meets bi-monthly. The consultation process is having a positive impact, with the committee helping to review and reshape our intake and complaint management processes.



Bulbul Nukang Wonai - Heart for Women & Children

The strength of women, care and connection are cornerstones of Nova for Women and Children. These values are celebrated in ***Bulbal Nukang Wonai - Heart for Women and Children***, created by renowned artist Saretta Fielding.

Nova commissioned Saretta to create this evocative piece that takes pride of place and welcomes our guests as they arrive at our new Nova Women's Hub in Broadmeadow. It lets our clients know that they are welcome, safe, and will be supported and heard.

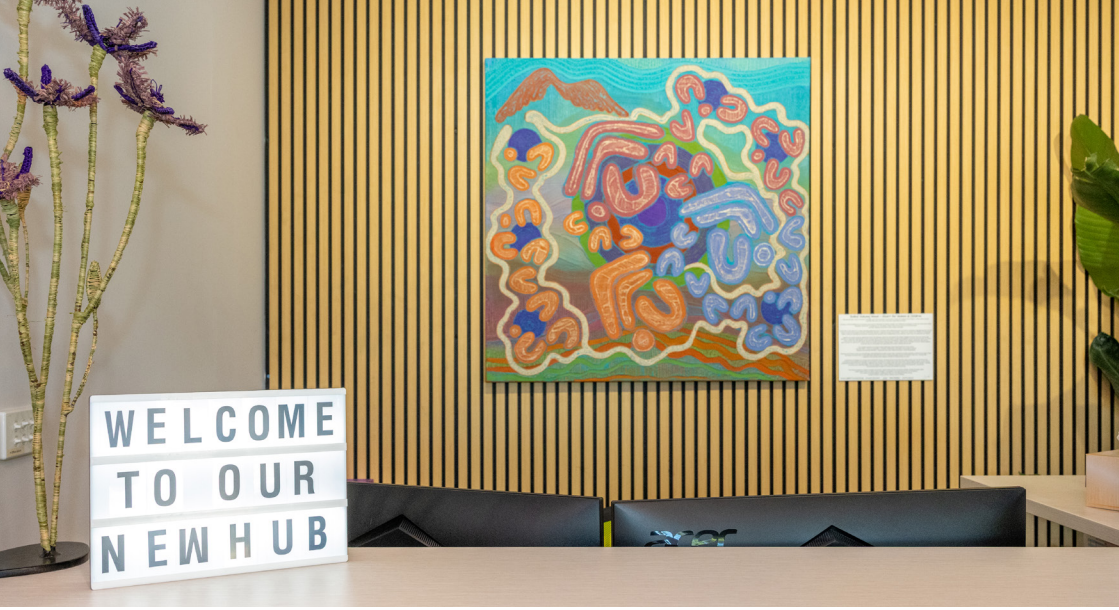
The artwork tells a story of women's strength, care and connection. It is the story of Nova for Women and Children, a place where women and little ones can come to feel safe, supported and heard.

The piece brings an Acknowledgement of Country, honouring the Awabakal and Worimi people, today's mob and the next mob coming through, and their ongoing connection to land, water and spirit.

At the heart of the artwork is a large, expanding gathering circle, overlaid with traditional women's and elders' symbolism, highlighting Nova and the homes, services, and programs across country they operate to support women and children. Places where women and children are supported within a safe and nurturing environment, as they journey towards a life of independence and resilience, where they are respected and valued.

Together, the women symbols, gathering circles and pathways interwoven throughout the design highlight the Nova team and community, reflective of respectful relationships across a strong network of partners and donors, as they work together around the shared vision of a future where women live with dignity and security, and with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

"This imagery represents safe spaces where women are welcomed in, where stories are shared, and where healing begins. These circles hold the strength of women sitting together, not alone, but as a connected mob supporting one another, walking side by side."



The artwork also captures six smaller purple gathering circles depicting Nova's 6 key values: Act with Intent - Focus on Strengths - Promote Collaborative, Innovative and Inclusive Practice - Respect and Embrace Diversity - Appreciate and Value Cultural Diversity - Work Respectfully.

Flowing around these circles are soft pathways representing the journeys women take, sometimes through hardship, sometimes through change, but always moving forward. These pathways reflect Nova's work of walking alongside women and children with care, creating safe, supportive environments where dignity, security and opportunity can grow.

A backdrop of songlines on country moves across the canvas, carrying stories across time from past, present and into the future and reminding us that healing and strength are grounded in connection to culture, place and community. These songlines depict country of the Awabakal and Worimi from the waterways, wetlands, hills and plains and coastal areas, with colour moving gently through the artwork - calming, nurturing tones reflecting safety, care and healing. They create a feeling of softness, balance and protection, echoing the environments Nova creates for women and children every day.

"This artwork speaks to a place of refuge and renewal. A place where women can pause, breathe, rebuild and begin again. A place where voices are heard, where strength is recognised, and where futures can be reimagined."

It is a story of coming together, holding each other up, and walking forward strong. A story of women caring, women leading, women healing.

About Nova

Nova for Women and Children Inc has been a haven for women who are homeless or are survivors of domestic and family violence in Lake Macquarie and Newcastle for almost 45 years.

- Nova provides safe and welcoming temporary and crisis accommodation for women and children. We are working with our community housing partners to increase the number of crisis accommodation units for women and children in Lake Macquarie and Newcastle and will open a nine-unit Core and Cluster refuge in late 2026.
- We support women and children living in medium-term transitional properties in partnership with community housing providers. Our caseworkers walk alongside our clients and provide holistic support to help women and children to rebuild their lives and find longer-term housing.
- Our caseworkers provide outreach to women and children in our community to find or maintain their housing.
- Nova caseworkers deliver specialist, trauma-informed domestic violence responses.
- Together our staff and Board advocate for women and children, and we use our voices and specialist knowledge to promote the need for change, to achieve our vision.

Our Vision

Our vision is to create a supportive and resilient community where women and their children are free from the threat of homelessness and family and domestic violence. We strive to ensure that every woman lives with dignity, security, and the opportunity to achieve her full potential in a safe and nurturing environment.

Our Purpose

We provide safe and secure accommodation, deliver holistic support services, and advocate for the rights of women and children in our community to live free from violence and injustice, with the aim of ending homelessness, domestic and family violence, and their impacts.

Our Chair

I am delighted to reflect on another busy year of accomplishments and the outstanding commitment and dedication from the Nova team in support of women and children across Newcastle and Lake Macquarie. We do not underestimate the challenges the sector continues to face with ever-growing demand but are proud of the impact that the organisation has.

We are pleased with the progress that Brittany and the team have made, as she leads the team in delivery of our three-year Strategic Plan. Focusing on growth and securing funds to meet increasing need for our services, we are particularly pleased to have secured five-year contracts to deliver specialist homelessness services and child specialist roles. This stability allows our team to focus on innovation, collaboration and improvement instead of three-year tender cycles.

I was grateful for the opportunity to raise awareness and funds through EJ Elliott's poetry book launch at the Newcastle Writers Festival. The event was launched by The Hon. Jodie Harrison MP, Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

I was also touched by the outcomes of the Interwoven workshops. I had the personal pleasure of attending a hands-on workshop hosted by Cherie Johnson of Miti Nukang and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to connect with Nova team members while gaining a better understanding of Aboriginal perspectives, our land, culture and storytelling.

Nova underwent an audit as part of the re-accreditation process in late 2025, aligned with the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES). We are delighted that the review and assessment across 18 standards affirmed Nova for Women and Children as meeting the ASES certificate level for the next three years. Our business practices are efficient and operating with appropriate management principles, a sound risk management approach and are aligned with meeting industry, legislative and regulatory guidelines.

L-R: Bonnie Anne, Kellen Evans, Dr Julie Mundy-Taylor, Jodie Harrison and Kynda Dixon







Nova reviewed its physical infrastructure needs, planning for growth and ensuring spaces are fit-for-purpose. The consolidation of our Charlestown and Newcastle offices has led to the activation of the beautiful new Nova Women's Hub in Broadmeadow, creating a welcome, safe and centrally located place for women to access our services. The new space also enables future opportunities for collaboration with other community organisations to co-locate the services which our women and children need.

"On behalf of the Nova Board, I would like to congratulate Brittany and her team at Nova for their rigour and their consistency in approach to high levels of service delivery and their client-first approach in everything that they do."

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to our Board members who have contributed their expertise, time and specialist knowledge over the past year. We would like to formally thank Katy Mooney, who stepped down as Secretary of Nova, after 10 dedicated years of service. We welcomed Natalie Oliver as newly elected Secretary, and Melissa Stark as our newly elected member of the Nova Board.

Nova's work can only thrive through the collaboration of government, charity partners, volunteers, the wider community and our dedicated team at Nova. We are grateful for the collective support to the women and children we walk alongside. Their strength and resilience continue to inspire us every day, driving our efforts to ensure women are able to live safely with dignity and security and to reach their full potential.



Kellen Evans
Chairperson

Our CEO

This year Nova has been focused on increasing our capacity to respond to the numbers of women and children that need our help, and on deepening the quality of service that we are able to deliver to our community.

We started a new partnership with Awabakal and Warlga Ngurra that has opened four new transitional houses for Aboriginal women and children fleeing violence. We are working with our community housing partners to secure funds to build more in the coming years. Most excitingly, we are seeing the build progress of a brand new Core and Cluster refuge for Newcastle, in partnership with Home in Place. We know we need more – we are simply unable to accommodate every woman and child that asks for our help.

We have partnered with other services in our areas to deliver innovation projects that include access to primary healthcare in refuges, and cultural programs like Interwoven. We've also partnered with Habitat for Humanity to renovate some of our existing refuges.

I'm very proud of our team for the service improvements they continue to deliver. This year saw Nova's very first Lived Experience Advisory Group of former clients meet to guide us. Their perspective challenges us to put women and children first in everything from room amenities to complaint forms and more. My deepest thanks to members, and I honour your commitment to supporting others.



Nova's Executive Team (L to R): Michelle Apschner - Opera Kynda Dixon - Practice Leader and Brittany Jack - CEO

Our Strategic Plan prompts us to review and improve systems as well as service. This year we rolled out a safety app for workers, with strict escalation protocols to minimise risk to workers and clients when doing outreach and home visits. We also revamped our SharePoint, making it a bit easier for workers to find the tools they need for their job.

The team have helped design, fundraise and prepare for a move to the new Nova Women's Hub in Broadmeadow. Not only have they managed less than ideal conditions while we repaired and moved, but they have also given over their expertise and commitment to make sure



ations Manager, Suzanne Harasti - Finance Manager,

the new Hub reflects trauma-informed principles and feels safe and welcoming. They've opened the door to collaborate with many services in the new space. And they have done all that while still supporting 1,642 women and children who are experiencing crisis, trauma and upheaval to plot a path to stability and safety.

"I'm constantly awed by the Nova team's professionalism, compassion and commitment."

I want to thank the Nova Board for their unwavering support and good advice. It's so generous to volunteer your time and considerable skill to govern a service like ours. From robust discussion about risk to setting bold strategic goals, your combined efforts ensure Nova can operate from a position of strength. I particularly thank Kellen Evans, our Chair, for her ongoing support, and Natalie Oliver, for her contributions to the legal and property side of our move.

"Finally, I want to take a moment to honour the passing in September 2025 of Nova's previous Operations Manager Lee Liewes, after a long battle with ovarian cancer. Lee was a warrior. She supported and advocated fiercely for the women and children in our service, and for staff in her 10 years of service at Nova. Our love and support are extended to her family, friends, colleagues and all the women and children who benefited from her support."

Brittany Jack
CEO



Meet Our Board

Nova for Women and Children is governed by a skilled board of women volunteers, with members drawn from a mix of professional fields and community organisations.

Their qualifications, specialisation, knowledge, expertise and professionalism ensure Nova continues to set strategic goals that will deliver the very best for our community. Their passion and commitment are always focused on achieving Nova's mission and vision.



Kellen Evans Chairperson

Current Professional Role: Business Manager - Training

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about strengthening community awareness of the profound impacts of homelessness and family and domestic violence on individuals and communities.

Having worked alongside people from diverse backgrounds, I am committed to efforts that create meaningful change and foster environments where inclusiveness is lived, and women and children can reach their full potential.

We can empower and transform lives through access to education, building new skills, and being part of connected and supportive networks; through Nova, we can enable pathways that foster safety, dignity, independence, and wellbeing.



Sue Hellier Vice-Chairperson

Current Professional Role: Human Services Consultant, Former CEO - Newcastle Family Support

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about the safety and well-being of children so they can have every opportunity to grow, develop, and build a life they are satisfied with. Similarly, the safety and wellbeing of women, so that they understand and are free from oppression, in all its forms.

I am passionate about supporting the staff of Nova who work towards these aims on a daily basis.



Brodie O'Sullivan Treasurer

Current Professional Role: Chief Financial Officer, Coast to Valley Garage Doors

What are you passionate about? I believe in empowering women and their fundamental right to feel safe.

I am passionate about being part of the change by ensuring the creation of a safe community for women and children, in this generation and the many more to come.



Natalie Oliver Secretary

Current Professional Role: Senior Corporate Counsel, NIB

What are you passionate about? Ensuring that the women and children of our community are safe and that their lives are not limited by violence or fear.

We live in a beautiful community, but we can continue to do better to make it a place where our vulnerable can live their lives with choice and dignity.



Marette Gale Board Member

Current Professional Role: Associate Lecturer, University of Newcastle

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about the development of a robust, bold, and inclusive service system that supports the well-being of all children, families, and communities. This would be a service system designed to lead, resource, and champion local place-based initiatives, with outcomes designed to break the cycles of violence, racism, ill health, and poverty.



Rozyta Englert Board Member

Current Professional Role: Change Management Consultant

What are you passionate about? I believe deeply in the right of every human being to be treated with respect and dignity, and to live a life free from fear, intimidation, and violence.

I am passionate about creating a community where we uphold these standards and ensure that vulnerable women and children feel safe and valued.



Samantha Smith Board Member

Current Professional Role: Manager, Family Violence/Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes, Department of Communities and Justice

What are you passionate about? My passion is driven by the opportunities in both my professional and personal (community) life to create meaningful and continuous positive change for children, their families, and communities. I believe change should be driven by a person's own self-identified and self-actualised needs, with support that is embedded to help people overcome the barriers and challenges they encounter, that is empowering and reinforces their own strengths. I'm also passionate about community development and creating a society that embeds safety and respect for all and creates equity and opportunity that is representative of both individual and collective needs and drives improvement for everybody.



Melissa Stark Board Member

Current Professional Role: Manager of Financial Planning and Analysis, Maitland City Council

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about supporting the women and children in our community because I believe everyone deserves to feel safe, valued, and empowered to thrive. I am committed to helping create environments where women and children are protected from harm, have access to the support they need, and given opportunities to build positive and independent futures.

Our Impact

1,642

women and children were supported in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie this year.

324 or around **20%** of those women and children had a stay in our accommodation, on average staying 3 months. The remaining 1,318 accessed homelessness casework and specialist Domestic Family Violence support in the community.

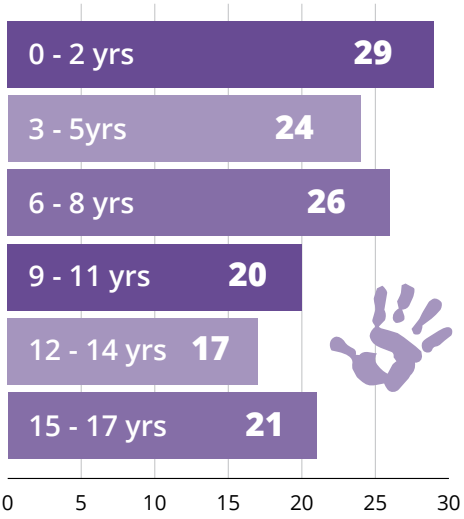
24% of those women and children identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

93% were born in Australia, and **97%** speak English at home

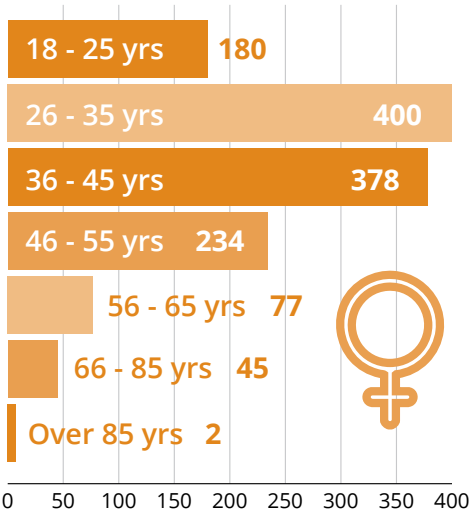
5% identify as culturally and linguistically diverse

66% were homeless, with **33%** at risk of homelessness

137 Children stayed in our accommodation



1,505 Adult women supported



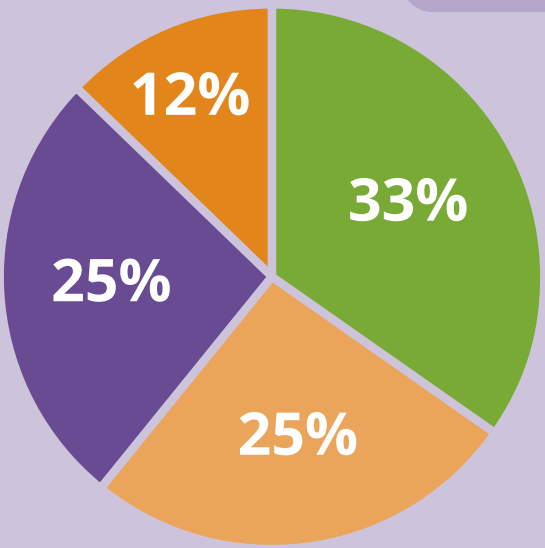
36,378

Number of individual bed nights of accommodation delivered.

That's more than the capacity of McDonald Jones Stadium.

Primary reason women seek our support*

- 33% Family and Domestic Violence
- 25% Inadequate or inappropriate dwelling
- 25% Housing crisis or accommodation ended
- 12% Housing affordability stress



*Clients can only choose one of these options as the primary reason for seeking support. Our experience is that most clients have a combination of these factors in their lives.

On any given day, there are around 80 women in Nova's referral and intake process.

Nova triages this list according to risk and need, with women fleeing violence and sleeping rough receiving fast-track priority for support.

Our Programs

Nova for Women and Children operates refuges and crisis accommodation, assists women and children living in medium-term transitional properties, and runs specialist programs to support women and children to escape, then rebuild their lives after homelessness or experiencing domestic and family violence.

Nova Women's Hub

Creating a 'one-stop shop' for women and children impacted by domestic violence and homelessness is the purpose of our new Nova Women's Hub.

The Nova Women's Hub is a safe, welcoming space where women can get practical support, like access to free food, toiletries, a shower and laundry, and easily access the support they need to begin healing and rebuild their lives.

Conveniently located at 22 Lambton Road, Broadmeadow, less than 250 metres' walk from a major public transport hub, the Nova Women's Hub's operation and fit-out is trauma-informed.

Our specialist caseworkers are co-located in one space, and partners from homelessness, government services, social services and DV sectors will share the space, making it easier for clients to access the services and supports they need to start over.





The Hub opened to clients and the community on August 31, 2026.

"It took a community effort to create the Nova Women's Hub, with more than $80,000 contributed through financial donations and in-kind professional services to complete the fit-out."

Specialist Children and Young People Workers

Domestic and family violence and homelessness can have a lasting impact on children and young people, affecting their development, wellbeing, confidence and ability to build healthy relationships as they grow.

Nova for Women and Children's Specialist Children and Young People Workers are qualified social workers and allied health professionals who focus on the unique needs and healing of children and young people. They provide practical and therapeutic support and strategies to help manage the effects of trauma, and support mothers to better understand and respond to their children's needs.

Helping Chloe Find Her Confidence

When Chloe and her mum came to Nova, they were rebuilding their lives after leaving domestic and family violence and experiencing financial abuse.

Chloe was struggling with anxiety, found it difficult to stay at school and lacked confidence in the everyday skills she would need to become independent.

With the help of her Child and Young People Caseworker, Chloe and her mum developed practical strategies to help manage her anxiety, regulate her emotions and cope when things felt overwhelming.

Her worker advocated for Chloe at school and supported her to overcome her fear of using public transport. By practising familiar bus routes with her caseworker, Chloe became more confident and began to attend school more regularly.

The specialist worker also supported Chloe through assessments to identify her additional support needs, while helping her mum better understand how she could support her daughter.

At the same time, Nova's caseworkers supported the family to secure safe, long-term housing, giving them greater stability as they continued to rebuild their lives.

Supported Temporary Accommodation

Nova for Women and Children operates a family-friendly, women-only supported temporary accommodation service. Referrals come through Homes NSW. The accommodation is available to women and children who have nowhere else to stay, either for a night or on a temporary basis while more suitable housing is arranged.

This service supported 90 women in 2026.

Domestic Violence Response Enhancement

The Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (DVRE) are a team of specialist caseworkers who provide after-hours crisis support to women (with or without children) who have left a violent relationship, or have experienced violence from an intimate partner, and are seeking safety and help.

With a focus on immediate safety planning, the DVRE team walk alongside women and support them to access housing, funding, health services, legal and police support. The DVRE team attends Safety Action meetings with police, court and legal services, who work together to support women to stabilise their situation and connect with immediate help.

Nova receives specialist funding to operate the DVRE service. The DVRE service is regularly functioning above funded capacity due to the growth in demand for domestic violence supports.

The Domestic Violence Response Enhancement service supported 165 women in 2026.

Transitional Housing

Nova for Women and Children provides holistic casework support to women who are living in transitional properties owned and managed by our community housing partners. Staying in transitional housing allows time for women to stabilise and work with their caseworker to address any barriers to them finding suitable long-term housing, for example, a private rental or social housing.

Our Transitional Housing service accommodated 121 women and children with 24,415 bed nights in 2026.

Outreach Support

Women with children and older women are two of the largest demographics impacted by homelessness or insecure housing in Australia. Nova supports women in our community who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This includes women sleeping rough, couch surfing or sleeping in cars. Our caseworkers also support women who have been given eviction notices or have fled their home due to violence, abuse or coercive control. They use strengths-based and person-first approaches to support women to find housing, connect to critical services and work towards their goals.





Elsie Women's Refuge - 1974

Why Women's Refuges Matter

In 1974, a group of women in Glebe, Sydney, established **Elsie Women's Refuge**, Australia's first women's refuge. The women's liberation movement recognised that women experiencing domestic violence and family violence (DFV) needed somewhere safe to go at a time when violence in the home was treated as a private matter.

Elsie Women's Refuge was the first of many to follow across Australia, usually set up by groups of women with very few resources and support. Government funding came later. Newcastle's first refuge, **Jenny's Place**, opened in 1977 and is still operating today. **Eva's Project**, which later merged with another organisation to become **Nova for Women and Children**, began around 1983.

"A refuge is more than a roof over someone's head. It is a place to breathe, heal and begin again. It is rooted in a history of women helping women. Safe, purpose-built refuge accommodation is the foundation, but a room alone cannot rebuild a life."



203 women and children stayed in Nova's refuges in 2026.

Women and children also need skilled, specialist workers who can support them through trauma, housing applications, legal processes, financial challenges, parenting and the many decisions involved in starting again. This support doesn't just save lives in crisis; it is what helps women and children to break the cycle and rebuild.

While governments rightly often focus on building bricks and mortar housing and crisis facilities as we grapple with the true scale of our DFV emergency, we must remember that skilled staff are what turn a building into a refuge.

Our Lived Experience Group and other clients consistently tell us that the trust and support they build with their case worker helps them identify safe, practical next steps and navigate a system that can often present significant barriers. But it is also what helped them find enough safety to begin to heal.

"We must ensure that any increases in bricks and mortar also include increases in staffing for support services."

The purpose of a women's refuge



Safety

Providing a secure place for women and children when home is no longer safe.



Stability

Creating space to establish routines and make decisions without the immediate pressure of violence.



Healing

Giving women and children time and support to begin recovering from trauma and abuse.



Practical support

Helping women navigate housing, legal, financial, health and other services.



Support for children

Recognising that children are affected by violence in their own right and need to feel safe, supported and heard.



A pathway forward

Helping women work towards longer-term housing, financial independence and a safe future.



A Place to Breathe and Heal

For Natalie Muldoon, a women's refuge is more than a safe place to stay. She knows firsthand that women's refuges are safe places for healing and starting over. It is a place she remembers from her childhood, where she stayed as a child with her mother and sister in a Lake Macquarie refuge.

Today, she now visits clients staying at the same refuge, as one of Nova's specialist caseworkers.

Natalie is proud that her own positive experiences of her time in the refuge has shaped the way she relates to the women and children she helps. It's shaped her understanding of the importance of safety, healing, and having someone beside you during one of life's most difficult moments.

"I have only fond memories of staying in refuge," Natalie says.

> **"The refuge environment was the only time I felt calm and connected as a family unit. We weren't in fight or flight mode, we were simply just being."**

She remembers the sunlight filling the rooms and the sense of peace that came from being somewhere her family could finally breathe and stop worrying about protecting her mother from violence.

"It was a feeling I could only explain as having a break from protecting her from him."

Most importantly, she remembers the connection with the caseworkers who supported them.

"I remember feeling such a sense of relief knowing that my Mum, and my sister and I had support and someone in our corner."

That experience has stayed with Natalie. Years later, it is at the heart of her practice as a caseworker.

"I love the idea that potentially I'm making a positive impact in someone's life story, by simply just being there during the hardest part of their story."

Seeing children and helping them feel seen

Natalie's lived experience also shapes the way she connects with children staying in refuge.

"I see them, I'm there with them sitting in the fear," she says. "I feel I have a deeper understanding of their situation based on my own lived experience."

She remembers one six-year-old boy who was staying in refuge with his mother. While another staff member supported his distressed mum, Natalie sat with him and played with Play-Doh.

She told him how clever he was and asked if he knew how clever he was.

"He turned his head and looked me straight in the eye and said, 'Am I?'"

For Natalie, the moment captured why children need to be seen and supported in their own right. Children living with violence and homelessness can become overwhelmed, withdrawn or unsure of their own worth.

> **"I want them to know they are worthy. They have what it takes to break the cycle."**

The power of someone believing in you

Natalie has seen how a safe place and a consistent relationship with a caseworker can help a woman begin to recognise her own strength.

She recalls the journey of a woman she calls Amanda, who experienced violence as a child and later faced addiction, mental health challenges and domestic violence in her own relationship. After fleeing with her young sons, Amanda connected with Nova and was supported through temporary accommodation and refuge before eventually moving into a safe home.

Today, she is working and her children attend the local school.

"Amanda always had the resilience and the grit to get to this point," Natalie says. "It's perhaps the case that she didn't know that herself."

For Natalie, this is the power of the relationship between a woman and her caseworker. A caseworker cannot do the healing for someone, but they can provide the safety, encouragement and advocacy that allows a woman to begin doing that work for herself.

A refuge can be the beginning of something different

Natalie believes the community needs to understand that asking for help is not a weakness.

"It's not brave to walk alone. It's brave, courageous and commendable to reach out for support."

For women and children leaving domestic and family violence, a refuge can provide more than emergency accommodation. It can offer a rare period of safety and calm, a chance to reconnect as a family and the support needed to begin imagining a different future.

"Refuges can be the missing piece of the transition from co-dependency and trauma bonds to finding yourself, your kids and your independence."

Natalie is still on her own healing journey.

When she reflects on what gave her the determination she carries today, she returns to the support she received as a child.

"My healing journey will never be over, however my journey has shaped me to who I am today. I am learning every day how to love myself just a little bit more."

"All I can honestly reflect on is my caseworker's support when I was a young child."

The refuge gave Natalie and her family something that remains with her decades later - a sense of calm, connection and possibility.

Now, as a Nova caseworker, she offers that same sense of connection to women and children who are beginning their own journeys.

Sometimes healing begins with a safe place to breathe. Sometimes it begins with someone sitting beside you and believing in you until you can believe in yourself again.



Our Clients

Finding Safety, Stability & Independence

Maddy had experienced decades of upheaval and instability when she reached out for help from Nova for Women and Children. Living with an intellectual disability and complex mental health needs, Maddy had also experienced domestic and family violence.

After relocating to Newcastle, Maddy entered another relationship and moved in with her partner and his mother almost immediately. What she hoped would provide connection and belonging instead became another unsafe environment.

By the time Maddy came to the Hub, she had been experiencing ongoing violence from both her partner and mother-in-law and had no safe place to stay. The priority for her caseworker was to support Maddy to find safety.

With support from her caseworker, Maddy contacted Link2Home for temporary accommodation. Her Support Coordinator also arranged a stay in Supported Independent Living accommodation while longer-term options were explored. It gave Maddy somewhere to stay, but the cost significantly depleted her NDIS funding, leaving her without funded supports while she waited for a plan review.

For Maddy, finding safety was more than finding secure housing. Her circumstances meant that conventional accommodation options were not always safe or appropriate. She was vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe relationships, and during temporary accommodation experienced incidents involving men who targeted her vulnerability. Refuge and other communal accommodation settings were also identified as unsuitable.

Rather than expecting Maddy to navigate complex systems on her own, the Nova team worked alongside her to make information accessible and meaningful.

> **"Maddy was empowered to have a voice in her own support journey. Her caseworker adapted the support she received to meet her individual needs, presenting information in a way that was clear and easy for her to understand."**

Safety plans were developed using simple language and visual prompts. Accessible, easy-to-understand resources were also placed inside her accommodation to help her respond safely if someone knocked on her door or asked her to do something that made her uncomfortable.



Maddy's Behaviour Support Practitioner also worked with her to build her understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships, consent and boundaries, as well as how to recognise unsafe situations.

Maddy consistently attended appointments, participated in case planning and engaged with safety planning and psychoeducation.

Behind the scenes, there was also a considerable amount of coordination across the DV, disability, advocacy and housing sectors. All the while, Maddy's caseworker was a central and relied on support person.

Then came a significant milestone. Maddy was offered a social housing property and began transitioning into her new home.

After a period marked by uncertainty, unsafe accommodation and complex systems, Maddy finally had the prospect of a stable place where she could begin rebuilding her life.

> **"The new home represented more than a change of address. It was an important step towards greater safety, stability and independence."**

Maddy's story demonstrates what can happen when support is flexible, accessible and genuinely centred on the individual. Most of all, Maddy's experience is a reminder that a safe home can be the foundation from which a person begins again.

When Safety Means Starting Again

For young Aboriginal mother, Alex, coming to Newcastle was meant to be a fresh start. After fleeing severe domestic and family violence, Alex made the courageous decision to leave behind what was familiar and begin again with her two young children.

The family initially stayed in one of Nova's refuges while they worked towards more long-term accommodation. With the help of her Nova caseworker, Alex and her children secured a transitional property and, for a time, things were going well. The focus was shifting to settling the children, establishing routines and beginning to imagine what life might look like now that they were free from violence. Then everything changed.

Alex contacted her caseworker fearful for the safety of herself and her children. She realised she had inadvertently left her location settings switched on through social media. Soon afterwards, her former partner was seen walking past her unit complex.

Her anxiety was heightened because her former partner had a history of drug use and violent behaviour. Alex also had family living in the area which increased her fear for the safety of the people she loved.

"For many women experiencing domestic and family violence, leaving is not the end of the danger. It can be a time when risk increases."



The danger of leaving

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 25 per cent of women continued to experience violence, and 14 per cent experienced increased violence after leaving domestic and family violence.

For Alex, those statistics were not abstract. She had already left one unsafe situation, relocated with her children and begun establishing a new home. Now, with the possibility that her former partner had located her, the family faced the prospect of having to leave once again.

Alex was now faced with an impossible choice: stay and try to make the property safe, relocate within Newcastle, or leave the area altogether.

Together with the help of her caseworker, Alex explored her options through safety planning and careful discussion about what would provide the greatest level of safety for her family.

Ultimately, she made the decision to leave Newcastle. Her Nova caseworker referred Alex and her children to a new service, then began gathering information to support the family's application for refuge accommodation in their new location.

"Alex's story is a powerful reminder that leaving violence is rarely a single event. For many women and children, it can mean leaving, finding temporary accommodation, establishing a home, discovering that safety has been compromised, and then having to make the incredibly difficult decision to leave again."

What made a difference for this family was having someone listen and take their safety seriously. And now, away from the place where she feared she could be found, she has told her support worker that she feels more relaxed.

For a family rebuilding after violence, sometimes that feeling of being able to breathe again is where the next chapter begins.

Interwoven

Resurgence: Interwoven is a 10-week healing and recovery program that offers a safe space for Aboriginal women to connect, heal, and rediscover their spark through culture and creativity.

> **"The program introduces women to weaving traditions and possum skin cloak making, fostering cultural pride, self-expression, and confidence."**

The yarns that happen as women learn together are transformative.

Nova has partnered with Miti Nukang to deliver the Interwoven healing and recovery program to Aboriginal women who are survivors of domestic and family violence in the Hunter. Connection to culture and community is a critical healing factor for Aboriginal women and children.



Work created by Interwoven group

The Power of Women Supporting Women

Sally had lived through addiction and recovery, and she knew how difficult the journey could be. During a recent Interwoven session, Sally found the courage to speak openly about her experience with addiction and recovery, sharing the challenges she had faced, the support she had needed and the hope that had helped her keep moving forward.

Her story was deeply personal, but by sharing it in such a safe, supportive environment, Sally created something that reached far beyond her own experience.

Another woman in the Interwoven program was supporting her son through addiction and was facing her own feelings of worry, uncertainty and helplessness. Hearing Sally speak honestly about her journey resonated with the other women and created a sense of connection and understanding that was healing for both.

In that moment, one woman's lived experience became a source of hope for another.



Work created by Interwoven group

Having the opportunity to speak openly about what has happened in a safe and supportive environment can help reduce isolation and shame, while allowing women to recognise their strengths and resilience.

For Sally, her lived experience had become something she could pay forward to support another victim-survivor and remind her that she did not have to navigate the challenges facing her family alone.

"This is the power of connection. When women are given the opportunity to share their experiences without judgement, their stories can become a bridge between isolation and connection, and between surviving difficult circumstances and finding hope for the future."

Interwoven provides a space where these connections can happen. Facilitated by Miti Nukang in partnership with Nova, Aboriginal women and children are referred to the program by domestic violence and specialist homelessness services in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, including Warlga Ngurra, Jenny's Place, and Family Support Newcastle.

Through Interwoven, women can access caseworker support as well as child and youth caseworker support, while also having opportunities to connect with culture, share stories, build relationships and experience a sense of belonging.

For many women, healing is not something that happens in isolation. It can happen through being listened to, accessing professional supports, sharing experiences, reconnecting with culture and discovering that your story can help another person feel less alone.

That is the heart of Interwoven. Sometimes healing happens through a conversation with a caseworker, through a child and youth worker supporting a young person, or through hands working together to weave while stories and relationships develop around the room.

These moments remind us that lived experience has enormous value. A woman's story can be part of her own healing, but it can also become a source of strength for someone else.

Through connection, culture and women supporting women, Interwoven creates space for hope, healing and resilience to grow.

Our Team

Nova has **34 staff** who have over **320 years** of community sector experience between them.

We are skilled in a range of fields that support our work, including social work, psychology, case management, counselling, criminology, law, AOD, communications, accounting, and more.



Education

Nova staff education

18% Postgraduate Qualifications

43% Bachelor Degrees

25% Advanced Diplomas and Diplomas

7% Certificate III and IV

7% Certificate I and II

We are proud to reflect our community

Staff demographics

21% Identify as LGBTQIA+

4% Identify as CALD

18% Identify as Aboriginal

43% Have a disability or long-term health condition

68% Have lived experience of Domestic Family Violence and/or homelessness





What's the best thing about working at Nova?

"Walking alongside women who demonstrate such strength despite challenges and adversity."

"Knowing that we are working not just to respond to crisis, but that we are using our voice for change."

"Helping vulnerable community members and being their safe place."

"Being surrounded by women who support each other."

"Being able to be a meaningful first point of contact for women when they reach out for help."

"A shared sense of purpose with the people I work with."

What are you proud of that Nova achieved this year?

"The opening of the new Nova Women's Hub and the way everyone worked together to manage such a significant transition while continuing to support women and children."

"Assisting a number of women to obtain safe housing."

"Seeing women secure safe housing, rebuild their confidence, reconnect with supports and work towards their goals is incredibly rewarding."

"The number of women we have collectively supported."

"Being able to provide a beautiful, calm and welcoming place where our women can come to decompress, with thoughtful touches like weighted blankets and teddies, makes such a difference."



Our Partners

Collaboration is the not-for-profit sector's superpower. This year Nova has leant into innovation and growth through partnership as part of our Strategic Plan.

Nova's ongoing membership of the Hunter Domestic Violence Consortium has led to innovative and impactful collaborative projects that will further embed trauma-informed practice and bolster how we support the healing and safety of our clients:

- Nova has supported healing and recovery through its partnership with **Miti Nukang**, giving Aboriginal women and children opportunities to draw on cultural strengths and connection through weaving and possum skin cloak making. The program was funded by Hunter New England Central Coast Primary Health Network (HNECCPHN).
- **Carrie's Place** has led the Primary Health Care in Refuge project, funded by HNECCPHN. This initiative has brought regular GP and nurse clinics directly into refuges across the Hunter, including Nova's.
- **Family Support Newcastle** has led the second stage of a project funded by the NGM Group Foundation, delivering an updated digital handbook and training to help frontline workers, including Nova staff, better recognise and respond to tech-facilitated abuse.
- **Port Stephens Family and Neighbourhood Services** has led the Hope in Healing project, funded through the Medical Research Future Fund. The project will establish primary care concussion clinics and strengthen pathways to identify and respond to mild traumatic brain injury among victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Nova works closely with community housing providers to provide housing for our clients.

We appreciate the shared vision and partnership of:

- **Home In Place**
- **Women's Housing Company**
- **St Vincent de Paul Housing**
- **Pacific Link Housing**





Nova has begun an exciting new partnership this year with **Awabakal** and **Warlga Ngurra.**

"Nova is delighted to work in partnership with Awabakal and Warlga Ngurra to deliver new transitional housing for Newcastle, in a specialist project for Aboriginal women and children fleeing domestic and family violence. The combination of Awabakal's cultural leadership, and their breadth of services in health, housing and care, along with Warlga Ngurra and Nova's expertise in supporting women fleeing domestic and family violence means families will be able to access the right support to safely heal and rebuild their lives.

We are at our best when we collaborate for our community. This project will keep families safe while they reconnect with school, health services, community and employment, as well as work to secure long-term housing after crisis."

- Brittany Jack, CEO

Our Donors

The NSW Government primarily funds Nova for Women and Children, but we regularly support far more women and children than our funding is designed for. We rely on benefactors and community support to offer specialist and innovative programs, and practical help for individual clients.

> **"It takes a community effort to support women and children to start over after domestic and family violence or homelessness."**

Benefactor Story

When a woman leaves a violent relationship or home, she is at risk of increased violence from her former partner. Creating a sense of safety and providing enhanced security at our refuges and Nova Women's Hub is paramount to best serve our clients and staff.

JAMES N. KIRBY FOUNDATION

Thanks to the generous support of the James Kirby Foundation, Nova will upgrade its security systems at two of our refuges and has installed state-of-the-art security and monitoring systems at our new Nova Women's Hub.

Donor Story

Kim Van Koeverden knows first-hand what it takes to heal from the trauma of domestic and family violence. Her beloved sister, Trisha, was brutally killed by her estranged husband, and in the tradition of refuges, is the namesake of one of the refuges operated by Nova for Women and Children.

As part of her healing journey, the talented visual artist held her first solo exhibition, 'Angels Among Us' at the Edwards Gallery in April 2026. The event was an opportunity to celebrate Trisha, the resilience of Kim and her family, raise money for Nova and shine a light on the work that is being done to help victim-survivors heal, and combat domestic violence.



L to R: Brittany Jack, Kim Van Koeverden, Jodie Harrison & Tamara Blakemore

Minister for Women, Seniors, and the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Jodie Harrison MP launched the exhibition of celestial sculptures, paintings and drawings. More than 300 people visited the exhibition during its weekend showing.

Kim is part of the Nova family and regularly fundraises for Nova and Trisha House, in honour of her sister, by busking with friends at local parks in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.



Significant grants, and donors of cash or in-kind goods and materials this year included:

- ★ **Tim Minchin** – the performer donated $50,000 from the proceeds of his 'Songs the World Will Never Hear Tour'.
- ★ **Friends With Dignity** – for setting up 'sanctuaries' and providing furniture, whitegoods and essential items for clients moving into new homes.
- ★ **Wests Cardiff** – $40,000 towards covering client costs to relocate and purchase white goods for their new homes.
- ★ **Novaskill, and Department of Education Regional Industry Education Partnership** – who supported high school students to build and install a bespoke cubbyhouse for the children staying at one of our refuges.





- ★ **Mortgage Choice Warner's Bay** - for ongoing support throughout the year.
- ★ **Lake Group Strata** – For their year-long fundraising commitment.
- ★ **NSW Knitter's Guild Newcastle Group** – raised more than $8,000 from their bi-annual exhibition and raffles for Nova.
- ★ **Downer Group** – selected Nova as the benefactors of their Christmas Giving donation.
- ★ **The King Family and Friends** – for their legendary annual curry fundraising night and ongoing donations of practical items for our clients.
- ★ **Glenrock and Toronto Anglican Churches** – for their long-term commitment to supporting Nova and our clients, donating cash for Christmas presents, and practical items like toiletries, new towels and pillows.
- ★ **Zonta Club of Hunter Newcastle** – for their unwavering support of Nova's refuges and staunch advocacy for women and children.
- ★ **Toronto Masonic Lodge** – for their support of our Westlakes Refuge.
- ★ **American Motorcycle Club Slopes and Plains Chapter** – for their ongoing charity rides and fundraising raffles.
- ★ **C3 Victory Church** – for their hands-on support, helping women living in transitional housing or caring for the outdoor spaces at our refuges.
- ★ **The Merry Mellows** – for contributing the proceeds from a production to Nova.
- ★ **Central Life Church** – for their donations and support.
- ★ **The Junction Fair and residents of Aveo Shortland Waters Village** – for their donation of Christmas gifts for clients.
- ★ **Wangi Knitters** – who created hand-made items for babies and clients.
- ★ **Newcastle Grammar Class of 2026** – who are fundraising for Nova during Year 12.
- ★ **BL Imaging** - for all of the fabulous photography.
- ★ **Saturn Creative** - for their beautiful graphic design services.

THANK YOU!

We are so grateful for the financial support we receive from the individuals who give weekly, fortnightly and annually – many who choose to remain anonymous. Every dollar, hour of support or useful item we receive makes a real difference for the women and children we serve.

Our Strategic Goals

STRONGER OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN & CHILDREN

- Understand and improve outcomes, learning from lived experience, using outcome tools and quality data
- Increase capacity of existing services to meet increased community need
- Services are safe and inclusive

FINANCIAL STRENGTH

- Strong balance sheet is leveraged to invest in our goals
- Our community's strength and generosity harnessed through an engagement strategy to increase Nova's revenue and assets

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Nova's property footprint is fit for purpose and scale
- Nova's business processes improve efficiency and effectiveness
- Quality Standards are maintained

SKILLED, ENGAGED PEOPLE

- Leaders have tools and resources to support teams
- Psycho-social risk understsood and minimised
- Benefits and culture attract and retain excellent staff

INNOVATION & GROWTH

- Nova has a clear role in preventing homelessness and domestic and family violence
- Deepen practice in post-crisis transition to sustained change
- Strong, authentic partnerships that increase impact for women and children

Our Future

Core and Cluster

Funded by the NSW Government and delivered in partnership with community housing provider Home in Place, Nova's Core and Cluster model is due to open in Newcastle in 2027.

Nova's Core and Cluster Refuge will consist of a group of self-contained townhouses (the "cluster"), and the "core" space for Nova's specialist caseworkers, therapy rooms, a children's playground, and communal gardens. This model is designed to provide a balance between independence and support for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence.

This setup differs from older women's refuges, where women and children share communal living spaces, kitchens, bathrooms, and laundries.

"The Nova Core and Cluster Refuge will allow our clients to maintain privacy, autonomy, and personal routines while having access to communal and child-friendly spaces, and the specialist caseworkers and assistance they need to reset and rebuild their lives."

Nova expects to be able to support around 100 women and children a year at this new site, while they stabilse and longer-term accommodation is found. As exciting as the new building is, the funding to staff the site with caseworkers and specialists will give women and children a new level of support and deliver the kind of help we must offer if we are serious about ending domestic and family violence.

Funding that matches the scale of the problem

Nova welcomes recent boosts in funding for domestic and daily violence services, but as a percentage of our overall current service, the increase is very small. Our existing refuges were not included in this funding boost, and remain oversubscribed, with 80 women and children in our intake process at any given time, and not enough crisis accommodation options to meet demand. As a result, many women and children are supported by Nova's caseworkers but staying in hotels, in cars, on friends' couches or other unsuitable options. Nova continues to work towards increasing our capacity until this need is met, and no woman ever feels compelled to return to an unsafe home.

There are a number of state and federal funding streams supporting the development of social and affordable housing, as well as crisis accommodation. This is very welcome, and the scale of the investment in bricks and mortar is bigger than anything seen in decades.



However, there has not been a proportionate increase in funding for support services to go along with this investment in bricks and mortar. Providers like Nova and others in the homelessness system are at times being asked to commit to deliver this support to additional housing with no additional increase in staffing. This cannot deliver the outcomes we need.

"Complex issues like domestic and family violence and homelessness require more than a roof and walls - the skilled staff are why a refuge is a refuge, not a building."

Partnerships

As the financial year closed Nova moved into our new Hub in Broadmeadow. Our vision is a safe, welcoming palace for women and children. A key part of this over the coming year will be to welcome partners to visit our Hub on a regular basis to support women and children. Services we are partnering with include legal advice, primary health care services, specialist family violence practitioners and more. We are committed to delivering budget-conscious, trauma-informed design that considers psycho-social needs, including the colour palette, sounds, and smell.

Recovery from DFV requires navigating a complex set of intersecting problems. By bringing services together in one trusted and safe space, women can access the support they need while staff across different services can communicate quickly and effectively.



Stronger services

Nova continues to take action to ensure our staff are working to current best practice. This means access to training and development. It also means reviewing our staff benefits, especially looking for ways to mitigate the impact of working in a job that exposes staff to vicarious trauma and moral injury.

Nova also works to continuously improve our business infrastructure. As well as moving to new offices and opening a new residential site, this also includes systems like payroll, and IT.

"A strong workforce is the critical factor that means women and children are supported to recover from crisis. And when they can access healing, we know that we can break the cycle of family and domestic violence for good."


Aboriginal Welcome
On This Day


nova
for women and children
WOMEN AND CHILDREN MATTER