



# Impact Report 2019-2020





## Our Vision

Our vision is for people from refugee backgrounds to live lives liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights injustice.

## Our Purpose

Our purpose is to nurture meaningful futures by assisting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive in our community.

## Our Commitment

We are committed to supporting survivors of torture and trauma and their families and communities in Queensland.

## Our Values

**Kindness.** We care. In all of our work, survivors of torture and trauma come first.

**Optimism.** We strive to build meaningful futures. We are committed to healing being a journey of recovery across mind, body and spirit.

**Perserverance.** We don't give up. We understand that healing requires time, patience and courage for individuals, families and communities.

**Justice.** We believe that to heal and belong are human rights. We collaborate to build opportunities so that survivors of torture and trauma can heal, belong and thrive in our community.



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## Acknowledgement of First Peoples

QPASTT acknowledges the First Peoples of Australia and their leaders past, present and emerging. We recognise the continuing trauma caused by losses of children, language, lore and land and the impact that this continues to have on psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing. We recognise that since time immemorial, First Peoples have nurtured communities of belonging and thriving and we work in solidarity towards a future of healing and justice.



# Chairperson's Report

It is with great pleasure that I present the 2019-20 Chairperson's Report on behalf of the Board of QPASTT.

QPASTT became incorporated in 1996. We are a specialist agency focused on recovery for refugee survivors of torture and trauma. Our care is holistic across individual, family and community levels. We believe that justice is intrinsic to recovery and we work to ensure that trauma is not a barrier to full participation in Australian life.



## **The COVID-19 Pandemic**

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption across our world. Many of our clients continue to experience anxiety and grief for loved ones overseas affected by the Pandemic. Fortunately, QPASTT was able to quickly transition our services to telehealth methods and we were able to provide a seamless service to our clients. We also worked in close collaboration with community leaders and stakeholders in the multicultural sector to ensure that local communities across Queensland felt connected, supported and informed.

## **Change of Status**

In February 2020, QPASTT transitioned to becoming a company limited by guarantee. We remain a not-for-profit organisation committed to fostering a community which upholds human rights, honours dignity, promotes hope and inspires faith in humanity for people from refugee backgrounds.

## **A New Strategic Plan**

In November, the QPASTT Board approved our new strategic plan. Our focus over the next four years will be on healing, belonging, thriving and justice for survivors of torture and trauma. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with a range of partners to achieve our vision.

## **The Queensland Context**

Prior to the closure of our international border due to the Pandemic, Queensland continued to experience high levels of regional settlement with almost 50% of arrivals being settled in Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns. In response, over the past year, QPASTT significantly increased resourcing to Toowoomba to better respond to need.

## **Our Staff**

I would like to acknowledge and thank all of our staff for making QPASTT such a dynamic and responsive organisation – our Counsellor Advocates, Community and Youth Workers, Administration Staff, Team Leaders, Senior Leaders, and of course, our Co-CEOs. Without effective leadership we would not be able to contribute to positive outcomes for our clients. The agility that has been required of you over the past year, has been tremendous. Additionally, the political and policy environment in which the organisation operates continues to be complex. The dedication and expertise of the people within the organisation cannot be understated and are greatly appreciated. I would like to thank our Co-CEOs for their continuing

guidance and leadership throughout the year in dealing with a wide range of complex and difficult issues, always with optimism for positive outcomes and deep respect for others in the process.

### **Our Board**

I would like to acknowledge the support and dedication of all the Directors of the QPASTT Board – your time and input are always greatly appreciated. I would especially like to acknowledge Luis Melgar who has been our Treasurer for the past 12 years. This was Luis final year as Treasurer, and we thank him for his dedication to the financial growth and stability of QPASTT over many years and wish him all the very best for his future.

### **Refugee Communities**

Lastly, and most importantly, on behalf of QPASTT, I would also like to thank the communities from refugee background with whom we partner. Your continued support and collaboration remain of significant importance for the continued effectiveness of our agency.

***Professor Emeritus Keithia Wilson, Chairperson***

## **Treasurer's Report**

I am pleased to present the Treasurer's Report for 2019-2020. Our 2019-20 Audited Financial Statements were prepared by our auditors, Haywards Chartered Accountants. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with applicable accounting standards and reflect the financial position of the organisation for the year ended 30 June 2019. The report is unqualified.

In this financial year, QPASTT's total revenue was \$7.86 million which was an increase of 7.4% from the previous year. A small surplus of \$78,000 from rental income was generated for the year. QPASTT remains in a solid financial position with an asset to liability ratio of 3.4:1. Our decision to diversify our assets into properties helps to compensate the reduction in interest income. Our healthy balance sheet allows us to continue to expand our work with clients and communities as well as through research and advocacy.

In 2019-20, 97% of QPASTT income was through government funding with the remainder 3% being generated by the agency through rental income and fee for service work. In the year 72% of income was allocated to service delivery and 26% was allocated to research, training, management, operations and delivery of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennial FASSTT conference. Approximately 81% of expenditure was on salaries and on-costs and 16% was related to operational expenses including facilities, cars and professional development for staff. Over 4% of QPASTT's total funding is expended on use of interpreters.

After 12 years in the role of Treasurer, I have decided to stand down. The work of QPASTT is critical and I wish the agency a continued strong future moving forward.

***Luis Melgar, Treasurer***





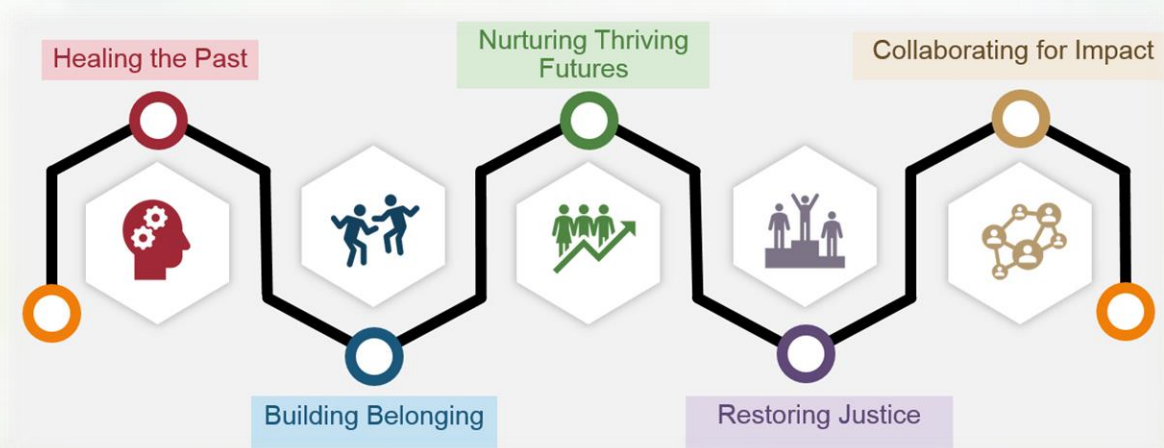
# Co-CEOs Report

Recovery is at the heart of all of QPASTT's work. It is our belief that trauma recovery is possible through a focus on healing, belonging, thriving and justice.

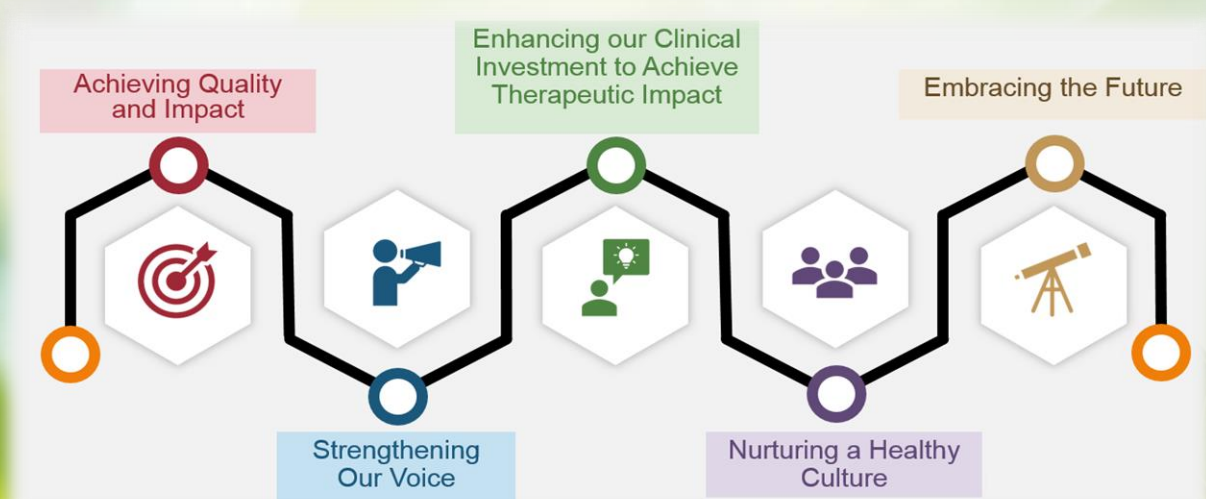
In November 2019, the QPASTT Board approved our new Strategic Plan. This new plan will guide our work over the next four years. We have revised our vision to incorporate our hope that survivors can be liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights abuses. Our mission is to nurture meaningful futures so that trauma is not a barrier to full participation in the Australian community.



We have five strategic priority areas that are focused on achieving impact for survivors of refugee-related torture and trauma.



We also have five strategic priorities that are focused internally on our organisation's quality, influence, systems, culture and ensuring that we are fit for the future.



Unfortunately, the goal of persecution is to destroy people and take away their futures. This is why enabling healing is at the heart of what we do. Our healing work is across mind, body and spirit. In the past year we supported 1582 people through 6739 specialised trauma recovery counselling sessions and 1034 carer engagement sessions.

*"If healing is happening, I  
can imagine my future."*

One of the impacts of trauma is that people's faith in humanity can be lost. Therefore, we believe that true healing cannot happen without the security of belonging. In 2019-2020 we combined a focus on wellness and belonging through delivering 378 group sessions involving 4827 participants. We also engaged in 182 activities with refugee communities to support their resilience in their collective journeys of recovery.

For survivors of torture and trauma to have thriving futures, we recognise that trauma recovery must also focus on the social, economic and cultural conditions that impact on the daily lives of individuals and families. In the past year, 28.5% of participants in our service were children or young people under the age of 18. We are passionate that for them to have a thriving future, our work reducing the risks of vulnerability and marginalisation and mitigating intergenerational trauma is imperative.

Healing from past oppression is an act of justice and we fiercely believe that it is a fundamental human right for refugee survivors. In the past year we increased our focus on research and advocacy. We also worked in collaboration with human service workers to increase their skill and capacity to support refugee survivors of torture and trauma through the delivery of 98 education and training sessions involving 1214 participants. Some of the sessions were delivered to 14 schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented substantial challenges to individuals, families and communities from refugee backgrounds. Nevertheless, a highlight of this year was the establishment, early in the pandemic, of the COVID-19 community leaders' response group, a partnership between community leaders, QPASTT and Multicultural Australia, aimed at ensuring not only timely access to reliable information regarding the pandemic so that people could stay safe, but also empowering communities and supporting active citizenship by amplifying the voice of people from refugee backgrounds.

Many people contributed to our work in 2019-2020. We would especially like to thank our Board, leaders, staff and volunteers as well as our stakeholder and government partners. Our relationships with community leaders are at the core of our work and we thank them for their ongoing dedication to recovery even in such a big year as what has been 2019-2020.

We look forward to continuing to nurture meaningful futures by supporting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive in our community in 2020-2021.

**Dr Ignacio Correa-Velez and Jamila Padhee, Co-CEOs**



# Statistical Snapshot 2019-2020

1582 Clients engaged in counselling

71 Countries of origin



## Top 10 countries:

- Iraq
- Iran
- Congo (DRC)
- Afghanistan
- Syria
- Somalia
- Burma (Myanmar)
- Sri Lanka
- Eritrea
- Ethiopia

6739 Counselling sessions

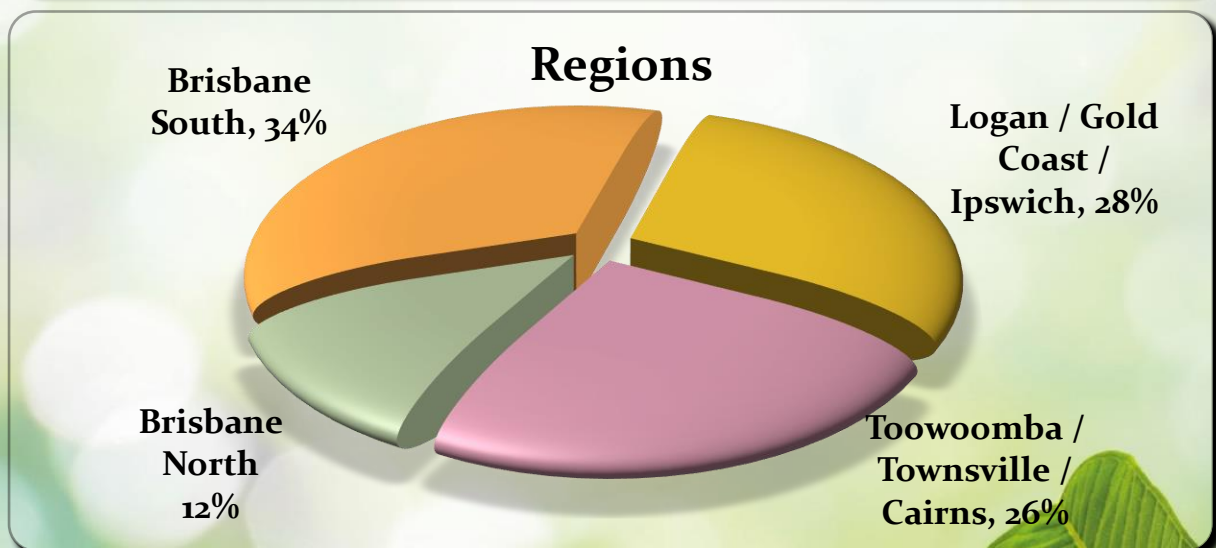
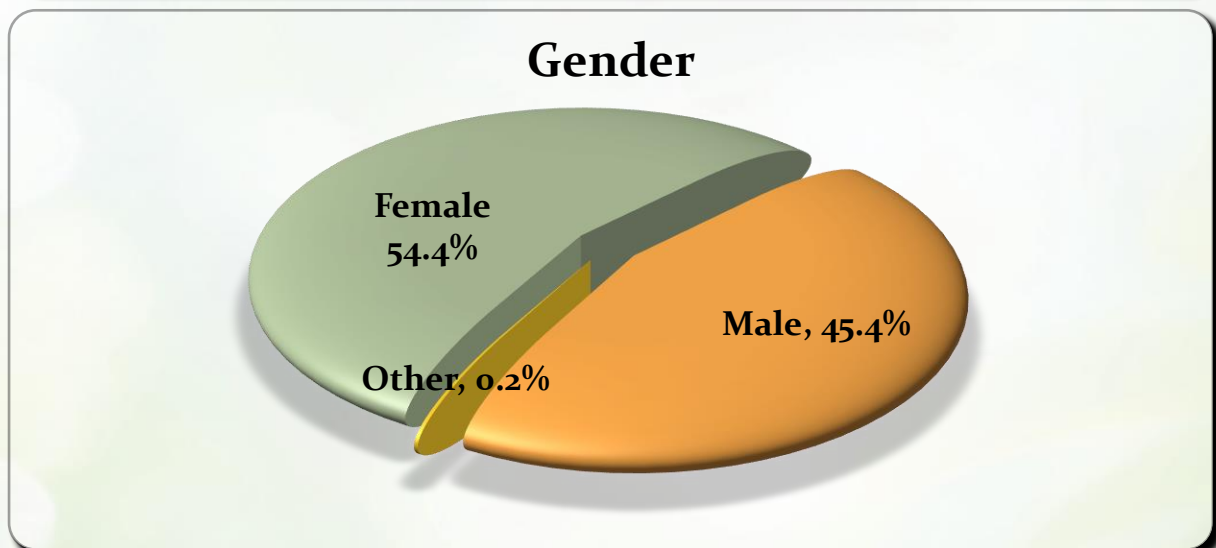
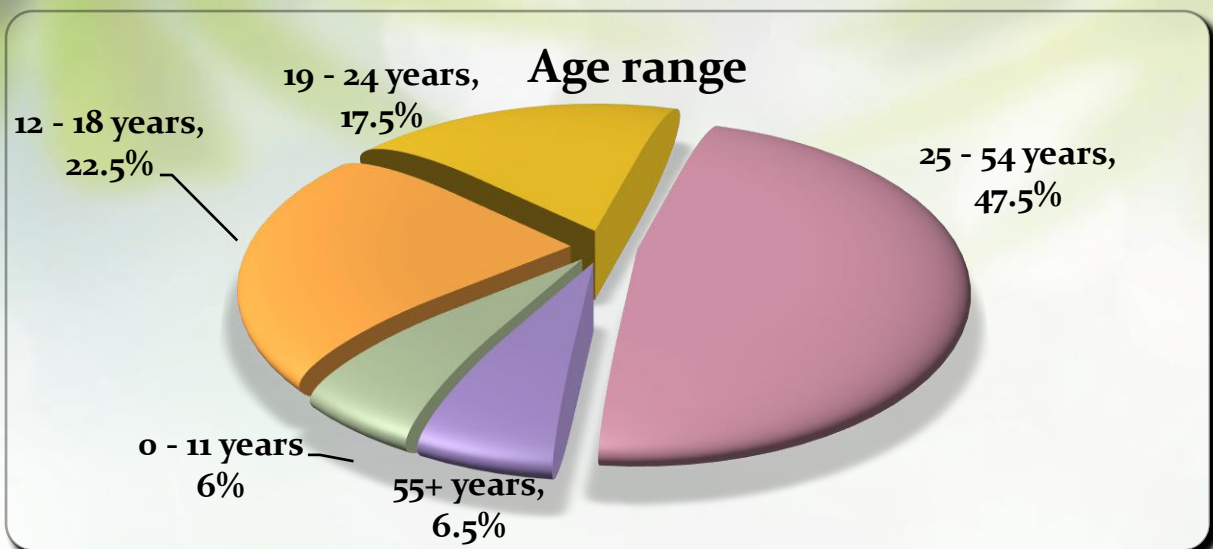
1034 Carer engagement sessions

635 New referrals for counselling

4827 Participants involved in 378 group sessions

21% Clients were people seeking asylum





# Healing

Trauma can affect the way that people think and act and can overwhelm their ability to cope and engage with others. Unresolved trauma affects physical, mental and spiritual health. Without support, the impacts of torture and trauma can last for many years and people may unknowingly pass on the effects of trauma to future generations. Our focus on healing is about ensuring that the impacts of torture and trauma are not a barrier to wellbeing and meaningful participation in family and community life.

QPASTT has provided specialised counselling services to refugee survivors of torture and trauma since our inception. While individual and family counselling are integral to recovery, it is an intervention that sits alongside community-based healing.

QPASTT's therapeutic framework is based on a model of trauma recovery that includes stages of establishing safety, carefully exploring past trauma, and building connections to people and place now. QPASTT counsellors use a range of modalities and techniques in therapeutic work, while prioritising the unique needs of their clients. In the past year we supported 1582 people through 6739 specialised trauma recovery counselling sessions.

*"Healing is being free from or having recovered from mental and physical pain."*

This year has continued to see complex trauma presentations in both newly arrived and established clients, with particular complexity in children and young people engaged in counselling. The impact of offshore immigration detention policies continues to bring challenges to our work with asylum seekers. For many people seeking asylum, their daily life can be dominated by prolonged uncertainty of their visa status as well as financial precarity. QPASTT works closely with a range of agencies to holistically meet the needs of people seeking asylum.

## Recovery Goals

- To restore safety and enhance control and reduce the disabling effects of fear and anxiety.
- To restore attachment and connections to other human beings, and a sense of belonging.
- To restore meaning, identity and justice.
- To restore dignity and value and reduce shame and guilt.

*Source: Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture.*



From March 2020, QPASTT staff adapted their support to specifically respond to COVID-19 related need. This included:

- ✚ Support to manage psychological stressors in adults and children including: fear and anxiety for self as well as family here and overseas; grief and loss for those who have lost family overseas due to COVID-19; economic and food insecurity due to unemployment; financial debt incurred due to COVID-19; family and household relationship stressors.
- ✚ Support to re-establish normalized daily living in context of restrictions and social distancing including: support to ensure that trauma re-triggering is not a barrier to daily living; re-integration back into schooling for children and youth with high levels of anxiety; re-establishment of 'online' social connections to reduce social isolation; support to re-engage with primary health care for those with exacerbation of anxiety and depression which may be impacting on their management of chronic health conditions.
- ✚ Crisis interventions to address issues of suicidality, domestic and family violence, child safety, and alcohol and drug use.
- ✚ Innovation in ensuring continuation of close interaction with children, young people, parents and caregivers. Digital inequity has been a barrier to service delivery across our client groups, children and youth in particular. Lack of access to devices, technology and data impacted on home schooling as well as our ability to service our clients. For this reason, the adaption to remote servicing has been most difficult for counsellors and youth workers working with younger children and youth at risk. Counsellors frequently use play therapy methodologies, which have needed to be significantly adapted. Despite these challenges, our counsellors and youth workers have been able to maintain contact and support children and young people during this critical period.

*"When you talk about your experience you may not be so triggered... you may not feel such intense reactions as in the past"*

*"Healing is having a sense of collective understanding - it's being with people who have been through the same thing as you... the community you are part of heals with you and helps you heal"*

# Belonging

*"Like I said, it's not always the same because not all people are like that, sometimes we are very happy 'oh, I feel like I belong here, this and that' and sometimes, when things like that happens [discrimination], it's like it remains with you for 2-3 months and it remains in your head like just going over and over again, because at that time I couldn't even say anything to him, like I should have said something there but then it's like...what do we say in that situation, that in some way, it's true? like, we just accept it that way. But then when I went back home, I was like 'oh, why didn't I say something, oh...I should have said this and that!' Like you know, it just stays there for 2-3 months so I think it's going up and down like when you meet people, it changes. Sometimes, I'm like 'oh, I belong here' because you get all the equal rights, like studying and doing this and that, but then when that kind of thing happened it's like you go down."*

*(Young person, Belonging research project)*

A sense of belonging to people, place and culture is an important contributor to the recovery and wellbeing of people from refugee backgrounds. Without belonging, safety is not felt, and a sense of safety is fundamental for healing. In this way, healing and belonging are interconnected.

Community and group work are integral to our recovery model. We work across refugee communities through a range of activities that promote community-based healing. Through our group programs, we support our clients and communities to feel at home (place-belongingness) and feel socially included (socio-spatial belongingness). We do this by focusing on:

- Nourishing mind, body and spirit.
- Movement including a range of physical activities.
- Relaxation including deep breathing, yoga and focusing on sleep.
- Connection and building friendship and belonging.
- Discovering new thinking and new ways.
- Creativity through music, arts, drama.

Throughout 2019-2020, QPASTT delivered 378 group sessions involving 4827 participants.

*"If there is someone in the community who is not able to process their healing, then the whole community may be affected... perhaps the community may also not be able to heal."*



Over the past year, we also held a number of consultations with young people from a diversity of backgrounds to inform the development of QPASTT Youth Strategy. Additionally, in early 2020 we conducted a small research project to document young people's perspectives about the factors that promote or hinder belonging. The main factors that promote belonging included:

- Family and interpersonal relationships, including the presence of a significant and caring person;
- A supportive school environment;
- Having access to equal rights, including the right to be an Australian citizen;
- Participation in education, employment, sports and recreational activities.

On the other hand, the following factors hinder belonging:

- Experiences of racism, discrimination and bullying;
- An unsupportive school environment where teachers and peers have low expectations regarding young people from refugee backgrounds' ability to succeed and undertake further education;
- Difficulties learning English and the challenges of navigating a new culture and environment.



# Thriving

*"If our parents are healing ... we will have the best opportunity to thrive."*

Disadvantaged social and economic conditions compound the effects of trauma. Additionally, it is frequently the case that people will not prioritise their own healing if they are concerned about the social or economic wellbeing of themselves or their children. QPASTT's focus on thriving is about addressing social and economic conditions so that they are not a barrier to healing. We do this through community engagement and working with communities to build opportunities. We also do this through community-based projects that enhance knowledge and skills including through the delivery of group programs in the community and in partnership with TAFE Queensland. In the past year, supported children and young people within 37 schools across Queensland.

Our strong focus of our work involves reducing the impacts of intergenerational trauma through a focus on children and youth from refugee backgrounds. Many children and young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced direct or indirect trauma as a result of persecution and conflict. For some young people this includes witnessing injury and death to family and close others. For the young people who were engaged with counselling at QPASTT, over 80% have experienced traumatic grief and stress. Therefore, the goal of our child and youth support is to ensure that their own or their family's trauma does not become a barrier to their growing, learning and thriving in Australia.

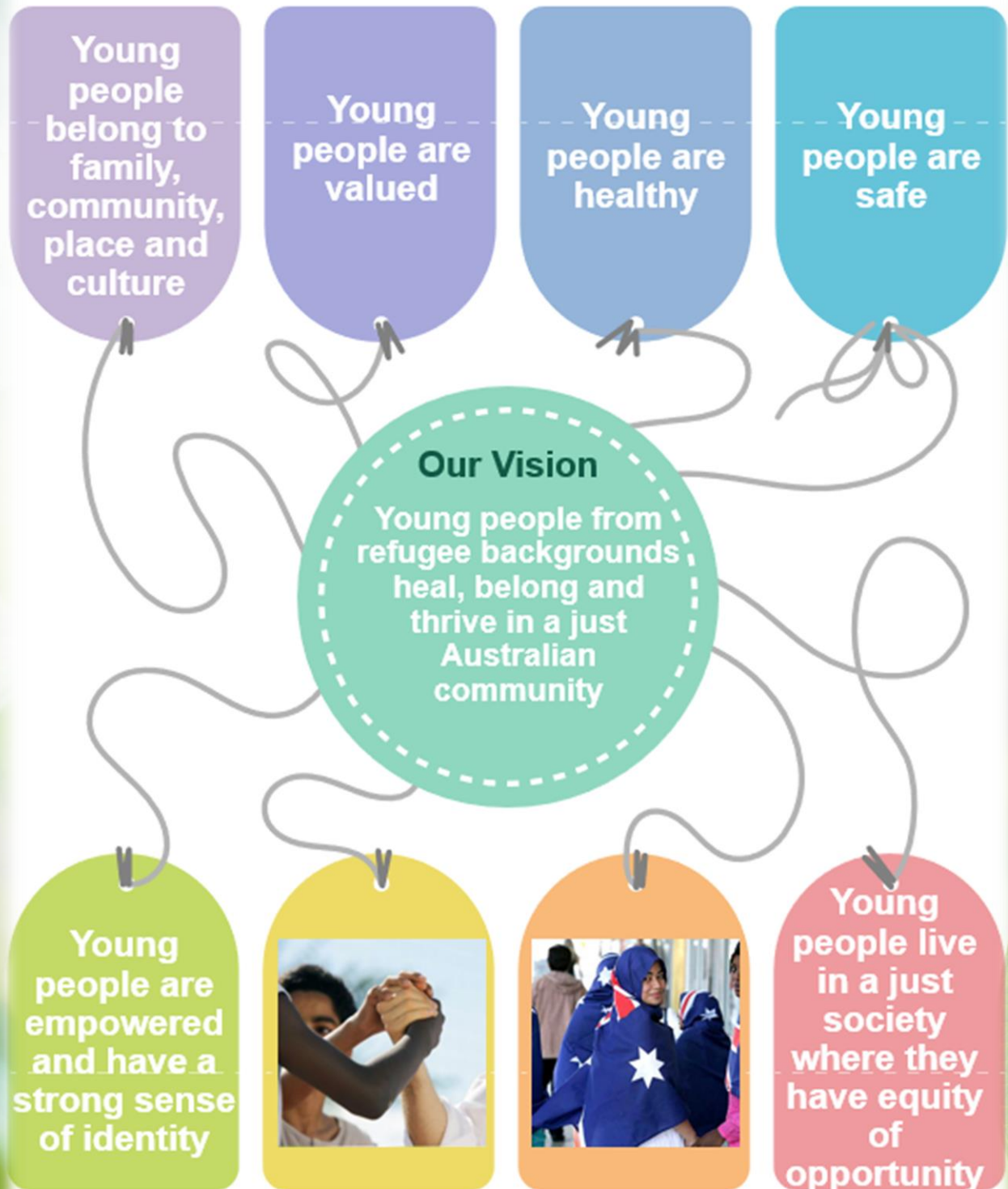


In the past year, we undertook consultation with young people from refugee backgrounds to inform the development of our youth strategy. Of significance, young people emphasised their need to feel safe, belong and have their dual identity valued. They also stressed the importance of engaging their parents in healing as well as the critical role that schools play for their thriving.

*"Having shelter and rights and opportunities - if we have basic rights, we feel like we belong."*



# Our Youth Strategy



# Justice

*"We need to be treated justly ... it's a constant battle to ask for rights."*

QPASTT's approach to restoring justice for those who have experienced persecution, torture, displacement and other human rights violations includes building the capacity of systems and services to respond to the needs and aspirations of survivors, and undertaking research, evaluation and (individual and systemic) advocacy.

## Sector Development

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019-2020, QPASTT delivered 98 education and training sessions to improve sector capacity to be refugee trauma informed. These training sessions involved 1,214 participants. Some of the sessions were delivered to 14 schools. See below feedback provided by the Department of Education participants:

*"I found [the QPASTT training] very useful. Every bit of information has helped me gain more knowledge about how to deal and cope with trauma and the traumatizing events around it"*

*"This was a useful presentation... I would like to share this with my colleagues"*

In response to the questions 'What will you do differently as a result of attending this training?' some participants stated:

*"Have more empathy and understanding of what our students have possibly been through and have had to deal with"*

*"I will be able to handle situations in the classroom more effectively."*

## Research, evaluation and advocacy

As part of QPASTT Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024, we have developed a Research, Evaluation and Advocacy Strategy that aims to cultivate an organisational culture where research and evaluation improve practice and inform advocacy to assist people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive in a just Australian community. The five areas of the Research, Evaluation and Advocacy Strategy are shown below:





In addition to the research project that investigated the factors that promote or hinder belonging among young people from refugee backgrounds (see Belonging section), we have developed a research proposal (“QPASTT counselling in context”), co-designed with counsellors and the professional supervision team, to investigate the contextual factors related to the mental health and wellbeing outcomes among adult refugee survivors of trauma attending the QPASTT counselling service. The project is in partnership with Dr Kate Murray from the School of Psychology and Counselling, QUT. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the progress of this research, but we look forward to commencing it in early 2021.

Our systemic advocacy aims to amplify the voices of survivors, including asylum seekers, and influence policy and practice. We do this through submissions to government enquiries, participation in advisory committees and sector networks, and cross-agency collaborations. In 2019-2020, our efforts focused on providing input into the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. We also worked alongside key advocacy partners such as the Refugee Council of Australia, the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), the Refugee Health Network Australia (RHeaNA), the Refugee Health Network Queensland Partnership Advisory Group, the Queensland Alliance for Mental Health, and the Queensland Community Alliance.

# Our Organisation and People

## **We value diversity**

The political and policy environment in which the agency operates is ever changing, complex and difficult, however QPASTT always strives to remain dynamic and responsive. The ideals of thriving, healing and belonging that form the foundation of our work, are reflected in what our staff and Board hold close. We are a diverse and multicultural team made up of staff originating from 40 different countries, speaking over 30 languages. This diversity informs our practice and our programs and strengthens our primary aim which is to provide services that enable people to be contributing members of the community, to work, study, establish careers and build themselves a productive life. In the last year we provided services to clients from 97 different ethnicities and speaking over 69 languages. Within our service delivery model, respectful support requires interpreter assistance. This has resulted in 2923 interpreter hours.

## **We value clinical expertise**

The clinical services work within QPASTT has the purpose of ensuring that clients, families and communities receive safe and high-quality services to support refugee-related trauma recovery. This is achieved through the Professional Supervision Team delivering clinical supervision, internal education and training, risk management support, external capacity building, input into the electronic database and providing up to date internal policy and procedural guidance.

802 sessions of  
internal clinical  
supervision with  
QPASTT Staff

Over the past year, the Professional Supervision Team has provided 802 sessions of clinical supervision to QPASTT staff. Internal training that has been delivered through a combination of QPASTT staff and external presenters with the aim of improving the skills and capacity of staff covered the following topics, child safety, working with dissociation, navigating NDIS, report writing within the asylum seeker context, supporting LGBTIQ+ clients, and overview of clinical policies and practice.

## **We value safety**

In response to COVID-19, QPASTT was required to deliver remote services to clients and communities using a variety of telehealth technologies. In transitioning our service, our aim was to maintain a high level of service delivery while safeguarding the ongoing needs and safety of clients, staff and the communities we work with. In May and June 2020 we conducted an evaluation of our clients' experiences of remote interaction. When compared to face to face, 50% of clients found telehealth equally helpful, 42% not as helpful, and 8% more helpful. Some of the experiences of clients are illustrated below.



## The Positives

*"Having session by phone means I have been able to continue receiving regular counselling session despite the COVID-19 restrictions on physical distancing"*

*"Check-ups that are regular, someone asking how I'm going"*

*"WhatsApp group was very helpful, makes all feel connected and reduce isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic"*

## The Challenges

*"I feel like I connect better when the session is face to face. Face and body have to be present in the session because words are not only way to communicate"*

*"I miss the face to face contact with my counsellor as I feel calm and comfortable when I see her. There are very few people that I trust, and I miss seeing her"*

*"... I don't want to talk about my issues over the phone. My children are at home and they can hear me"*

Our partnership with community leaders around the COVID-19 pandemic was much-valued work for our staff. Feedback provided by community leaders who were part of the working group is included below:

"We can survive the pandemic because we feel are not alone – we can face it together"

"People were empowered!"  
"Communities have upskilled themselves"

"It created a spirit of partnership and collaboration using diverse skills working together"

"This gave voice to youth to step up and follow rules for own health and community"



# Acknowledgements

**Supporting survivors to recover from trauma does not occur in isolation. QPASTT works in collaboration with numerous community leaders, government and stakeholder agencies. We are very grateful for the shared dedication and mutuality of our relationships.**

QPASTT gratefully acknowledges funding from the following agencies which enabled our work in 2019-20.

- Commonwealth Department of Health
- Queensland Department of Health
- Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs
- Commonwealth Department of Social Services
- Queensland Department of Health
- Queensland Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs
- International Health and Medical Services (IHMS)
- Brisbane South and Brisbane North PHNs
- Alcohol and Drug Foundation
- Local Governments throughout Queensland.



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