



Early Insights Report

Progress, learnings, achievements and emerging outcomes

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Funding from the NSW Government was also received to refurbish interim premises of the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre. Lata Satyen has been funded by the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre to support capacity building and measure impact.

About the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre

Domestic, family and sexual violence (DHSV) has significant and enduring impacts on women's physical, psychological, social and economic wellbeing (World Health Organization, 2026). Holistic, trauma-informed, and recovery-oriented care that extends beyond a crisis response is needed. The Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was established to address this gap and support victim-survivors in the long-term.

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is a federally funded, Australian-first, community-led initiative co-designed with women with lived experience, practitioners, researchers and partner organisations to provide comprehensive, integrated and long-term support for women recovering from HSV (Cullen et al., 2021). A project of the Illawarra Women's Health Centre, its model of care is grounded in trauma-informed principles and recognises recovery as a holistic, individualised and ongoing process requiring coordinated responses across health, psychosocial, legal, housing and other support systems. The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre also aligns with National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (henceforth, National Plan) which recognises healing and recovery as essential components of the broader response to gender-based violence, alongside prevention, early intervention and crisis response (Department of Social Services, 2022). This approach reflects the broader evidence that recovery from HSV is multidimensional and extends beyond symptom reduction to include safety, wellbeing, social connection, financial security, empowerment and quality of life (Satyen & Sharda, 2024; Sinko et al., 2022).

An evaluation of the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's innovative recovery-oriented model is essential to determine its effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness. The objectives of this Early Insights report are to:

- Describe how the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was established and how the service has developed.
- Highlight what the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre has achieved so far and what we are learning about its impact on women's recovery, wellbeing and healing.
- Identify what has worked, what has been challenging and how the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre has responded and adapted as it has developed.



- Provide recommendations for the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's future, including how it can continue to improve, plan for long-term sustainability and inform similar recovery-focused services for women experiencing DFSV across Australia.

How the Findings were Developed

These early insights were developed through the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's documents, service and client data, findings from the external interim evaluation, and interviews with Centre leadership. Together, these sources provide an early picture of what has been achieved, what has been learned and where further development is needed.

Findings

Building the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre: From Establishment to Growth

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was created to provide supports that were largely missing from the existing DFSV service system: a place where women could receive longer-term support to heal and recover, not only help during an immediate crisis. Because it was a new service, there was no existing model that could be copied. The team had to build many parts of the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre service at the same time as they began supporting women. This included recruiting and developing staff, working out how the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre would operate, building connections with other services, setting up systems for managing information and data, and developing the services offered to women.

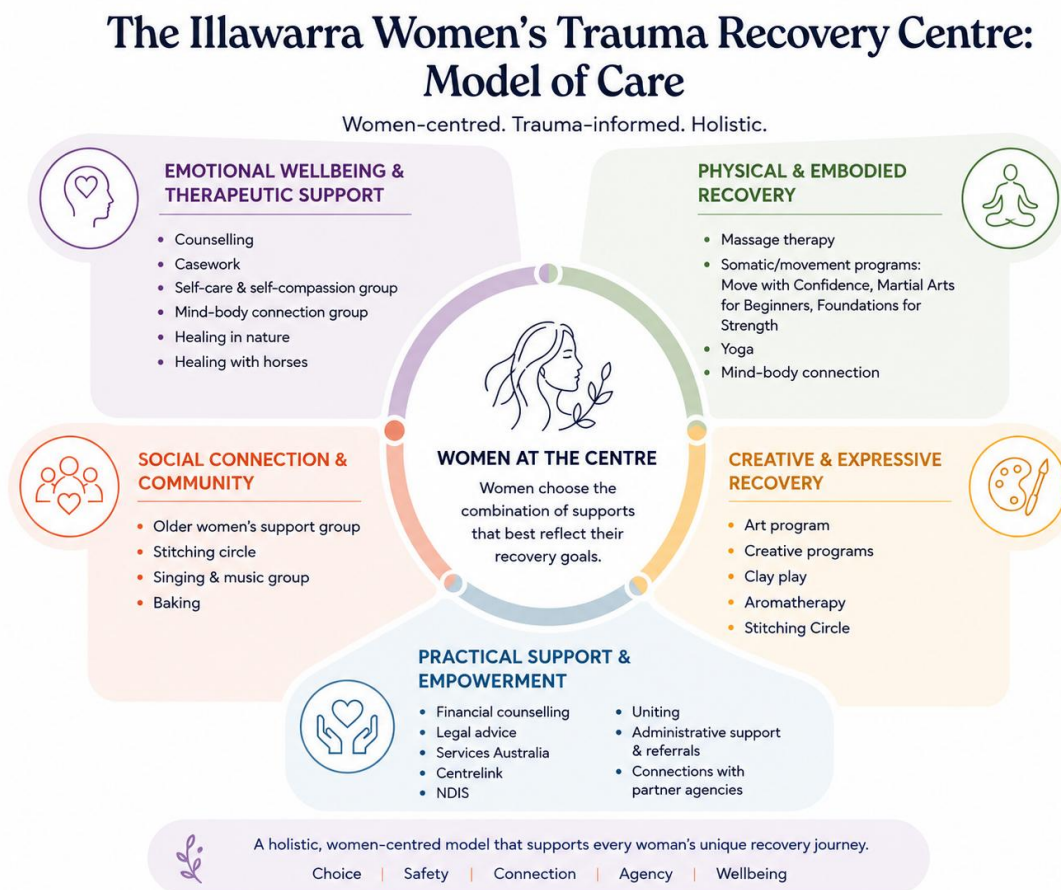
The first 6-12 months were an important period of establishing the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre and working out what was needed. As it grew, its leadership structure also changed. It began with a shared leadership model and decision-making and later introduced a CEO and Senior Leadership Team. This gave people clearer roles and responsibilities and helped support the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's growth. The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's physical environment was intentionally designed to support women's safety, healing and recovery, with women with lived experience and First Nations communities helping shape the space.



The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was designed to support women's mental health, physical health, relationships and everyday life. Rather than providing one type of support, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre brings together different services so women can access support that reflects their individual needs and goals. Now, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre provides close to 30 services and programs, both directly through the Centre and through partnerships with other organisations, providing women with a broader and more holistic approach to recovery and healing. These services can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Services offered by the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre



Early Achievements



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So far, more than 300 women have accessed support from the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre. More than 70% have engaged in counselling and access an average of three different therapeutic services. Women accessing the service have provided feedback about positive experiences and changes in their wellbeing, confidence, social connection and emotional health. In interviews, women described feeling safe, heard, validated and supported at the Centre. The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is also becoming more connected with other services in the Illawarra. Increasing referrals and positive feedback from partner organisations suggest that the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is becoming an important part of the local support system for women affected by DFSV. See Figure 2 for further detail on the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's emerging impact.

In July 2026, the WTRC undertook a client survey to assess client satisfaction, service accessibility, and the outcomes achieved through participation in Centre programs and support services. The survey was completed by 61 women who were currently or previously engaged with the Centre. Findings demonstrated high levels of client satisfaction and positive wellbeing outcomes. Overall,

- **91.8%** of women agreed or strongly agreed that their experience with the Centre had been positive.
- **77.8%** of women who had received counselling support, reported a reduction in trauma-related symptoms, including anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, stress and relationship challenges.
- **97.2%** of women who had accessed massage therapy, agreed or strongly agreed that massage therapy had helped to release tension from the body and improve emotional regulation.

Survey findings also identified positive changes across a range of wellbeing indicators, including increased understanding of the impacts of trauma, greater feelings of safety and hope, stronger identity and self-awareness, improved understanding of healthy relationships and boundaries, and increased social connection. (Table 1)



Table 1: Client wellbeing outcomes identified through the July 2026 client survey (n = 61)

Holistic Client Survey - Client Wellbeing Indicators			
61 Clients in total completed this survey anonymously			
Question	Answer	No. of Respondents	%
I have a better understanding of how Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence has affected me and how trauma has impacted my life	Strongly Agree or Agree	51	83.60%
I feel safer	Strongly Agree or Agree	46	75.40%
I have a stronger sense of who I am	Strongly Agree or Agree	44	72.10%
I feel more hopeful	Strongly Agree or Agree	44	83.60%
I have a better understanding of healthy relationships and how to set boundaries	Strongly Agree or Agree	51	80.30%
I feel more connected to others	Strongly Agree or Agree	49	72.10%

Figure 2

Results from the satisfaction survey conducted with 61 clients in 2026





Learning, Adapting and Growing Through Implementation

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is a new service, so it had to build its workforce, services and ways of working while also supporting women. This meant the early period involved a lot of learning and change. As the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre gained experience, it used feedback from women, staff and partner organisations to understand what was working and what needed to change.

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre also faced challenges such as temporary premises, limited resources across the wider service system, gaps in referral pathways and the need to support women with complex, longer-term recovery needs. In response, Women's Trauma Recovery Centre adapted its services, partnerships, staff development and therapeutic programs as it learned more about what women needed.

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's early experience should therefore be understood as a period of establishing and developing a new service, rather than as a fully established model. A key learning for the establishment of future trauma recovery centres is to ensure adequate time for establishing systems and structures before service delivery commences.



Importantly, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre demonstrated its ability to learn from challenges, respond to changing needs and strengthen its approach over time. The key challenges and how the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre responded are outlined below in Table 1.

Table 2: Challenges and Responses at the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre

No.	Challenges	Improvements and learnings
1.	Finding and keeping the right staff It was difficult to find practitioners with the right skills, experience and values at a time when there was a shortage of workers with DFSV expertise.	The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre obtained specialist recruitment support and offered employment conditions that attracted skilled staff.
2.	Finding a suitable permanent space A suitable permanent site could not be secured in the short time between funding being confirmed and the service opening.	An interim location was established so services could begin while advocacy continues for funding for a larger, permanent, purpose-built space, including an outdoor space.
3.	Creating a new model of care The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre is one of the first publicly funded services of its kind, so there was no existing model that could simply be copied.	The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre developed its approach with women with lived experience, staff and other experts. Systems and ways of working were regularly reviewed and changed as the Centre learned more about what women needed.
4.	Supporting staff wellbeing Supporting women with complex experiences of DFSV, particularly when demand is high, can place significant pressure on staff.	A range of strategies are used including: regular staff consultation to identify and address psychosocial hazards; additional leave; internal and external supervision; group and cultural supervision; yarning circles; EAP; onboarding and training; and opportunities for staff to collaborate and celebrate.
5.	Building data and outcome systems while the service was developing	A theory of change and program logic were developed in collaboration with key stakeholders; ongoing



	The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre was developing its services and learning what information it needed to collect at the same time	improvements are being made to the collection and management of information about client outcomes and services.
6.	Managing high demand and waitlists Demand for the service has been greater than its available capacity. This reflects high levels of DFSV in the region and gaps in the wider service system.	Waitlist policies and procedures were developed to help prioritise support and communicate regarding capacity. This included prioritising support for women from culturally diverse backgrounds and keeping partner organisations informed about availability.
7.	Building connections with others The Centre works across a large and complex network of DFSV, health, legal and social services. Limited resources during the establishment period meant it was not possible to build relationships with all organisations at once.	Initially, the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre focused on providing quality services and building stronger relationships with key partner organisations. As it has become more established, expanding relationships across the broader service system has become a priority.

Looking Ahead

As the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre moves into its next stage, the focus will be on strengthening what has been built so far and ensuring it can continue to provide high-quality support to women over the long term. This will include securing stable funding and suitable infrastructure, building and retaining a skilled workforce, responding to growing demand, improving how client outcomes are tracked, and strengthening the systems that support the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's work. Continuing to build strong relationships with other services will also be important so women can access the broader support they may need.

Ongoing evaluation will help the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre to understand what is working, what could be improved and what difference it is making for women over time. What is learned through this process can also help inform other recovery-focused services for women experiencing DFSV. Figure 3 shows the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's journey from establishment to growth and ongoing development.



Figure 3

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre's Journey of Development, Growth and Adaptation.



Priorities for the next 3 years

1. Secure long-term funding for a permanent Centre with outdoor space

The Centre's physical environment is an important part of how it supports women's recovery. Long-term funding will be sought for a stable, purpose-built space with an outdoor area where women can continue to access safe, trauma-informed support.

2. Improve how client outcomes and service data are collected

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre will continue collecting information about how clients are doing and how services are helping them. A good client management database will make it easier for staff to support clients, track progress and provide the information needed for reporting and future funding.

3. Invest in staff and workforce development

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre will continue building a skilled local workforce with expertise in DFSV recovery. This will include supporting staff retention, regular supervision, professional development and staff wellbeing so practitioners can continue providing high-quality care.



4. Strengthen systems as the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre grows

As the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre develops, it will continue to formalise the processes that help staff work safely and consistently. This includes clear processes for sharing information across different professionals, protecting privacy and confidentiality, and ensuring clients understand and consent to how their information is used.

5. Increase capacity while protecting staff wellbeing

Growing demand services needs to be supported in a way that is sustainable for the wellbeing and capacity of staff. Future planning will consider waitlists, service capacity, clear referral pathways and appropriate ways to support clients when they leave the service. Staff also need dedicated support to manage the pressures associated with increasing demand.

6. Strengthen partnerships and advocate for better systems

The Women's Trauma Recovery Centre will invest more resources in building strong relationships with services across DFSV, health, housing and homelessness, child protection, legal and social services. Advocacy will also be undertaken for improvements to systems that affect women's recovery, including the Family Court, Victims Services, legal assistance and mental health services.

7. Evaluate and share what is learned

Continue gathering information and data to understand what is working, what could be improved and what happens for clients over the longer term. Sharing these findings will help strengthen the Women's Trauma Recovery Centre and build knowledge about effective, recovery-focused responses to DFSV more broadly.



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