



2024/2025

IMPACT REPORT

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SUPPORT OUR WORK

For over 30 years, QPASTT has been supporting people from refugee backgrounds to live lives liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights injustice. We nurture meaningful futures by assisting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive.

Your donation enables QPASTT to:

- Support the immediate needs of asylum seekers living in the community who have limited or no access to housing, medical and health services or social services.
- Deliver community-based programs that promote empowerment and social connection which are not funded by our grants and contracts.

QPASTT is a registered charity and all donations over \$2 are tax deductible.



Donate at qpastt.org.au/donate

To discuss corporate and philanthropic partnership opportunities with QPASTT, contact Sally Stewart, Co-CEO for Partnerships and Opportunity Development at sallystewart@qpastt.org.au.

About QPASTT

Founded in 1995, QPASTT (Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma) provides specialised, culturally responsive services to promote the health and wellbeing of people in Australia who have sought safety from persecution, torture and war-related trauma.

QPASTT is a non-profit company limited by guarantee and a registered charity with no political or religious affiliations. Our work is funded by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments.

QPASTT is a statewide organisation, with offices in Brisbane, Logan, Cairns, Townsville, Toowoomba and outreach services across Queensland.

QPASTT is a member of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), a network of eight specialist rehabilitation agencies that respond to the needs of survivors of torture and trauma who have come to Australia from overseas. There is a FASSTT member agency in each state and territory in Australia.

QPASTT is a member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), a global membership fighting to eradicate torture and offer health-based rehabilitation services to help torture victims rebuild their lives.

QPASTT is accredited under the National Standards for Mental Health Services.



Acknowledgement of Country



QPASTT acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land where we live and work and we pay our respects to their cultures, their ancestors and their Elders – past and present.

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, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have nurtured communities of belonging and thriving and we work in solidarity towards a future of healing and justice.

QPASTT supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart.



Our commitment to equality and inclusion

QPASTT is committed to creating a safe, inclusive and equitable environment for people from all genders, sexualities, religions and cultures – for our clients, communities and our staff.



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 values

KINDNESS

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

OPTIMISM

We believe in meaningful futures. We are committed to healing being a journey of recovery across mind, body and spirit.

PERSEVERANCE

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

FAIRNESS

We believe that recovery from trauma is about justice and that to heal is a human right. We strive to build opportunities so that survivors of torture and trauma are able to belong and thrive in the community.

HONESTY

We act openly and ethically. We are committed to delivering impactful services.

30 years of walking alongside survivors



In 2025, QPASTT proudly celebrated 30 years of walking alongside Queenslanders from refugee backgrounds. Our anniversary was marked by two special events: a reception at Government House hosted by respective QPASTT and HEAL patrons, Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM (Governor of Queensland) and Jasmina Joldić PSM, and a vibrant community celebration at the Brisbane Multicultural Centre. At Government House, QPASTT and HEAL came together with students, clients, school staff, community leaders and supporters to honour the strength, resilience and contributions of people from refugee backgrounds. Our open house celebration invited guests to experience the heart of our work through storytelling, drumming circles, expressive arts, counselling tours, cultural installations, henna and a traditional coffee ceremony.

During our formal program, Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Giri Sivaraman delivered a powerful keynote, reflecting on QPASTT's 30-year history as "love in action." Quoting bell hooks, he reminded us that love is not a feeling but an action - one that takes strength, courage and commitment. He acknowledged the bravery of QPASTT staff who sit with people in their most vulnerable moments, who walk beside survivors through healing, and who have never hesitated to call out injustices. He spoke of how global conflicts shape the lives of the people we support, and how racism and dehumanisation continue to harm refugee communities. In contrast, he said, QPASTT humanises people, recognising their resilience, value and fortitude, and acting as a lighthouse in turbulent times - "a light, fuelled by love."

We are deeply grateful to everyone who celebrated with us and helped make QPASTT's 30-year milestone meaningful. These events honoured not just our history, but the communities who have shaped QPASTT and the shared commitment to healing, belonging, thriving and justice that will guide us into the next 30 years - and beyond.

Chair's welcome

It is a privilege to present QPASTT's 2024–25 Impact Report and to reflect on a year of transformation, growth and renewed purpose.

This year, QPASTT has continued to stand firmly in its mission to nurture meaningful futures by assisting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive. Across six regions and many communities, our teams have walked alongside survivors of torture and trauma, creating spaces of safety, dignity and hope during times of great challenge.

I would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking Professor Emerita Keithia Wilson, who stepped down as Chair after more than two decades of dedicated leadership. Keithia's wisdom, compassion and vision have profoundly shaped QPASTT's journey. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Liz Gordon, outgoing Co-CEO for Practice Leadership, Service Innovation and Quality. Liz's commitment to trauma-informed, culturally responsive care, together with her passion for and expertise in play-based learning for children, leave an enduring legacy. Over her 20-year tenure at QPASTT, Liz served as a Counsellor, Clinical Supervisor and Senior Leader before stepping into the role of Co-CEO.

At the end of 2024–25, we warmly welcomed Vivienne Braddock as Co-CEO for Practice Leadership and Service Delivery, joining Sally Stewart in leading QPASTT into its next chapter. Vivienne brings more than three decades of clinical and leadership experience in transcultural mental health and will work alongside Sally to continue strengthening QPASTT's impact and reach. We were also delighted to welcome Jasmina Joldić PSM as the patron of our HEAL expressive arts therapy program. Jasmina's passion for education, her lived experience and her leadership will inspire young Queenslanders in our programs as we support them to flourish and thrive at school and in life.

This has been a year of strategic renewal. Guided by extensive consultation with staff, community leaders and partners, QPASTT launched its Strategic Plan 2025–2029, reaffirming our commitment to healing, belonging, thriving and justice. We also advanced preparations for national accreditation under the Mental Health Standards, reflecting our culture of continuous improvement and quality practice. A board renewal project was initiated to ensure the long-term strength and sustainability of our governance, while new investments in technology, research and evaluation have positioned QPASTT for a resilient and connected future.



▲ Liz Gordon (second from left), with (L-R) Sally Stewart (Co-CEO) and former CEOs/Directors of QPASTT: Tracy Worrall, Paula Peterson and Jamila Padhee.

None of this progress would be possible without the extraordinary dedication of our staff and volunteers, who embody our values of kindness, optimism, perseverance, fairness and honesty every day. Nor would it be meaningful without the courage of the individuals, families and communities who allow us to walk beside them on their healing journeys.

As we look ahead, our work remains grounded in partnership – with survivors, communities and each other. Together, we are building a future where every person who has sought safety can find belonging, and every community can thrive.

Robin Lonergan
Chair of the Board, QPASTT



From the Co-Chief Executives

2025 has been a milestone year for QPASTT – a year of both celebration and renewed strategic vision. As we mark our 30th anniversary, we honour the legacy of those who came before us; we are truly standing on the shoulders of giants. Across three decades, QPASTT staff, volunteers and champions have shown an enduring commitment to healing, belonging, thriving futures and restoring justice. As we look ahead, we remain firmly anchored in this vision.

This year has brought continued global uncertainty and volatility, which we have met with flexibility, innovation and renewal. Throughout all the changes, the QPASTT family and our partners have lived our values of kindness, optimism, perseverance, fairness and honesty. These values have kept us steadfast in our purpose. This report showcases the creative, impactful and extraordinary work undertaken by the entire QPASTT community in partnership with organisations and local communities. We are enormously proud of the work and achievements outlined here. We extend our deepest thanks to Liz Gordon (former Co-CEO) and Tanya Van Bael (Acting Co-CEO for part of 2024–25) for their strong leadership and support.

This year, we launched our new QPASTT Strategic Plan 2025–2029, developed through a deeply collaborative process involving all QPASTT teams, our Board and input from external stakeholders. **The Plan outlines an ambitious path for the next four years, guided by four strategic priorities:**

- **Service Equity and Reach** – ensuring our services are delivered where they are needed most.
- **A Clear and Committed Voice** – using our voice to share QPASTT's trauma framework and champion the rights of survivors of refugee-related torture and trauma.
- **A Workplace of Opportunity, Learning and Thriving** – ensuring QPASTT fosters and advances opportunity, learning and thriving for all staff.
- **New Knowledge and Collaboration** – welcoming new thinking, diverse perspectives and deeper collaboration to strengthen and improve our practice.

This strategic clarity is especially important at a time of continued uncertainty across our service landscape.

Following last year's significant rise, counselling referrals remained high, demonstrating ongoing unmet need across Queensland. Meanwhile, the number of people accessing our free, expanded Support Line continued to reflect the emotional and mental health impacts of global crises on multicultural communities in our state.

Our new offices in Townsville and Cairns have become critical extensions of our response, allowing us to better support regional and remote communities.

The implementation of the National Minimum Data Standards across our national FASSTT network has strengthened our ability to measure, track and respond to emerging needs – from the mental health impacts of prolonged displacement to the rising levels of family stress, trauma, grief and youth anxiety. This in turn enhances our capacity to advocate effectively and respond to increasing demand.

Yet 2025 was also defined by profound global instability. Escalating conflicts, rising displacement and reductions in international aid have placed enormous strain on social systems and on those already carrying deep scars. These pressures reverberate through the daily lives of our clients – especially young people, many of whom report increased exposure to distressing media, racism and isolation linked to global events.

In the midst of this, QPASTT's staff and partners continue the quiet, steadfast work of uncovering hope – walking alongside individuals, families and communities in their healing journeys through acts of kindness, compassion and advocacy.

Sally Stewart &
Vivienne Braddock
Co-Chief Executive Officers



CFO's report

QPASTT's total revenue increased to \$15.47 million in FY25 (up from \$12.9 million in FY24), delivering a net operating surplus of \$1.3 million (compared with \$1.16 million in FY24). This growth reflects continued expansion of federal and state contracts, alongside carried-forward funds from various programs.

In 2024–25, 76% of total revenue was allocated to wages and other staff-related expenses, including leave provisions, superannuation, professional development and training. QPASTT employed approximately 150 staff across a range of roles and locations throughout the year.

Significant investment was made in IT systems and data management to strengthen compliance with government contracts and enhance the security of client information. Several QPASTT offices also underwent essential repairs and storm-proofing works, contributing to an increase in depreciation expenses in FY25.

QPASTT finalised its Strategic Plan 2025–2029, positioning the organisation for sustained growth and innovation. With strong financial performance and better-than-expected surpluses, QPASTT is well-placed to invest in its people, systems and strategic priorities to ensure long-term sustainability.

In FY26, QPASTT will continue to prioritise investment in staff capability and digital systems, while strengthening partnerships with like-minded organisations and deepening engagement across communities.

QPASTT continues to maintain a healthy financial position, with current assets more than double current liabilities (ratio 2.26), demonstrating a strong level of liquidity and the ability to meet short-term obligations.

Our 2024–25 audited financial statements, prepared by Haywards Chartered Accountants, comply with Australian Accounting Standards, and the audit report was unqualified.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to all our funders and partners for their ongoing trust and support. Your commitment continues to make a positive difference in the recovery journeys of our clients and communities.

Angela Ng
CFO



Community drumming circles were a hit at our Brisbane Open House to celebrate our 30th anniversary.



Outgoing Co-CEO Liz Gordon adds her handprint to artwork in our community garden.

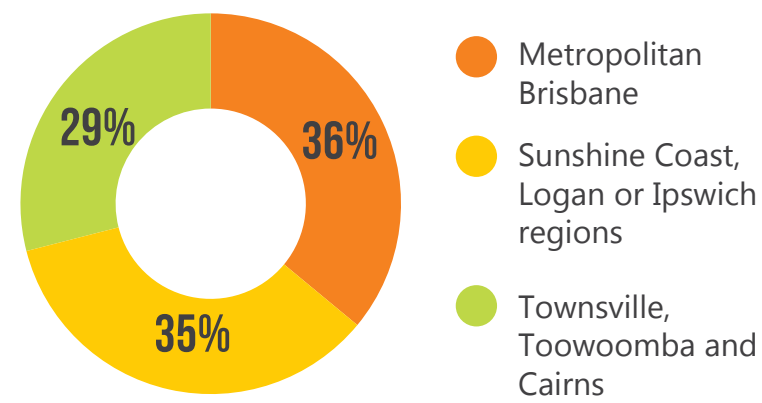


We welcomed Jasmina Joldić PSM (at right) as patron of our HEAL expressive arts therapy charity.

Key figures in 2024-2025

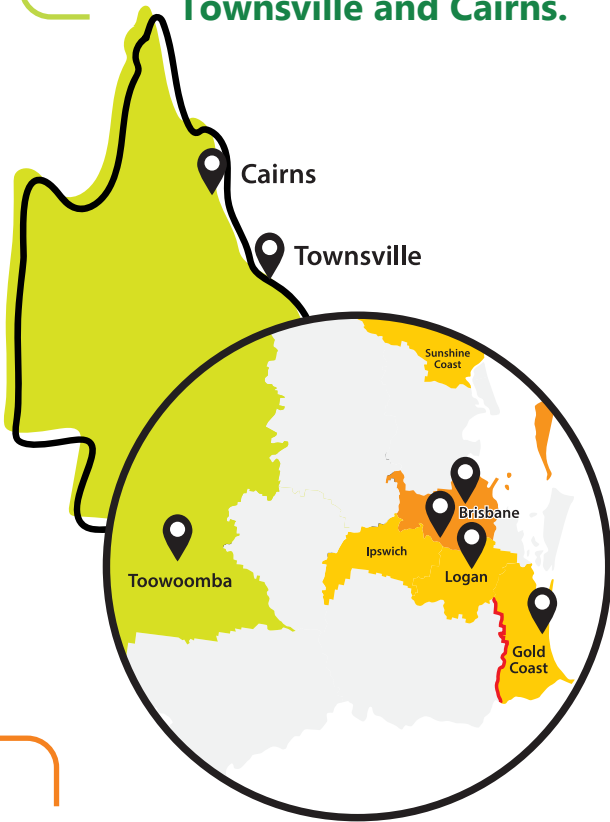
We supported **2,526** individuals across all our individual, family and group services, providing **15,369** occasions of service.

CLIENT DISTRIBUTION by Region

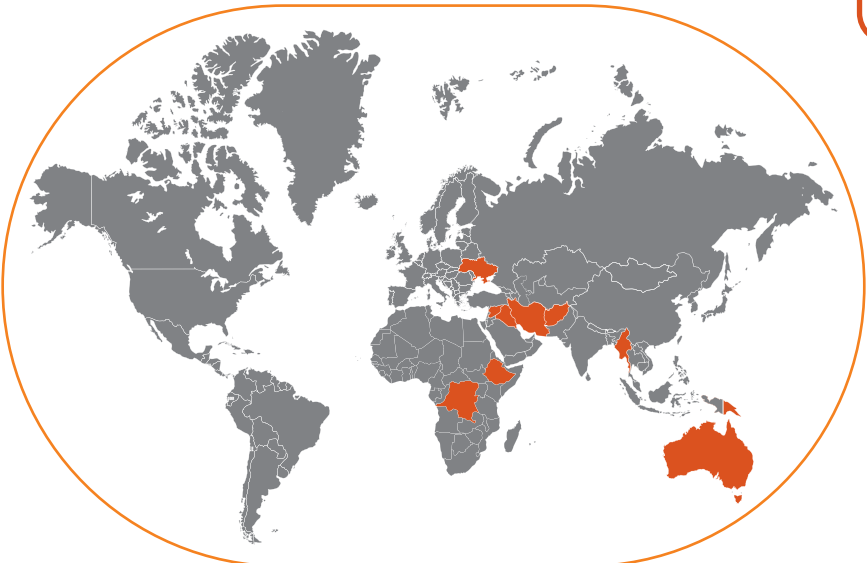


QPASTT provided services across **7** major service delivery locations:

Brisbane, Inala, Logan, Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns.



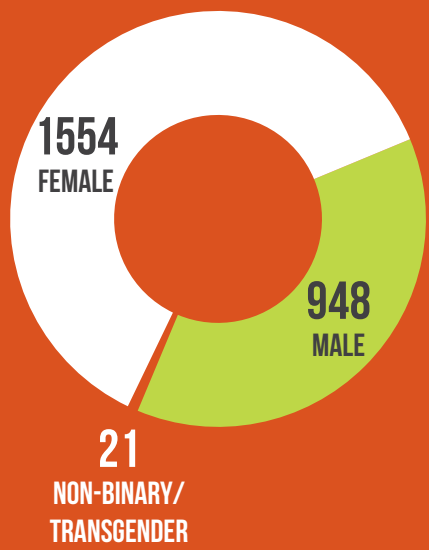
Our clients span **98** countries of origin.



Top 10 countries of origin

1. Afghanistan
2. Iraq
3. Iran
4. Democratic Republic of Congo
5. Syria
6. Papua New Guinea
7. Australia
8. Myanmar
9. Sudan
10. Burundi

GENDER BREAKDOWN



We received **2,184** new counselling referrals.

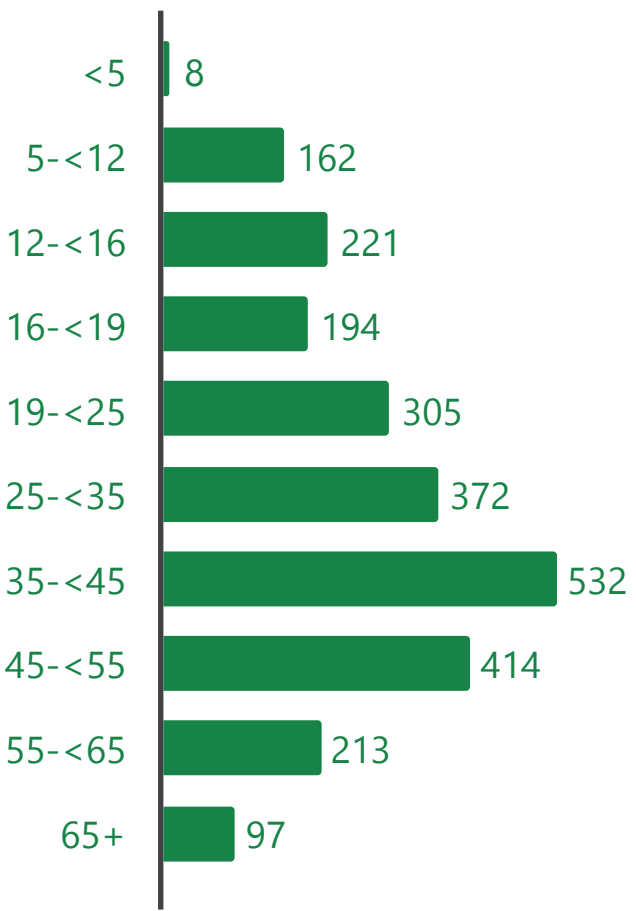
We supported **279** people seeking asylum.

Our Support Line provided an average of **55** hours of support to callers per month.

35% of our counselling clients were children or young people aged 25 years and under.



AGE BREAKDOWN



We grew our community of supporters across social media by

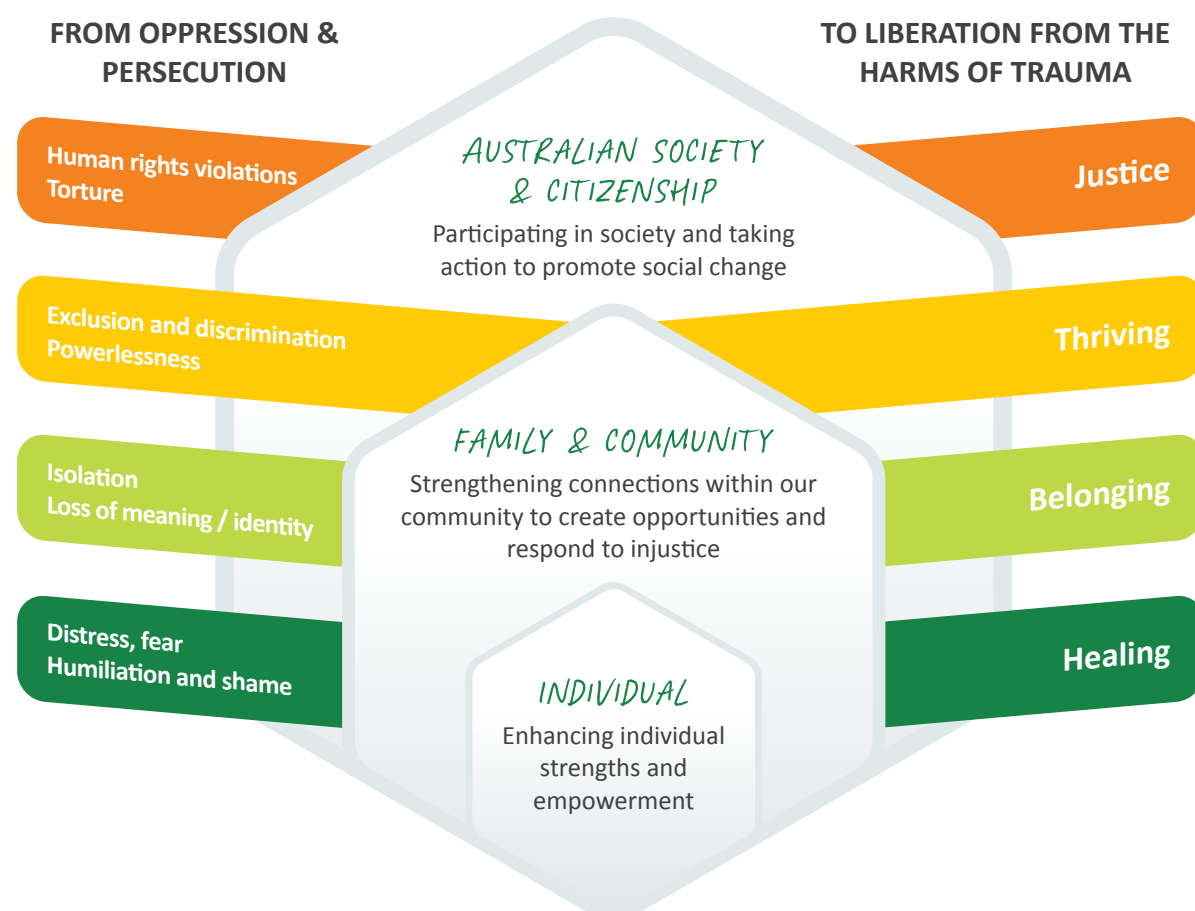


17%



Towards liberation – QPASTT's trauma recovery framework

Our refugee trauma recovery framework



QPASTT's recovery framework is inspired by the philosophy of liberation. It recognises that persecution and torture are forms of intentional harm, oppression and exploitation of people through mechanisms of violence and intimidation within systems that fail to offer protection. Recovery from the impacts of torture and trauma is therefore a process of restoring safety, justice and autonomy across the domains of individual, family, community and society.

QPASTT articulates this process through the principles of:

- **Healing the past** - supporting survivors' recovery across mind, body and spirit.
- **Building belonging** - to people, place and culture so that survivors can feel safe.
- **Nurturing thriving futures** - by ensuring that individuals and families from refugee backgrounds experience positive social and economic conditions so that the risks of intergenerational trauma can be reduced.
- **Restoring justice** - empowering services and local communities to overcome barriers to the aspirations of survivors of torture and trauma.

Our challenge

Oppression, persecution and human rights violations can affect daily living and shatter trust in humanity.

A survivor's ability to recover from trauma is impacted by:

- Feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, grief, distress, fear, humiliation, guilt, and shame.
- Separation from family, isolation and stigma within communities.
- Social and economic disadvantage and lack of opportunity.
- Discrimination and negative public opinion, including in Australian society.

Our opportunity

Working together with refugee and local communities, we can:

- ✓ Reduce stigma and support people to heal from the impacts of trauma.
- ✓ Build safety and connection so that people feel a sense of belonging.
- ✓ Support individuals, families and communities by creating opportunities for them to thrive.
- ✓ Advocate for community empathy and justice for survivors.



Our response:

Collaborating for impact

QPASTT centres partnership and collaboration with clients, communities and service providers. Together, we address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health and wellbeing so that each survivor has access to the resources they need to recover from torture and trauma.

Building health confidence in North Queensland's communities - collaboration with True Health Services

North Queensland is home to a diverse refugee community, including people from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Bhutan, Karen State, Papua New Guinea and Afghanistan. Families range from new parents with infants to older adults in their 60s and 70s.

Many families told QPASTT they found it difficult to access healthcare in Australia. Some were unsure what services were available or how to use them; others had negative experiences that made them reluctant to seek help again.

To address this, QPASTT partnered with True Health Services to deliver five community health education workshops. The sessions provided practical, culturally safe information about contraception, reproductive health, pregnancy options and how to access local services.

QPASTT staff worked closely with community leaders, church groups and interpreters to promote participation and ensure learning was accessible. One facilitator from the Karen community tailored content to meet the needs of an older audience no longer eligible for settlement services.

Across the five workshops, 43 participants attended from communities including Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Myanmar, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. People asked questions, shared their own experiences and spoke openly about topics often considered private or sensitive.

Participants said they valued being able to learn in a safe and respectful environment and felt empowered to ask questions. They reported feeling more confident about navigating the health system and better informed about their health and wellbeing. The sessions also strengthened trust between refugee communities, QPASTT and local health services.

True Health Services shared:

“Engagement was high, with participants asking questions and sharing thoughts throughout the session. Group discussions helped create a safe, supportive space for learning. Participants showed a strong willingness to learn and valued the opportunity to speak openly about health in a respectful and culturally sensitive environment.”

Embedding trauma-informed practice with Refugee and Immigration Legal Services (RAILS)

For people who have survived war, persecution and displacement, the legal system can be confusing and distressing. Trauma can affect memory, concentration and communication, making it harder to access justice and feel safe within legal processes.

In 2024-25, QPASTT partnered with Refugee and Immigration Legal Services (RAILS) to strengthen trauma-informed practice across the organisation. A QPASTT Clinical Supervisor was embedded in RAILS as a Trauma-Informed Practice Development Advisor, helping to integrate trauma-informed principles into daily practice, client engagement, and staff wellbeing.

Through reflective practice and shared learning, RAILS staff built confidence in recognising the impacts of trauma on clients and learned practical strategies to create safer, more supportive interactions. The partnership also increased awareness of indirect trauma exposure among legal staff and strengthened internal processes to sustain their wellbeing.

QPASTT gained valuable insight into legal frameworks and processes, enhancing our staff capability to write clear, effective reports and to support clients navigating complex legal systems.

Early outcomes include:

- Improved client engagement through trauma-informed approaches.
- More coordinated responses between legal and mental health services.
- Healthier and more sustainable systems for staff wellbeing.

This partnership demonstrates how collaboration between legal and mental health professionals can build safer, more just systems. By embedding trauma-informed practice, RAILS and QPASTT are restoring safety, agency and trust for survivors - and supporting the wellbeing of those who walk alongside them.

Walking in Solidarity - supporting intercultural connection with refugee survivors and First Nations Australians

In Cairns, QPASTT partnered with Mungabana Indigenous Art Gallery to strengthen relationships between refugee and First Nations communities. The collaboration aimed to build understanding, empathy, and solidarity - creating spaces where young people could learn from one another's histories and experiences.

Through QPASTT's Youth Drop-In program at Trinity Bay State High School, Mungabana artists led an art workshop exploring shared stories of resilience and belonging. Around 20 young people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds attended during their lunch break, engaging in art-making and conversation that connected their personal journeys with those of First Nations peoples.

The workshop introduced students to the history, culture, and resilience of First Nations peoples while highlighting shared experiences of colonisation, displacement, and strength across both communities. It also provided an opportunity for young people to reflect on their own journeys and recognise the common threads of survival, community, and hope.

The session fostered respectful dialogue and empathy between young people, the school and the wider community. Teachers and facilitators observed improved relationships, greater curiosity about one another's stories, and a growing sense of pride and belonging among participants.

The success of this collaboration has opened pathways for ongoing intercultural learning, creative exchange, and partnership - continuing to strengthen harmony and inclusion across Cairns communities.

Workers' Rights Education and Support Program

The Workers' Rights Education and Support Program began in 2022 in response to community-identified concerns about exploitation and abuse in the workplace. Delivered in partnership with Multicultural Australia and the Queensland Community Alliance, and funded by Multicultural Affairs Queensland, the project strengthens awareness of workplace rights and access to support for people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Drawing on QPASTT's trauma-informed expertise, 72 community members across Queensland were trained, mentored, and debriefed as Workers' Rights Champions within their own communities. Training built skills in community listening, understanding the wellbeing impacts of workplace exploitation, and increasing knowledge of laws, protections, advocacy and referral pathways.

In 2024-25, QPASTT and partners delivered four training sessions for 14 new Champions from Toowoomba, Darling Downs and Ipswich who subsequently delivered sessions to 179 community members. QPASTT also provided individual support to six community members facing complex workplace situations and held five coordination meetings to strengthen collaboration and shared learning.

To date, the project has reached over 2,900 community members through workshops and informal education. By equipping Champions to educate, advocate and support others, the project is creating safer, fairer workplaces - and building community wellbeing, resilience and confidence to stand up against exploitation.



Sector development and capacity building

Through trauma-informed and culturally safe tailored training packages, QPASTT's training team builds the capacity of services and individuals to understand the impact of trauma on clients and community members and how they can develop trauma-responsive services, systems and practices.

QPASTT training delivers evidence-based knowledge and skills about trauma recovery through storytelling and creativity. This includes concrete examples of concepts, strategies, interventions, and tools to enhance the knowledge, skills, and behaviour of professionals working across these fields.

This year, demand for QPASTT training was significant due to an increased focus on trauma-responsive workplaces by the Federal Government and requests from schools to strengthen their capability to respond to the needs of students in the classroom.

In 2024-25, QPASTT delivered training to over 2,145 participants from the education, tertiary, health, police, government, community and faith sectors.

For organisations that engaged QPASTT to deliver a series of training sessions:

- 95% of participants were very satisfied with our training.
- 92% of participants rated the training as very relevant.
- 94% of participants reported they are very likely to apply skills and knowledge to their personal and professional lives.
- 100% of participants stated that the training team created a safe training environment.



Hear from a Lived-Experience Trainer:

*Many people providing frontline services have limited understanding of the impacts of refugee trauma. Misconceptions, **unconscious bias*** and racism can still shape how people from refugee backgrounds are seen and treated. These experiences can feel deeply unjust and undermine a person's sense of belonging.*

As trainers, we help participants understand the refugee and settlement journey, and why justice and belonging matter.

Lived experience humanises what can otherwise feel abstract - the idea of "a refugee" or "a person seeking asylum." Sharing our stories, and creating safe spaces for others to share theirs, allows a deeper connection and richer learning experience. It helps people connect to our shared humanity and reflect on how they might feel if they were in the same situation. "

- Nima Doostkhah
Training Officer

▲ Training officer Nima Doostkhah shares his lived expertise at a storytelling session as part of QPASTT's 30th anniversary celebrations.

***Unconscious bias:**
Unconscious *favouritism towards or prejudice against* people of a particular ethnicity, gender, or social group that influences one's actions or perceptions.

(Oxford English Dictionary)



▲ Third Queer Culture members at Brisbane Pride.

Survivor-led initiatives: Third Queer Culture

Third Queer Culture (TQC) is a peer-led social group for LGBTIQ+ people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds, providing a safe and inclusive space where participants can embrace both their cultural identity and gender or sexual identity.

With gender and sexuality still sensitive topics in many communities, TQC activities help reduce isolation, foster social connection, and strengthen wellbeing. Through a strong partnership with QPASTT, the group has grown into a vibrant peer network of more than 50 members, offering mentorship, community leadership, and advocacy opportunities.

In 2024-25, QPASTT supported TQC through 45 hours of mentorship and nine peer leader meetings, helping to strengthen governance, event planning, and referral pathways. Together, the partnership achieved:

- Twelve community events and weekly English classes, attended by 127 participants.
- Seven training sessions and a sector forum delivered with partners including Queensland Health, Queensland African Communities Council, and LGBTIQ+ Health.
- Development of three practitioner and community resources: a Culturally Sensitive Communication Guide, STI Testing and Nurse-Led Clinic Guide, and a Practitioner Guide for Working with Interpreters.
- One-to-one peer support and drop-in sessions for 20 individuals, including young people, to help navigate identity, safety, culture, family, and community participation. These sessions also addressed mental health and wellbeing, the impacts of trauma, and access to health and gender-affirming care. They supported people with education and employment pathways, legal and migration support, housing, and financial and crisis assistance - issues identified through a year of individual engagement and community connection.

The collaboration also appointed a part-time Peer Coordinator to strengthen leadership within the group and support casework and referrals for education, employment, and wellbeing.

Through this partnership, QPASTT and TQC continue to build visibility, safety, and belonging for queer-identifying people from refugee backgrounds - ensuring every individual has the freedom to live, connect, and thrive as their whole self.

Hear from Saina, Third Queer Culture's Peer Coordinator:

"I'm a community member, peer support worker, educator and advocate. My work is grounded in lived experience - the knowledge that comes from being part of this community and understanding its struggles firsthand. I hope to use my lived expertise to create change: to shape systems that truly see us, support us, and stand beside us."

Through one-on-one peer consultations, I walk alongside people at every stage of their settlement and healing journeys - whether that's helping someone apply for a driver's licence or advocating with them when they face discrimination or injustice from mainstream service providers.

Often, our peers don't feel safe or understood in mainstream services, where there's little awareness of queer identity.

At the same time, within LGBTIQ+ spaces, there's often a lack of understanding about cultural identity, faith or the refugee journey.

Third Queer Culture bridges those gaps. We bring an intersectional lens - recognising the multiple layers of stress experienced by queer people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds. We work to create trauma-informed, inclusive practice and to show the collective care that holds this community together - standing with and for one another in our right to safety, belonging and pride."

- Saina Avesta

Peer Leader and Peer Coordinator



▲ Training Officer and TQC Peer Coordinator Saina Avesta co-presenting at the Queensland Alliance for Mental Health Conference, sharing reflections of intersectional practice with queer-identifying refugees and people seeking asylum.

Our response:

Healing the past

Healing the past is a journey of recovery across mind, body and spirit. QPASTT supports recovery from trauma for individuals, families and communities by providing compassionate counselling where everyone:

- Feels safe, welcome and understood
- Is assisted with their needs and aspirations
- Is supported in their individual and family recovery journey

Trauma recovery goals

The therapeutic framework of QPASTT's interpersonal, family, group and community interventions is guided by the Refugee Trauma Recovery Goals of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture:

1. Restore safety, agency and control.

2. Restore attachment and connection to others and enhance belonging and trust.

3. Restore meaning and purpose to life and rebuild identity.

4. Restore dignity and a sense of value.

These goals are not in a hierarchy of importance. However, establishing psychological and physical safety is the foundation on which all other trauma recovery work is built.

Measuring wellbeing at QPASTT

At QPASTT, we measure the impact of our work on client wellbeing using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index - a short, trusted questionnaire developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The tool asks five simple, non-invasive questions about how someone has felt over the past two weeks - for example whether they have felt cheerful, rested or interested in things.

We use the WHO-5 at intake and at regular intervals during counselling and our community-based programs. This allows us to track changes in subjective wellbeing over time, helping us see whether our support is translating into real improvements in how people feel, engage and thrive.

Because the WHO-5 has been translated into many languages and used globally, it is a reliable, culturally responsive way for us to assess wellbeing across diverse refugee and multicultural communities.

A client's counselling journey with QPASTT

1. Intake and Connection

QPASTT's Intake and Connect Team provides the first point of contact for people referred to our services. The team conducts initial assessments, triages clients to counselling or group programs, and offers brief interventions, incidental counselling, and advocacy support. QPASTT also operates a free Support Line during business hours, offering information, advice and referral assistance to callers from refugee backgrounds, as well as consultation for service providers supporting refugee clients.

In 2024-25, QPASTT received 2,184 new referrals, and our Support Line and duty service across all programs provided an average of 55 hours of support each month - connecting individuals, families and professionals with timely, trauma-informed assistance.

Intake Groups helping to respond to high demand for QPASTT support

In Southeast Queensland...

To help provide earlier support to people on our counselling waitlist, QPASTT piloted a five-session recovery-focused group using techniques of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for Afghan clients in Logan. The group gave participants psychoeducation and practical tools to handle difficult thoughts and emotions. Sessions covered grounding, mindfulness, self-compassion, and values-based living, with several participants reporting they no longer needed individual counselling afterwards.

In Toowoomba...

QPASTT offered a Psychoeducation and Welcome Group for people on the counselling or intake waitlist. With demand far greater than capacity in the region, this group provided early support, helping participants understand common trauma symptoms, the refugee and settlement experience, and where to find help in the community. Delivered in-language with cultural support, the sessions normalised common trauma responses and built connections between newly arrived refugees and local services. This flexible approach can be set up quickly in response to emerging needs and helps QPASTT identify common themes among clients on the waitlist, guiding the design of future targeted programs.



▲ Ronald Sanchez, Intake and Connect Practitioner and Group Facilitator

"It's okay to feel difficult and uncomfortable feelings – that is just part of being human. What Acceptance and Commitment Therapy can offer survivors is techniques to find meaning and purpose despite those difficult emotions."

- Ronald Sanchez
Intake and Connect Practitioner and Group Facilitator

2 . Psychosocial Assessment

At the commencement of counselling, clients participate in a comprehensive psychosocial assessment, completed over several sessions. This trauma-informed process enables practitioners to sensitively understand each person's background, needs, mental health symptoms, and cultural perspectives. It informs a collaboratively developed therapeutic plan and cultural formulation, which is regularly reviewed with the client as well as QPASTT's Clinical Supervisors.

In 2024-25, QPASTT completed 452 psychosocial assessments. The most common issues identified across all age groups were:

- Separation from family.
- Concern for family overseas.
- Physical health issues.
- Social isolation.
- Settlement challenges.

3 . Counselling

QPASTT's Counsellor/Advocate model integrates therapeutic counselling with advocacy (with or on behalf of clients) to external services - ensuring immediate needs are met while supporting long-term recovery and upholding self-determination. Our counsellors use a person-centred, integrative approach, tailoring therapeutic modalities to each client's goals, needs and cultural context.

At the heart of the process is the development of relational safety and trust, which supports both skill-building in coping strategies, as well as deeper trauma processing when appropriate. Clients are referred to other QPASTT programs or to external services when additional support is required. Co-management with other health professionals occurs where complex or severe needs are present, and goals and progress are reviewed with all clients every ten sessions to ensure responsive, effective care.

IN 2024-25,
a sample of **92** clients recorded a
72% improvement in wellbeing,
demonstrating the effectiveness of
QPASTT's trauma-informed, recovery-
focused approach.



Reconnecting body, mind and heart: Somatic pathways to healing

QPASTT offers a range of body-based therapies grounded in the understanding that trauma is held not only in memory but in the body itself. These approaches draw from traditional healing practices, yoga, Daoism, Buddhism, mindfulness and polyvagal theory alongside contemporary neurophysiology and psychoneuroimmunology. Together, they recognise what many cultures have always known: there is no separation between mind, body and our environment.

To cope with distress and the impacts of trauma, many people learn to suppress their feelings, which can lead to disconnection from the body and a reduced ability to experience joy, pleasure or relief. For people who have survived chronic danger, displacement and fear, the body often becomes a source of pain (feeling too much) or numbness (loss of feeling). While cognitive therapy alone can sometimes pull clients back into traumatic memory, somatic therapies help clients learn to attune and safely reconnect with their body and nervous system, reducing symptoms and fostering a sense of safety and embodied empowerment.

In practice, somatic work includes yoga-informed therapy, breathwork, grounding, sensory exploration and movement-based activities such as mindful walking or using body socks. These modalities gently counter the powerlessness of trauma by giving clients safe choices in the present moment: for example, choices about how to breathe, how to move, how to notice their heartbeat, or how to reconnect with their feet. Through curiosity and experimentation, people learn to take effective action in their bodies again, strengthening neural pathways, widening their window of tolerance and building a kinder, more trusting relationship with their bodies.

"There is an inherent sadness that can dwell within a body of unshed tears - memories of the past stored deep within. Sadness settles in the breath and the body, especially when we have not had safe, attuned experiences of letting our emotions be witnessed and released. Psychoneuroimmunology (studies in the interactions between psychological processes and the nervous, endocrine and immune systems) helps us to understand this, asking us to be vulnerable with our pain rather than cover it as we often need to do for survival."

I like to think of this work as if one is an astronomer of grief and pain - gently peering, with curiosity, through the darkness of what the body holds.

We're not seeking neat closure; we're helping people learn to listen to, and form a safe, compassionate relationship with, their own mind-body-heart. "

-Lori Waghorn
Counsellor/Advocate

The role of Counsellor/Advocates in group work



"Group work powerfully complements counselling by reducing isolation and showing participants they are not alone in their struggles. Shared stories, practical skills and peer connection help to build belonging and resilience. While recovery groups are structured and goal-focused, social connection groups offer ongoing spaces of safety, comfort and cultural connection - particularly important for people facing language barriers or loneliness."

Having a counsellor present in group work is invaluable. Group spaces can be unpredictable. Emotions can shift quickly, especially when global events or community tensions are close to people's lived experience. In these moments, a counsellor helps to hold and contain what arises, steadying the space so people feel seen and safe.

For me, this work is deeply personal. As someone from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, and with my own experience of settling in a new country and becoming a refugee, I understand the challenges many of our clients face. I know the courage it takes to start over, to learn a new language, to navigate a new system. When clients recognise that I share aspects of their journey, it helps to build safety, trust and connection, which is the foundation for healing. I feel privileged to bring that lived experience and understanding to my work. "

-Viktoria Fomina
**Counsellor/Advocate and Co-Facilitator of the
Ukrainian Health and Wellbeing Group**

4 . Exiting counselling

When clients are ready, counsellors work collaboratively with them to develop a planned exit strategy that supports continued wellbeing and access to community or peer supports.

QPASTT's counselling services remain highly effective, with 79% of clients achieving recovery and discharge within 12 months of commencing counselling. This reflects our focus on building resilience, self-agency and sustainable recovery outcomes.

5 . Client satisfaction

QPASTT conducts a Client Satisfaction Survey every two years to ensure services remain safe, effective and responsive. Our 2024 survey involved 120 clients, including 40 in-depth interviews, and demonstrated consistently high levels of satisfaction and trust.

97% of clients reported feeling safe, welcomed and respected.

90% expressed overall satisfaction and said they would recommend QPASTT to family and friends.

90% said QPASTT helped "very much" or "quite a lot" in improving their health and wellbeing and supporting their trauma recovery.

These results highlight QPASTT's commitment to trauma-informed, client-centred care that fosters safety, trust and recovery for people from refugee backgrounds and their families.

Responding to the Gaza Crisis: supporting communities through conflict and recovery

The escalation of conflict in Gaza in 2024-2025 caused deep distress across Queensland's Palestinian, Lebanese and Muslim communities, many of whom have family directly affected by the violence and loss. The ongoing conflict also retriggered past trauma for people from other refugee backgrounds, creating widespread anxiety, fear and grief, affecting individual, family and community wellbeing.

QPASTT responded swiftly and compassionately to support individuals, families, schools and communities affected by the crisis. Our work focused on creating safety, restoring connection and building trust during a time of profound instability - both globally and locally.

Therapeutic interventions

QPASTT's Moringa Team provides direct counselling support, with all sessions conducted in a client's preferred language. Counselling is available with an Arabic-speaking practitioner with in-depth understanding of the Palestinian context.

Many of those arriving carry multiple layers of compounding trauma, including experiences of war, displacement, and loss of home, loved ones, and identity, alongside symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, hopelessness and emotional volatility. Several also carried histories of childhood trauma or domestic violence, compounding their current distress. Adjusting to life in Australia brought further challenges: language barriers, cultural displacement, and navigating unfamiliar systems of health, education, and employment.

The Moringa Team's work focuses on brief intervention and trauma-informed practice, integrating psychological and advocacy-based approaches. Therapies included Gestalt, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), narrative therapy, and psychoeducation on trauma, grief, and coping strategies. Importantly, all interventions were culturally and politically informed - grounding each session in empathy, shared understanding, and respect for the broader context of Palestinian lived experience.

Despite the ongoing trauma of war and systemic barriers in Australia - including non-recognition of professional qualifications and experiences of racism - clients demonstrated remarkable resilience and recovery, and with sustained, culturally attuned care, began developing effective coping mechanisms and re-engaging with life goals despite ongoing external stressors.

Whole-of-community response

QPASTT continued to play an active role as a governance and operational partner of the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance (ASRA) Consortium, collaborating with services and community to coordinate practical, legal, emergency relief, health and mental health supports for people fleeing the conflict. Through ASRA, QPASTT helped ensure that newly arrived families - many on short-term visas - could access essential assistance despite significant settlement barriers.

In parallel, QPASTT engaged with Palestinian and Muslim community leaders, Imams, and local organisations to share information about available supports, including legal assistance from RAILS, while also voicing community concerns to state government agencies. These discussions helped advocate for improved access to healthcare and education for children on temporary visas, and greater government empathy and responsiveness to community distress.

Supporting schools and young people

Across Queensland, QPASTT responded to serious conflicts in schools where global tensions had escalated into local incidents between students of different cultural backgrounds. Using a whole-of-school approach, QPASTT worked with teachers, wellbeing staff, parents, cultural leaders and community representatives to rebuild relationships and restore safety, through interventions that not only calmed immediate tensions but strengthened schools' capacity to respond to trauma and conflict with empathy and understanding.

Community healing and connection

QPASTT also partnered with the Islamic Women's Association of Australia to deliver an art-based support group for 70 women and children from Palestinian and Middle Eastern backgrounds. The group provided a trauma-informed, creative outlet for expression and connection, with many participants sharing experiences of significant loss and ongoing fear for loved ones overseas.

Through interfaith collaboration, advocacy and trauma-informed care, QPASTT continues to foster safety, dignity and connection - supporting communities to heal, find stability, and rebuild hope amid ongoing conflict and uncertainty.

Restoring safety and belonging through Palestinian Tatreez

The Palestinian Tatreez Group was a women-only, community-based program co-designed to preserve and share the traditional Palestinian art of Tatreez embroidery while providing a culturally safe space where women could connect, find support, and gently process the emotional impacts of the ongoing conflict in Palestine.

Sessions invited participants to learn, create, and share stories in an environment that honoured identity, fostered belonging, and reduced isolation. Participants reported a restored sense of safety and connection, a reduction in distress, and less time spent alone ruminating on their circumstances. Many described feeling more welcome within the broader community and more able to cope with ongoing stressors.

Wellbeing outcomes demonstrated measurable impact. Using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index at the first and final sessions, participants showed a moderate increase in wellbeing - from 31% to 52%. Given the direct and ongoing impact of international conflict on participants during this period, this improvement is considered meaningful and significant.

Participant reflections included:

"I look forward to this session every week - it's the only relaxing time I have during the week."

One woman shared that the group reminded her of childhood gatherings - family sitting together, playing music and stitching Tatreez - which brought a deep sense of comfort and nostalgia.

The Palestinian Tatreez Group demonstrated how culturally grounded practice can nurture healing, strengthen community connection, and restore dignity, even in times of profound uncertainty.





Supporting people seeking asylum

Isn't seeking asylum a human right?

A timeline of Australian asylum policy

Every person has the right to seek safety from persecution. This principle is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 14) and the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which Australia is a signatory. Seeking asylum is not illegal - it is a lawful act of survival and courage.

Yet, over recent decades, Australia's immigration policies have increasingly punished people for exercising this right. From the introduction of mandatory detention in 1992 to offshore processing, temporary protection visas, and restrictions on family reunion, successive policy changes have created ongoing harm, uncertainty, and trauma for people seeking refuge.

The following timeline traces the evolution of these punitive policies - and their human impact - as a reminder of the urgent need for compassionate, rights-based responses to people seeking safety.

1945

The Department of Immigration is established.



1947

Following World War II, Australia resettles displaced people from camps in Europe, seeking to address labour shortages and boost population.

- By 1957, Australia had admitted 170,000 displaced persons under this scheme, including from Poland, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

1992

Mandatory detention introduced.

- The Migration (Amendment) Act and the Migration Reform Act establish Australia's system of mandatory detention for non-citizens without a valid visa.



1991

First "boat people" detained.

- 104 people seeking asylum are transferred from temporary sites in Darwin to a new detention facility at Port Hedland, WA, while their refugee applications are being processed.



1975

Refugees from Indochina begin arriving.

- Australia selects around 400 Vietnamese refugees from camps for resettlement.
- In 1976, a small vessel carrying five asylum seekers from Vietnam arrived in Darwin, Australia, the first of 56 boats to arrive over the next six years following the end of the Vietnam War.

1992

Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) introduced.

- The government releases hundreds of people from held detention into the community.

2001

The "Tampa affair" and the "Pacific Solution."

- Following the rescue of over 400 asylum seekers aboard the MV Tampa, the Howard government implemented offshore processing on Nauru and Christmas Island, barring those arrivals from settling in Australia. This marked the beginning of the offshore regime for boat arrivals.

The MV Tampa rescued hundreds of asylum-seekers from a stranded Indonesian fishing boat in the Indian Ocean and was attempting to bring them to Australia, sparking the "Tampa Crisis." (MV Tampa. Photo: Remi Jouan, Wikimedia Commons) ▶



2005

Community Detention introduced.

- The Migration Act was amended to allow "residence determinations" where immigration-detained persons could live in the community at a specified address while still legally detained. This introduced more flexible detention alternatives but within a framework of restricted rights.

Continued on next page →



Supporting recovery in uncertain times

IN 2024-25,
QPASTT supported **279** people
seeking asylum.

For people seeking asylum, safety and stability are often still out of reach. Many live with deep uncertainty about their visa status, limited access to income or healthcare, and ongoing effects of trauma. These stressors can lead to high levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation - conditions made worse by experiences of detention, family separation, and displacement.

QPASTT’s Moringa Team provides intake, brief intervention, counselling and advocacy support to people who are seeking asylum in Australia. This includes people residing in the community on temporary visas or holding no visa, people in community detention and those held in immigration detention.

Asylum Seeker Mental Health Connect

IN 2024-25, the Asylum
Seeker Mental Health Connect
(ASMHC) Program supported **190**
clients with individual interventions.

Funded by Queensland Health, Asylum Seeker Mental Health Connect is a joint response by QPASTT and World Wellness Group to the complex mental health needs of people seeking asylum living in the community.

QPASTT provides an initial psychosocial assessment followed by up to eight sessions of support aimed at:

- reducing the impact of trauma on daily functioning.
- creating opportunities for social engagement, connection and wellbeing (e.g. group programs).
- psychoeducation to improve coping, stress management and regulation skills.
- advocacy and referral to meet basic needs.
- safety planning and crisis intervention.
- brief counselling interventions.

The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance
Program (ASRA)

QPASTT is a partner in the Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance (ASRA) Program which provides emergency relief, health, legal, employment, mental health and housing supports to people and families seeking asylum. ASRA is a collaboration of seven partner agencies, with funding provided by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

In 2024-25, QPASTT operated in three ASRA Hubs in Logan, Gatton and Indooroopilly, providing incidental counselling, psychoeducation, emotional support and referrals, as well as offering therapeutic arts-based activities for clients of varied ages including children. QPASTT provides consultative and debriefing support and reflective practice supervision for staff and volunteers of ASRA partner organisations.



Healing together: Supporting survivors of
gender-based violence

The ASMHC Women’s Therapy Group supported survivors of gender-based violence experiencing ongoing trauma symptoms such as flashbacks, panic attacks, and sleep difficulties.

Over seven weeks, participants were supported through a structured, trauma-focused group using culturally adapted somatic and cognitive behavioural approaches, alongside meditation, storytelling, and art therapy. The sessions built understanding of trauma’s effects on the body and mind while teaching grounding and coping strategies.

By the end of the program, participants reported reduced trauma symptoms, greater confidence in using coping skills, and a stronger sense of connection and safety with peers. Importantly, the women described feeling more able to form and share their personal narratives and tolerate related distress, enabling them to create the necessary testimonies for their asylum-seeking processes.



Supporting clients in immigration
detention

Providing trauma counselling in immigration detention requires adapting our approach to restore as much safety, dignity and control as possible in an environment where those very things are restricted. Clients live with constant uncertainty, limited choice and ongoing surveillance. Our practice centres on offering meaningful agency wherever we can: choices about appointment times, communication preferences and therapeutic goals. As much as possible, we transform the counselling space with soft furnishings, warm lighting, coloured fabrics and sensory supports, creating a brief but powerful respite from the detention environment.

People in detention frequently tell us they feel forgotten; QPASTT’s role is to bear witness, to walk alongside them as they navigate systems that hold such strict control over their lives. A common theme in our sessions is how to maintain a sense of self when so much has been taken away - for example, how to hold onto the identity of being a father or family member despite forced separation. Detention work matters to the whole of QPASTT, because when someone is detained it has an impact on family and community systems across Queensland.

Alongside direct client work, QPASTT participates in the FASSTT Visa Cancellation Working Group. Meeting every two to three months, this national forum brings together practitioners supporting people in detention to share policy updates, shifts in detention conditions, client experiences and trends across the country. The group reduces the isolation practitioners can experience in this field, building solidarity and a shared understanding of the challenges clients face. It also provides a mechanism for raising systemic concerns - such as facility conditions, barriers to trauma-informed care and the impacts of policy decisions - which can then be escalated within FASSTT for coordinated advocacy. This sharing of knowledge strengthens our collective capacity to support people in detention and their families living in the community.

“Detention work can feel lonely at times, so being part of a national community of practitioners is incredibly meaningful. The immigration detention system and its impact is hard to witness, but it is also a privilege to meet the people we support, to see their capacity to engage in rich therapeutic work, and to learn from the ways they survive despite the challenges of the systems and environment they remain in.”

- Anna Perry
Counsellor/Advocate



Our response:

Building belonging

A sense of safety is fundamental for healing - and belonging is essential for feeling safe. Healing and belonging are deeply interconnected.

QPASTT works with communities to build belonging for survivors of torture and trauma. We do this through partnership, engagement, capacity building, and creating opportunities for community-based healing.

Collective healing through social and recovery groups

Group work can counter the isolation that often follows trauma. The collective learning, repair of trust, confidence and relationship building fosters a sense of belonging and validation which supports healing and recovery.

QPASTT creates opportunities for survivors to connect and heal with others in groups where:

- Body, mind and spirit are nourished through new friendships and traditional wellness.
- Wellbeing is nurtured through a focus on movement, relaxation and creative therapies.

Participant feedback

“I always feel sad, afraid, and uncomfortable speaking up and advocating for myself, which I guess is very much common when you are dealing with anxiety and depression but in a group situation like this, I always have an opportunity to lean into feeling accepted by others and to challenge myself in making my needs known.”

IN 2024-25,
adult groups delivered across
Southeast Queensland included:

Impact Men's Soccer Group

The Impact Men's Soccer Group was designed in consultation with cultural community leaders to support newly arrived men aged 25 years and over who are experiencing social isolation. The program has a particular focus on addressing the impact of trauma and the resettlement process on participants' wellbeing, mental health and interpersonal relationships. The group enables participants to build social connections, establish informal support networks, connect with service providers and receive psychoeducation and settlement life skills.

“This group program provides a safe space or environment to meet, connect and build trust with each other from the communities. It is also a safe place to open up when you are in your most vulnerable state, and you are looking for help but afraid to get help because of stigma.”

Wangarra Men's Group

The Wangarra Men's Group is a therapeutic and recreational program supporting newly arrived men as they navigate the early stages of settlement. Many participants arrive in Australia carrying the impacts of trauma, loss and disconnection while adjusting to unfamiliar systems, new cultural expectations, and significant shifts in family roles. Through weekly activities, the program creates safe opportunities for social connection, emotional wellbeing, gentle exercise, English practice and psychoeducation on trauma. Participants - referred through QPASTT, partner agencies, and community leaders - represent diverse cultural backgrounds and often begin the program while waiting for individual counselling.



“Many group members come from places where they carried the responsibility of providing for their families and leading their households. Suddenly they find themselves in a new country, navigating unfamiliar systems on a small allowance, without networks or local experience. They are often the first in their families to engage with the community - learning English, enrolling children in school, looking for work - while still carrying the emotional weight of trauma, loss and uncertainty. When asked, ‘What were your hopes and dreams when you came to Australia?’ the answers are often humbling. Many never imagined the life they now have, nor the support they would receive. Moments of joy stand out clearly: a man telling me kayaking was ‘the very best moment of my life’, or another experiencing the ocean for the first time. To witness these moments - these sparks of confidence, connection and healing - reminds us of the key context of our work - it is about nurturing the future.”

- Sam Anywar
Wangarra Men's Group Facilitator



Healing through the expressive arts

QPASTT delivered art sessions to clients at TAFE and other service organisations, offering a range of expressive and movement-based activities including breathwork, gentle stretching, collage and group-based art activities. These are designed to promote individual reflection and mind-body connection, as well as peer connection. Facilitators also introduce QPASTT's services, including psychoeducation on the impact of trauma and stress on the mind and body to increase participants' mental health literacy and capacity to self-regulate through coping strategies and self-care.

Art Group

The QPASTT Art Group is an open, therapeutic space for adults that uses art, mindfulness, and yoga to support recovery from trauma. Through creativity and calm reflection, participants are guided to explore and process complex emotions, build resilience, and strengthen their overall wellbeing.

The mixed-gender group of 17 participants, aged 25 to 75, includes recently settled refugees and migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, and Myanmar. Many are older adults and survivors of trauma who have found in the group a safe, inclusive space to reconnect with themselves and others.

Participants report high satisfaction with the program - 100% described the experience positively - and pre- and post-program WHO-5 Wellbeing Index results show significant improvement in overall wellbeing.

Through shared creative practice, the Art Group fosters:

- Emotional expression, helping participants release feelings and gain self-awareness.
- Community connection, building mutual support and belonging.
- Personal growth, enabling reflection on hopes and challenges while easing emotional burden and supporting adjustment to life in Australia.

Iranian Strong Women's Group

The Iranian Strong Women's Group focuses on practicing and mastering the Daf, a Persian frame drum, to enable integration of psychotherapeutic work around cultural identity and meaning.

Qualitative group feedback and facilitator observation recorded a decrease in social isolation, an increase in social connection, and greater self-efficacy and emotional regulation.

Participant feedback

“ Learning the Daf has connected me with my roots and helped me find tranquillity in hectic days. ”

“ The group sessions are the highlight of my week, where I can share my love for music and feel supported by friends who understand my journey. ”

Women's Skill Share Groups - North and Southside

Women's Skill Share Groups are open groups for women from refugee backgrounds addressing barriers to mental health and successful settlement including pre- and post-arrival trauma, language barriers, acculturation and social isolation. The groups focus on peer mentoring and skill sharing to foster collective healing and recovery in a non-clinical setting. Participants report improvements in skills and confidence and enhanced mental health and wellbeing due to attending the groups.

Ukrainian Health and Wellbeing Group

The Ukrainian Health and Wellbeing Group is a weekly, peer-facilitated support group for women offering a range of activities and interventions aimed at promoting mental health and wellbeing through opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, cultural enrichment, access to healthcare information and connection to services, and pathways to education and skills development. These initiatives aim to reduce stress, foster a sense of community, and empower participants to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives. Activities included trauma-informed yoga, equine assisted learning and arts-based activities.

Support, Skill and Connect

Support, Skill and Connect enhances education and settlement, designed to work within existing education settings like the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The program focuses on building employability skills, often missing for people who have experienced disrupted education and employment during the refugee journey, as well as providing psychosocial support and building participants' social connections.

Located at TAFEs in both Brisbane and Toowoomba, participants take part in psychoeducation and discussion sessions and workshops exploring:

- The refugee experience, culture shock and settlement processes.
- Positive experiences, challenges and coping strategies for mental wellbeing.
- Accessing support services.
- Resume writing and job interviews.

Queensland African Women's Cooking and Craft Group

The Queensland African Women's Cooking and Craft Group, based in Brisbane and Logan, provides a safe, welcoming space for women from refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds to connect, share skills, and support one another.

Through cooking, craft, and coffee ceremonies, women explore everyday challenges, celebrate achievements, and build confidence in a supportive community. Over the past year, more than 60 women have taken part in workshops and activities covering health, wellbeing, English language, digital literacy, citizenship, and employment.

In partnership with Business Bazar, participants also showcased their creative businesses - from handmade crafts and clothing to perfumes and food - strengthening women's economic participation and visibility. During Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month, 25 women attended a session on Respectful Relationships, deepening understanding around coercive control, conflict resolution, and community strength.

The group's regular activities, supported by Queensland African Communities Council, continue to foster friendship, learning, and empowerment - helping women from Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo and beyond to find belonging and build strong, connected families and communities.



Community consultation and capacity building: Strengthening voice, connection and recovery



QPASTT’s community consultation and capacity building work ensures that our services remain culturally responsive, relevant and grounded in the lived experiences of the communities we support. This work focuses on trauma recovery, mental health, wellbeing and advocacy, while building the capacity of community and faith leaders to lead, connect and create change.

In 2024-25, QPASTT engaged in more than 340 capacity building activities, including 170 direct engagements with community leaders and over 1,000 participants from communities affected by conflict and displacement - including Palestine, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Rwanda.

Through forums, meetings, and one-on-one support, QPASTT helped communities navigate the impacts of overseas conflict, discrimination, and local crises. Highlights included:

- Facilitating community dialogue to address and de-escalate conflict and respond to sudden losses and local crises.
- Providing social, emotional and practical supports during times of grief and distress.
- Supporting recovery and access to grants following Cyclone Alfred.
- Hosting community-led forums in Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba and Townsville.
- Connecting leaders with government representatives to elevate community voices and advocate for human rights.

QPASTT supported community and faith leaders impacted by ongoing and emerging conflicts in Iran, Gaza/Israel, Lebanon, Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Congo, Iraq, Cuba, Burundi, Ukraine/Russia, and Myanmar, hosting 65 meetings with community leaders to provide emotional support, facilitate access to services, and advocate for families affected by conflict, displacement, and the rising cost of living in Australia.

QPASTT also collaborated with partners to deliver respectful relationships and coercive control awareness sessions and continued to respond to emerging community needs through active listening, crisis support, and resource sharing.

This work strengthens trust, resilience, and leadership across Queensland’s diverse refugee communities - ensuring that those with lived experience of trauma are heard, respected, and supported to lead recovery within their own communities.

Community Leader Forums: Strengthening dialogue and collective action

In partnership with Multicultural Australia, QPASTT hosted five Community Leader Forums across Queensland in 2024-25, creating vital spaces for dialogue between community and faith leaders, government, and service providers.

Each forum focused on issues identified by community leaders and reflected local priorities:

- **Brisbane (May 2025):** Seventy-five leaders gathered to discuss domestic and family violence and coercive control laws, exploring how to raise awareness and promote safety, peace, and respect within families.
- **Toowoomba (May 2025):** Eighty leaders came together to focus on education, co-designing solutions with schools, the Department of Education, and community partners to improve engagement for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- **Cyclone Alfred Recovery Forum (March 2025):** Held across Brisbane, Toowoomba, North Queensland, and the Gold Coast, in collaboration with partners including QACC, SSI, Multilink, and IWAA, this forum supported community leaders in recovery and resilience efforts through advocacy, information sharing, and emotional support.
- **Ipswich and Townsville Forums (July/Nov 2024, April 2025):** Addressed mental health, settlement support, family reunion, and citizenship.

Across all forums, more than 80 community and faith leaders, and 15 sector stakeholders participated. Together, they strengthened collaboration, shared lived experience, and built collective strategies to support wellbeing and inclusion across Queensland’s diverse communities.



Community consultations: Building inclusive partnerships for refugee wellbeing

In April 2025, QPASTT brought together 40 community leaders and members from 33 refugee communities - including Chin, Ukrainian, Congolese, Syrian, Rohingya, Eritrean, and Palestinian groups - for a series of consultations to better understand how systems can work with, not just for, communities.

The conversations revealed a clear message: refugee communities are not just resilient, they are resourceful, organised and leading healing in the face of crisis. Participants described their daily realities navigating overseas conflicts, housing pressures, family violence, and mental health stigma, often stepping in where formal systems fail. As one leader said, **“We are the first responders in our communities. The government comes later, if at all.”**

Community leaders spoke of holding multiple roles - interpreters, mentors, advocates, crisis responders - without recognition or support.

Communities Healing to Thrive

Communities Healing to Thrive (CHT) is a trauma-informed leadership program that strengthens the capacity, confidence and wellbeing of community leaders and active community members who play vital roles in supporting their communities through healing, connection and recovery. Designed at the intersection of culture, leadership, trauma and mental health, the program equips participants to build shared language around mental health, activate community-based healing practices, provide early support and referral pathways, and sustain their own wellbeing.

Co-designed with communities, CHT tailors its workshops to the issues leaders identify as most important, including intergenerational trauma, cultural expectations, parenting, burnout and supporting community members in distress.

In 2024-25, QPASTT delivered 21 workshops across 8 groups, engaging 108 participants (83 of them new to the program this year). Outcomes were strong, with 98% of participants reporting improved skills to respond to the emotional and mental health needs of themselves and their community. In April 2025, the CHT program also expanded into the Ipswich region.

They called for genuine partnership, culturally safe services, and refugee-led solutions that move beyond consultation to shared decision-making and equity.

Key themes included the need to:

- Embed refugee support workers and community connectors across service systems.
- Fund and recognise community-led healing and crisis response.
- Address structural inequities impacting diverse communities.
- Centre youth, trauma-informed practice, and expressive therapies in schools.
- Create refugee-led forums for direct dialogue with government.

The resulting Community Consultations Synthesis Report offers a blueprint for action - one built on dignity, justice, and collaboration. As participants shared, **“Resilience is not a moment; it is a culture.”**

QPASTT’s ongoing commitment is to transform systems from within - ensuring refugee voices shape the policies, programs, and partnerships that define their futures.

QPASTT CARES

The QPASTT CARES program (Community Awareness, Response and Engagement for Sudden Losses) takes a holistic, trauma-informed approach to suicide prevention, intervention and postvention, offering tailored support for individuals, families, and communities affected by suicide. It provides personalised guidance for those at risk, survivors of suicide attempts, and people grieving a loss, ensuring timely referrals and practical assistance to promote safety, healing, and wellbeing. The program also supports community leaders through training, resources, and guidance to build confidence, skills, and resilience in responding to suicide-related situations. Additionally, QPASTT CARES delivers community wellbeing initiatives, including culturally responsive support groups, workshops, and events, aimed at raising awareness, reducing stigma, and fostering open dialogue around suicide.

Over the past 18 months, the program has worked with 17 individual clients and facilitated six wellbeing workshops, supporting 83 participants from Rwandan, Congolese, Sudanese, South Sudanese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Colombian communities. In addition, 26 natural helpers have been supported through skills development and wellbeing-focused guidance to strengthen their capacity and resilience.

Regions of belonging

QPASTT is committed to providing access to a range of interventions that support healing and recovery for survivors of torture and trauma across Queensland. This includes having permanent and accessible service locations in the key regional settlement areas of Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns, staffed by local community members. In 2024-25 we partnered with the Multicultural Communities Council Gold Coast to deliver consistent services on the Gold Coast.

IN 2024-25,
29% of QPASTT clients lived in Townsville, Cairns or Toowoomba.

Healing, connection and leadership in North Queensland

In North Queensland, QPASTT supports diverse refugee communities across Cairns and Townsville to heal, belong and thrive through individual counselling and therapeutic group programs. People from countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Bhutan, Karen State, Papua New Guinea, Venezuela and Afghanistan now call this region home.

Regional settlement offers potential for deep connection and healing when services and communities are equipped with trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches. Working alongside schools, community groups and local service organisations, our teams focus on building safety, trust, capacity and connection through a range of services - from trauma-informed community education and advocacy to programs that foster intercultural understanding and inclusion. Together, these initiatives strengthen relationships between communities, create safe spaces for learning and healing, and support people to feel a genuine sense of belonging in their new home.





Empowering community leaders in North Queensland

In 2017, community leaders in North Queensland were working in isolation. There was little space for dialogue between cultural groups or with local services. When QPASTT held its first Townsville Community Leader Forum in 2017, the atmosphere reflected frustration and disagreement within and between communities and with the service sector.

Today, that story is changing. Through QPASTT's Community Leader Network and Forums, leaders from refugee and migrant backgrounds are coming together with renewed confidence and unity.

Quarterly in-person consultations and regular online meetings now provide a safe space for leaders to raise issues affecting their communities - from settlement challenges to family support needs - and to work collectively on solutions. QPASTT staff have played a vital role in bridging connections with key partners, including settlement providers and government agencies, ensuring leaders have a direct line to the services that matter.

The transformation over these years has been remarkable. Leaders have formed an executive group that meets regularly with service organisations to advocate for their communities' needs. What began as divided voices has become a coordinated, empowered network of community representatives driving positive change.

"We just want to belong:" Empowering refugee communities to achieve citizenship

The Citizenship Support Project emerged through the North Queensland Community Leaders Network, where community representatives voiced growing concern about the barriers that people from refugee backgrounds face in gaining Australian citizenship. Many long-term residents - some living in Australia for more than a decade - were repeatedly failing the English-only citizenship test, despite demonstrating strong civic knowledge when materials were translated into their own language. The impact of repeated failed attempts at the test includes financial pressure and personal distress.

While TAFE provides English language programs for refugees, many women are unable to attend due to work or caring responsibilities. This leaves few other pathways to learn English. In response, QPASTT partnered with North Queensland Ummah Care to deliver community-based citizenship classes and English language support for both women and men through our Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program. The classes build confidence and vocabulary using the official citizenship booklet, while QPASTT provides incidental counselling to sustain morale and wellbeing - especially for those who have already failed once or twice and are feeling discouraged.

For many participants, citizenship is far more than a legal status. It is about belonging, safety, and equality - the ability to vote, to access higher education and aged care, to receive the same supports as others, and to travel safely without fear of being unable to return. Without citizenship, people remain excluded from shaping their communities and living free from the fear of deportation.

The injustice of language as a barrier is stark. When translated into their first language, participants consistently pass mock tests, proving that English proficiency - not civic knowledge - is what holds them back. Recognising this, QPASTT and North Queensland Ummah Care continue to advocate for equitable citizenship pathways and improved access to English language learning.

Despite systemic barriers, the people's determination is unwavering. Their commitment to learning and hope to be able to contribute fully to Australian society reflects their resilience and their deep desire for belonging. Women are now approaching QPASTT years before they are even eligible to sit the test. As one participant said, **"I've been here one year, but I want to start learning now, so that when the time comes, I will be ready."**



From consultation to change: Community-led parenting support in action

Thriving Mums, Thriving Families is a community-led initiative bringing together eight women representing eight cultural communities - from Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, the Central African Republic, Congo, Afghanistan and the Karen community.

The group was established in response to community-identified needs and ongoing consultation with community leaders. Through this forum, women come together to discuss the issues affecting their families and communities and to co-design solutions that strengthen connection and wellbeing.

One key issue raised was the challenge of navigating different parenting styles and family laws in Australia. In response, QPASTT trained both staff and community representatives in the Bringing Up Great Kids program - an evidence-based parenting course that uses mindfulness and reflection to strengthen parent-child communication and foster children's emotional wellbeing and positive identity.

Each woman delivers a tailored version of the program within her own community, adapting the content to reflect language, culture and lived experience. Participants learn about children's cognitive and emotional development, the impact of trauma, and practical, positive parenting strategies to support healthy family relationships.

The program continues to grow, with new sessions delivered in community settings such as the Townsville Mosque in response to local requests. By building confidence, connection, and parenting skills, Thriving Mums, Thriving Families is helping create stronger, more resilient families - and empowering mothers as community leaders of change.

Participants said that understanding how a child's brain develops differently from an adult's helped them change the way they respond to their children, leading to calmer homes, stronger relationships, and less stress for parents and families.



Meet Tivane, our Counsellor/Advocate working with adults and families in Cairns

With a background in Social Work and Anthropology, and early experiences working in community and sustainable development with Indigenous communities in Thailand, I learned the importance of listening deeply, recognising people's strengths, and working collaboratively toward inclusion and rights-based justice. Those early lessons - respect, participation, and partnership - continue to guide how I approach healing and recovery with clients today.

In many mental health settings, the work stops at counselling, assessment, or treatment. At QPASTT, I can also stand alongside clients as an advocate - working collaboratively with other service providers and organisations to address the practical and systemic barriers that impact recovery.

I work primarily with women - including mothers, single mothers, and adolescents - from Afghan, Congolese, Burundian, Venezuelan, Papua New Guinean, and Bhutanese backgrounds. Their support needs are varied, from experiences of loss, trauma and displacement to the impact of settlement stressors, family separation, or violence. Meeting clients where they are - in their everyday

hopes and challenges - becomes the foundation for healing. Sometimes the entry point is practical: accessing job training, navigating services and legal processes, or helping a young person process traumatic experiences and re-engage with school. When people regain a sense of value and purpose, we often see real symptom reduction and renewed energy for life.

My therapeutic approach is grounded in a feminist and empowerment framework and supported by training in sandplay therapy, adventure therapy, narrative exposure therapy, and movement-based processing. I integrate expressive processes - including music, dance, drawing, symbols, movement and sensory connection - to help clients access and express experiences held in the body and make meaning of their emotions.

Research consistently shows that it is the quality of the therapeutic relationship - rather than the specific modalities or techniques used - that determines success. I hold this close in my practice. My focus is on creating an environment where clients feel safe enough to release and process what they carry.

It is deeply rewarding to witness clients rebuilding confidence and growing their sense of identity or self-esteem. For example, at the end of a recent session a client told me she felt more energised to pursue her goals. Those moments of renewed strength and solidarity sustain me in this work.

Meet Harry, our Counsellor/ Advocate working with children and young people in Cairns

“One of the unique things about being a regional worker is how deeply we get to embed ourselves in community life. In a smaller team, our roles often cross boundaries - we’re not only counsellors but also community connectors, advocates, and partners. Through the incidental relationships we build across the sector and the community, we gain a deeper insight into the settlement landscape and what kinds of systemic issues are impacting people day to day. You hear it straight from the source.

My counselling work with children and young people focuses on creating a safe and secure relationship first. Once that foundation is there, therapeutic work can unfold naturally. I draw on play therapy, Internal Family Systems, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Play therapy gives children a way to express and process experiences they may not have words for yet - through sand trays, games and imagination. ACT, on the other hand, helps people accept their present experiences, unhook from distressing thoughts, and take intentional steps toward a life that aligns with their values.

Advocacy is also a big part of what we do - whether that’s supporting students who experience bullying, liaising with schools about classroom challenges, or helping parents navigate systems. We have strong relationships with local schools, which allow us to have clear conversations with a lot of goodwill when issues might arise.

What I value most about working at QPASTT is the genuine commitment to being community-led. The organisation is flexible and responsive - instead of asking people to fit into a service, we adapt our work to meet their needs. That takes courage and humility, but it’s also where the real impact happens.

Our young men’s group grew directly from listening to community voices; at a youth workshop, participants said they wanted a safe place to talk about their wellbeing. Together we’ve explored topics like healthy relationships, consent, grief and loneliness, managing stress, and finding identity, purpose and fulfilment. It’s been powerful to see how a simple space for honest conversation can foster vulnerability and connection.

I’m passionate about this work because I believe deeply in counselling and the freedom that healing can provide when someone is truly seen and supported at the right time in their life. “

▼ Play therapy gives children a way to express and process experiences they may not have words for yet.



Empowering the Êzidî community in Toowoomba

For over five years, QPASTT has walked alongside the Êzidî community in Toowoomba, supporting their healing, belonging, and self-determination. Initially, the community had no formally registered associations to represent their collective interests. Today, with support from QPASTT and the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ), the Êzidî community has established four registered associations dedicated to youth development, cultural preservation, and aged care - a major step towards self-representation and long-term sustainability.

Building community leadership and voice

The journey toward establishing these associations began with a series of leadership workshops delivered by QPASTT. These sessions equipped emerging community leaders with essential knowledge about the purpose, structure, and registration requirements of community organisations. Through mentoring and capacity-building support, Êzidî leaders developed the skills to advocate for their community, manage their associations, and plan activities independently.

These efforts were complemented by QPASTT’s Community and Faith Leaders’ Dinners, which created pathways for Êzidî leaders to connect with decision-makers and strengthen their voice in local and regional matters.

Healing through cultural continuity

Cultural practices have been central to the Êzidî community’s healing journey. One significant event was the Kojo Commemoration - a ceremony held in Toowoomba’s Queens Park to remember those who were lost or missing. The event honoured Êzidî traditions, with men and women later gathering separately in homes to console one another. Community members expressed that such practices provide deep emotional healing, reinforcing connection, dignity, and cultural identity.

Recovery goals and outcomes

QPASTT’s work with the Êzidî community aligns with recovery goals centred on agency, dignity, and collective empowerment. By fostering leadership, strengthening organisational capacity, and creating opportunities for participation in decision-making, the Êzidî community now leads its own development with confidence and vision.

Key outcomes include:

- Four registered Êzidî associations now operating independently.
- Enhanced leadership and governance skills among community leaders.
- Stronger connections with local institutions and decision-makers.
- Sustained cultural healing and unity through community-led events.

A pathway to thriving

The Êzidî community’s story in Toowoomba demonstrates the transformative power of strategic, trauma-informed support and collaboration. Through targeted capacity building, leadership development, and respect for cultural practice, the community has established structures that both honour tradition and empower future generations.

Their journey reflects what is possible when communities are supported to lead their own recovery - moving from survival toward strength, dignity, and thriving in their new home.

Regional groups delivered by QPASTT in 2024-25 included:



Women’s wellbeing groups (Toowoomba)

QPASTT’s Women’s Wellbeing Groups in Toowoomba provide safe, supportive spaces where women can share experiences, strengthen connections, and build emotional and physical wellbeing. Designed to reduce mental health stigma and increase understanding of wellbeing, the groups also equip participants with practical knowledge and tools to support themselves and their families.

In 2024-25, 33 Êzidî women with limited English language skills participated in closed and open group sessions focused on expressive activities such as mandala drawing, movement, and mindfulness. These sessions helped participants connect with and express their emotions while developing confidence to access local services and resources.

The group also hosted psychoeducation workshops on domestic and family violence, women’s rights, and online safety, in collaboration with local police and community educators.

Outcomes included:

- Strengthened social connection and mutual support within the Êzidî community.
- Increased confidence to explore and engage in local spaces and activities.
- Emotional support and collective healing during times of cultural grief and remembrance.
- Improved wellbeing and self-care practices, with participants reporting feeling respected, informed, and more confident to apply new skills in daily life.

Men’s wellbeing groups (Toowoomba)

QPASTT’s Men’s Wellbeing Groups in Toowoomba provide safe, supportive spaces for men from refugee backgrounds to strengthen their mental health, build connection, and support each other through the challenges of resettlement.

Recognising the significant stigma many men face in acknowledging trauma and emotional distress, the groups use recreation, physical activity and mindfulness as practical entry points for deeper conversations about mental health, anger management, and coping strategies.

In 2024-25, 32 men participated in sessions exploring topics such as sleep and mental health, resilience, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships. Employment and purpose were common themes, with participants sharing frustration about unemployment and supporting one another to find work.

Outcomes included:

- Increased emotional expression and awareness of stress management strategies.
- Stronger peer connections and mutual support networks.
- Improved engagement in community life, with some men joining local sports clubs and others securing employment.

Resilience Group (Cairns)

Located at Cairns West State School, the Resilience Group is designed to build self-confidence, physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing for children. Activities focus on increasing communication, cooperation, respect, self-confidence, self-esteem, friendship and mindfulness. School staff have reported the mindfulness and body-awareness activities have made a difference to student wellbeing, while all participants recorded improvements to their overall wellbeing scores using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index.

Youth Wellbeing Group (Cairns)

The Youth Wellbeing Group provides a safe and supported environment for young people aged 18-25 years to share their experiences, successes and challenges with their peers, extending their support networks, connections and coping strategies through fun, informal activities. One participant has trained and was employed by QPASTT as a peer worker, delivering workshops about healthy relationships for young people.

Play to Connect (Cairns & Townsville)

Play to Connect utilises games to promote human rights, non-discrimination and peaceful conflict resolution for children aged 6-12 years. QPASTT has delivered these groups in Aitkenvale State School and Cairns West State School to foster a greater sense of connection and belonging in students. Games and activities are designed to increase emotional regulation, social cohesion, safety, connection and communication, problem-solving and friendship.

Families in Cultural Transition (Cairns & Townsville)

Families in Cultural Transition provides support to parents from refugee backgrounds to address participant-identified needs arising out of their settlement and transition to a new life in Australia. This includes building their parenting confidence in the new Australian context, while also creating connections and skill sharing between parents.

Youth Voice (Townsville)

Youth Voice Townsville is a community-based youth-led group with a focus on leadership and advocacy. Young people aged 15-25 meet regularly to share experiences, build skills and act on a range of matters that impact young people, including mental health, employment opportunities, healthy relationships, discrimination, and youth leadership.

Central African Republic Women’s Group (Townsville)

The Central African Republic Women’s Group was established to address unique challenges impacting the wellbeing of newly arrived women and their families settling in the region. Sessions offer both therapeutic and practical supports to improve wellbeing and respond to settlement challenges, including access to services and psychoeducation.



Family Fun Days in Cairns, Toowoomba and Townsville

Family Fun Days are designed to provide opportunities for newly arrived families to socialise and form friendships with other families in the local area. Offering a range of activities including BBQs, sports, games, face painting and henna, bouncy castles and weaving workshops, the events provide positive, play-based family experiences and can be a stepping stone for parental engagement in more targeted wellbeing activities such as psychoeducation groups. QPASTT partners with settlement and community organisations in each local area to deliver the events.

Our response:

Nurturing thriving futures

Many children and young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced direct or indirect trauma because of persecution and conflict.

Additionally, if people do not have the opportunity to heal from trauma, they can unknowingly pass its impacts onto future generations. Their children may experience high levels of stress, difficulties with attachment as well as disconnection from their culture and community.

QPASTT's work with families, children and young people focuses on ensuring trauma is not a barrier to growing, learning and thriving in Australia.

IN 2024-25, QPASTT supported *890* children and young people (aged <25).

Supporting parents, strengthening families

Building Stronger Families program

The Building Stronger Families program builds the skills and knowledge of people from refugee backgrounds to become Community Connectors, who then facilitate workshops in their own cultural communities to provide opportunities for peer support and discussion, psychoeducation, and pathways to further information and support on:

- The impact of trauma on individuals and families.
- Improving family relationships.
- Healthy communication and discipline techniques for parenting.
- Australian laws, customs and expectations and how to access support.

Our Community Connectors conduct community sessions in participants' original languages, enhancing communication and trust between participants and facilitators.

Participants reported feeling seen, heard, and empowered to help their own families, and more confident in seeking assistance when necessary.



Ensuring young people reach their potential

Young people from refugee backgrounds often face complex challenges on top of the normal ups and downs of teenage life - including the impacts of trauma, disrupted education, racism, cultural expectations, and limited safe spaces to connect and belong. These pressures can lead to anxiety, depression, and school disengagement, making it harder for young people to realise their potential or access support that understands their experiences.

Our Youth Engagement and Advocacy Officers support young people aged 12-24 years to recover from trauma, achieve their goals and build strong connections in their communities.

We provide young people with incidental counselling and psychosocial support based on their needs and aspirations. Our community and school-based therapeutic and social groups and activities support development and growth in all areas of a young person's life.



Logan Youth Hub: Building connection and community

QPASTT's Logan Youth Hub has become a trusted and safe space for young people and community groups from refugee backgrounds. In a time of growing social isolation, family stress, and the ongoing impacts of global conflict, the Hub provides a vital place for connection, support, and belonging.

The Hub is home to QPASTT-led activities including the Young Men's Hangout, Girls Group, Peer Mentorship Program, Peace Leadership Program and employment workshops, and it also hosts English Conversation Classes and Citizenship Training delivered by communities and external organisations.

Through strong partnerships with Burundi, Rohingya, Eritrean, Rwandan, and Hazara community groups, the Hub also supports a range of cultural, language, and leadership activities that strengthen identity and build local capacity. This partnership approach enables QPASTT to respond quickly to emerging community needs, offer social and emotional support, and connect people with appropriate services.

The Logan Youth Hub continues to grow as a place of collaboration and resilience - where young people and communities come together to share culture, develop leadership, and find pathways to thrive.

Supporting young people to feel safe, included and confident in their future

QPASTT's Youth at Risk Program works across Ipswich, Logan, and Toowoomba, providing trauma-responsive individual and group psychosocial support and facilitating drop-in spaces and school holiday activities where young people and their families can connect, learn, and access the support they need.

In Ipswich, a Girls Club offers young women a safe and nurturing space to discuss challenges, build skills, and explore topics such as healthy relationships, boundaries, and goal setting. Designed with the participants themselves, the group strengthens belonging, agency, and peer connection. A similar group in Toowoomba is helping young women at risk of isolation to build confidence and re-engage with school and community life.

The program also partners with schools and families to host workshops on parenting in a new culture, supporting children's learning, and building healthy routines. These events foster mutual understanding between parents, young people, and school staff, strengthening relationships centred on wellbeing.

QPASTT's Youth Engagement Officers work closely with principals and teachers to identify when behavioural or learning issues may be linked to trauma, helping schools respond in ways that promote safety and inclusion.

The Youth at Risk Program has also established a new Youth Hub at the Toowoomba Multicultural Centre - a safe after-school space for support, homework help, and social connection. Youth Engagement Officers are co-designing future mental health literacy activities with students, including a new Young Men's Group that explores healthy masculinity and positive identity.

Through these initiatives, young people are gaining the confidence, community, and skills to navigate life in Australia - and to believe in their own future.



▲ Youth Engagement Officers Stephen Lau and Jessica Subek.

"For some cultures, the idea of counselling may be seen as something linked to psychiatric treatment, which can carry stigma or fear. Often, young people and families with lived refugee experience are approached as though they lack knowledge or skills. These factors can create significant barriers for young people to access health and other support services."

The Youth at Risk Program takes a culturally responsive and trauma-informed approach, working in partnership with young people and families to understand what matters to them. We build from their cultural strengths, while introducing systems or ideas that might help them navigate life in Australia. We use peer-based learning and support groups where young people can share their own knowledge and experiences, learn from each other, and feel empowered."

- Sharelda Cornelius

Youth Engagement Officer (Toowoomba)

"Many newly arrived young people can find themselves incredibly isolated because of language barriers, lack of community networks and unfamiliarity with Australian support services. One young person shared that they felt hopeless because they didn't know who or how to ask for any help. QPASTT is providing safe, youth-friendly spaces and social activities where young people can start to build the skills, connections and confidence to explore personal goals, understand what contributes to their own sense of wellbeing and safety and learn to seek help and advocate for themselves."

Our individual support ensures that particularly vulnerable youth receive the level of support they need. One young person with health needs was experiencing family conflict and ongoing homelessness. They had no community connections, limited English and had not felt safe to reach out for help."



Participant feedback

"It gave us the space to share serious conversations, and although some of the stories were hard and sad, it actually felt like a healing process."

"I was able to share things I have never talked about before; the room was validating and safe. Even though our stories are different - here we found them similar, I see we actually come from similar values."

"The activities show how much we assume and stereotype each other. It was eye-opening to hear others' experiences and stories. It changed how I feel a lot."

The QPASTT Youth Space is a fun, safe place where they could build trust and rapport with me. Together, we explored their goals for independence and linked in with settlement and housing services to source safe, permanent housing. With support to increase their confidence in crucial life skills like cooking, accessing the doctor, buying groceries, and catching public transport, they are better equipped to manage their own needs independently and seek support when necessary. We explored their interests, connecting them to the library and community soccer activities, creating a sense of belonging and reducing their risk of isolation. With support from QPASTT and other services, the young person has drawn on their existing strengths and resilience and further developed the skills and confidence to support their wellbeing into the future."

- Stephen Lau

Youth Engagement Officer (Logan)

Peace Leadership Program: Building understanding, confidence and connection

QPASTT's Peace Leadership Program empowers young people to build peaceful communities by strengthening self-awareness, communication, and belonging. Based on the international Alternatives to Violence Project, the program offers a series of experiential workshops that explore healthy relationships, conflict resolution, and identity through participatory learning and reflection.

Working with more than 100 young leaders across Brisbane and North Queensland in 2024-25, the program supports youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to respond to the impacts of conflict - both overseas and within their communities - and to become agents of positive change.

Over two days at a Brisbane workshop in May, participants explored how culture, gender, and age influenced their experiences of violence and nonviolence, sharing personal reflections with openness and compassion. The program is creating a rare space where young people feel safe to speak honestly, challenge assumptions, and discover shared values across differences.

One participant said, **"One of the most important lessons I learned was how to transform power in a conflict situation. Before, I used to think power meant being in control or having the last word. Now I know that real power comes from staying calm, showing respect, and helping others feel heard. It's about using your influence to bring people together instead of dividing them."**

At each level of the program, participants build on their skills - from understanding personal conflict and communication, to developing leadership and, eventually, becoming Peace Ambassadors trained to deliver the program themselves.

Impact highlights:

- Increased emotional literacy and confidence in managing conflict.
- Strengthened cross-cultural understanding and empathy.
- Creation of safe, inclusive spaces for honest dialogue and healing.
- Emerging youth leaders equipped to promote peace within their communities.

Through the Peace Leadership Program, young people are learning not only to resolve conflict, but to lead with empathy - fostering unity, resilience, and hope across diverse communities.

Youth Voice: Leading change and amplifying young people’s stories

Youth Voice is a leadership and advocacy group of young people aged 15-25 from refugee and multicultural backgrounds including Sudanese, Rwandan, Congolese, Eritrean, Afghan, Syrian, Iranian and Bangladeshi communities. United by a passion for social justice, the group meets monthly for peer support, leadership development, and collective action - creating a platform where young people’s voices are genuinely heard, valued, and amplified.

In 2024-25, Youth Voice identified financial hardship as a major issue impacting wellbeing in their communities. Concerned about young people taking on risky loans and debt, they completed financial literacy “train-the-trainer” workshops and are now preparing to deliver community education sessions to help others avoid financial stress. Members have also undertaken Emotional CPR and Peace Leadership training, building skills to promote resilience and wellbeing among peers.

With QPASTT’s support, three Youth Voice members were accepted to present at the Trauma Aware Education Conference in Brisbane (Nov 2024), sharing their insights on navigating cultural expectations, racism, and resettlement pressures. They also participated in a visit to Parliament House, engaging directly with policymakers, and continued contributing to a QUT research project exploring intergenerational experiences of displacement.

Through Youth Voice, young people are gaining skills in leadership, advocacy, and peer mentoring, while strengthening their sense of belonging and collective purpose. Their work continues to inspire systemic change - demonstrating the power of youth-led action in creating more inclusive, just, and connected communities.



Peer mentor initiative: Empowering young people as leaders and role models

In 2024-25, QPASTT deepened our investment in youth leadership through the employment and training of Peer Mentors - young people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds who bring their lived experience, insight, and passion to support others on similar journeys.

After trialling peer mentoring at camps and programs in 2023-24, we strengthened the model in 2024-25 by expanding training, increasing responsibilities, and providing paid, ongoing roles across camps, schools, and community activities. This year, four Peer Mentors were employed for our school holiday youth camps, with two supporting our Youth Engagement Officers within our school-based programs in Logan and Ipswich. Each mentor completed a tailored induction and leadership development workshop focusing on active listening, strengths-based practice, group facilitation, and trauma-informed mentoring. Candidates also completed both Peace Leadership training and a full-day Peer Mentoring workshop, as well as dedicated preparation sessions with QPASTT’s youth team.

These structured pathways ensure the role is not just a token or symbolic gesture, but a meaningful leadership opportunity that builds skills, confidence, and employment experience.

Peer Mentors act as co-facilitators and positive role models. When visiting schools, they share their personal stories of navigating education, TAFE, and university systems - showing students that their goals are achievable. Through social sports, informal conversations, and group activities, they model inclusion, respect, and perseverance outside of formal counselling or casework settings.

The impact is reciprocal. Mentors grow in confidence, self-awareness, and leadership capacity, while mentees gain connection, encouragement, and hope. As one mentor reflected:

“I never saw myself as a leader, but now I can see how I can contribute and help others.”

This initiative also provides young people with meaningful paid work, recognising their expertise and supporting financial independence. For QPASTT, the Peer Mentor model offers practical insights into how trauma-informed, youth-led approaches can foster healing, belonging, and leadership within communities.



participant feedback

“ One of the things I’ve valued most about being part of Youth Voice is having a platform where young people’s opinions are truly heard and respected... It’s also helped me build confidence in speaking up and contributing to discussions on issues that matter to my community. ”

“ Youth Voice has not only provided me the chance to network with my peers but also professionals from all different fields. ”

Voices of Hope Awards Night

In May 2025, QPASTT hosted the Voices of Hope Awards Night - a youth-led event that brought together over 450 guests to celebrate the achievements and resilience of young people from refugee backgrounds and showcased the positive contributions young people bring to the community. More than 20 young people helped plan and run the night, which featured music and dance performances, youth MCs, and awards across sport, academic excellence, community service, and resilience. Co-hosted with community partners including the Kawsar Community, Hazara Association of Queensland and Dare Turkman Association, the event strengthened relationships between schools, families, and community organisations.

Following the event, community leaders reflected that they had learned valuable skills in organising formal community events and felt confident to host their own in the future. Several student award winners gained employment with partner organisations that attended, and community members shared how meaningful it was to see young people recognised and celebrated by their own communities.



Next G: Growing confidence, connection and leadership

QPASTT's Next G Program supports young people from refugee and multicultural backgrounds to strengthen their sense of identity, belonging, and purpose through co-designed activities that build confidence, skills, and community connection.

In 2024-25, Next G programs were delivered across Forest Lake State High School, Woodridge State High School and QPASTT's Logan Youth Hub. Each program creates an inclusive, youth-led space where participants explore their interests, develop leadership, and learn life skills in a supportive, culturally safe environment.

Grounded in the principles of inclusivity, welcome, and bravery, Next G empowers young people to take ownership of their learning and wellbeing. Participants have led school events, organised cultural performances, run intra-school tournaments, and secured casual employment and leadership roles.

DRUMBEAT™: Finding connection and confidence through rhythm

DRUMBEAT™ - Discovering Relationships Using Music, Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts - is an evidence-based social and emotional development program that uses rhythm to build relationships, confidence, and community.

Adapted and delivered by QPASTT's Youth Engagement and Advocacy Officers across three high schools in 2024-25, DRUMBEAT™ brings young people together in a drumming circle - creating a safe space to explore themes like identity, belonging, emotions, teamwork, and leadership through music and conversation.

At Marsden, Glenala and Milpera State High Schools, groups of newly arrived students from Afghan (Hazara), Rwandan and other cultural backgrounds came together each week to share rhythm, laughter, and reflection. Drumming became a universal language for expressing feelings, managing emotions, and building connection. Participants learned to listen deeply, take turns, and work in harmony - strengthening group cohesion and self-esteem while reducing stress.

Participant feedback

“QPASTT helped me to meet new people and get a job.”

“These activities have enhanced my leadership and teamwork skills alongside spending the joyous moments with friends.”

“I want to do more at my school for leadership and Next G helps me do that.”



A one-off community DRUMBEAT™ session, co-designed with an Afghan community group, gave young people and parents a new way to discuss sensitive topics such as respect, peer pressure, and belonging without stigma. Parents described it as:

“A simple, engaging way to learn important things without retraumatising anyone.”

“It was very interesting how using instruments such as drums can normalise and simplify topics that usually carry stigma.”

Impact highlights:

- Improved emotional awareness and regulation.
- Stronger communication, listening, and teamwork skills.
- Increased confidence and connection among peers.
- Reduced stress and greater wellbeing - with WHO-5 wellbeing scores improving by an average of 2-3 points over the program.
- Strengthened leadership and self-esteem as young people took turns leading games and group activities.

DRUMBEAT™ continues to show how creative, culturally inclusive approaches can help young people connect, heal, and thrive - one beat at a time.



HEAL: School-based expressive arts therapy

Founded in 2004, HEAL (Home of Expressive Arts and Learning) is a targeted early intervention program supporting children and young people from refugee backgrounds to heal from trauma, engage in learning and build a positive sense of self.

HEAL uses expressive arts therapies - including art, music, movement and play - to help students process their experiences, express emotions, and find new ways to connect and grow. Delivered by qualified therapists within schools, HEAL provides individual and small group therapy, transition and crisis support, as well as capacity building for teachers and school communities.

By embedding the program directly in schools, HEAL ensures that support is accessible, non-stigmatising, and collaborative. Therapists work closely with teachers, guidance officers and families to help each student feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.

Through this school-based model, HEAL supports students to:

- Regulate emotions and feel calmer in the classroom.
- Re-engage with learning after disrupted schooling.
- Strengthen relationships with peers and teachers.
- Build confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem.
- Improve mental health and overall wellbeing.
- Feel more connected within the school community.

HEAL also helps schools to become trauma-informed environments, offering professional development for educators through QPASTT. Each HEAL therapist holds a master's degree in expressive therapies and works within a trauma-informed framework, supporting whole-school wellbeing and inclusion.

By combining creativity, compassion, and evidence-based practice, HEAL helps young people from refugee backgrounds to recover from trauma, reconnect with learning, and imagine hopeful futures.

Student numbers and school sites

IN 2024-25, HEAL supported more than **430** young people across five Queensland primary and secondary schools.

Referrals

IN 2024-25, students were referred into HEAL programs for a range of symptoms and support needs, including:

- Feeling sad/distressed
- Feeling worried
- Transition support
- Feeling withdrawn
- Conflict with peers
- Difficulty concentrating or learning

Community support

IN 2024-25, generous donors, partners and philanthropic grants contributed over **\$95,000** to fund expressive therapists in schools and support young people to heal and thrive. This support enables HEAL to fund a part-time therapist for almost one year, working onsite in a school.

IN 2024-25, HEAL provided individual support to **217** students and group support to **108** students, ensuring that Milpera remains a place of safety, cultural humility and belonging for young people beginning their education in Australia.



Milpera State High School

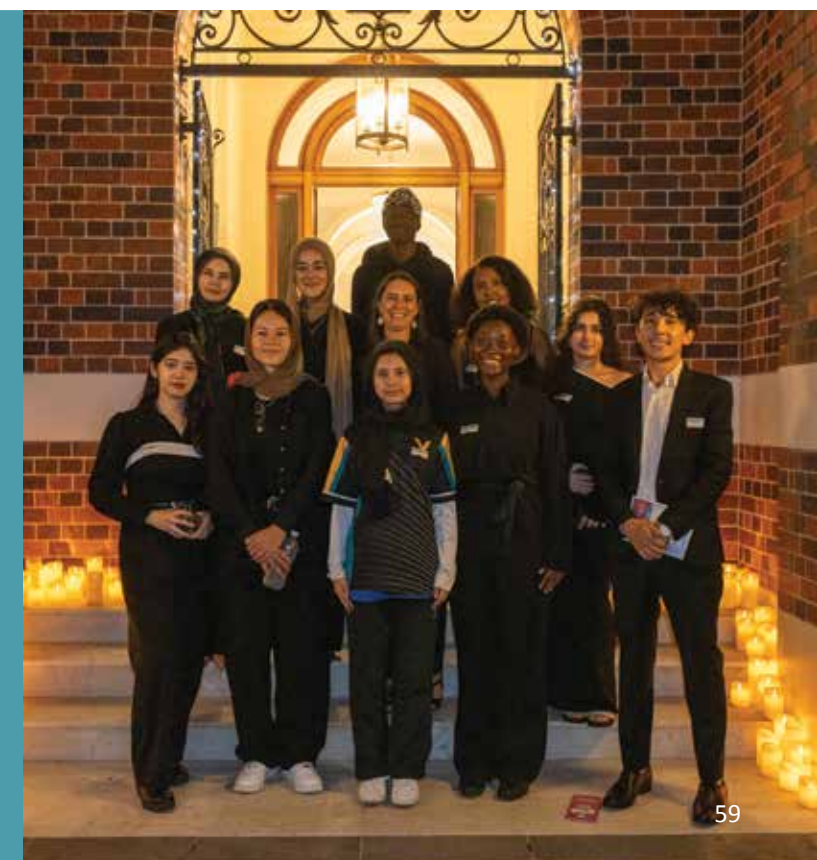
In 2024-25, Milpera State High School marked two major milestones: 40 years since opening, and 20 years of the HEAL program supporting newly arrived young people through their early settlement and recovery. HEAL therapists contributed to the celebrations by transforming school spaces into creative, therapeutic environments - inviting students and families into activities such as a nature mandala, textile explorations, and arts-based connections that reflected HEAL's longstanding role at Milpera.

Throughout the year, HEAL expanded its capacity with additional arts therapists and the reintroduction of music therapy, strengthening its multimodal, trauma-informed approach. Individual and group arts therapies remained central, supporting students to regulate emotions, process experiences and develop confidence through clay-field work, interactive drawing, songwriting, yoga, painting and movement. Students from Rohingya, Afghan, Congolese, Syrian and Iraqi backgrounds were among those who engaged in the program, each bringing rich cultural identities and unique settlement journeys.

HEAL continued to be embedded in Milpera's whole-school approach, providing staff presentations, contributing to EALD Day, engaging with international visitors, and participating in the Equine Assisted Learning program at Reason to Thrive.

Twilight at Toonarbin

In May 2025, HEAL held a special fundraising event at Toonarbin, generously hosted by custodians Allen Hunter and Carmel Dyer. Led by HEAL Patron Jasmina Joldić PSM and Board Director Adele Rice AM, the evening brought together supporters to learn more about, and raise funds for, HEAL's expressive arts therapy programs for children and young people from refugee backgrounds. Guests enjoyed performances from the Musica Viva Strike-a-Chord prize-winners, the Australian debut of the Di Bruin Gospel Project, and a guided panel conversation featuring HEAL graduates. A tour of Toonarbin's well-known art collection added to the experience. The event provided a meaningful opportunity for the community to connect, hear young people's stories, and contribute to the ongoing impact of HEAL's work in Queensland schools.



St James College

IN 2024-25, HEAL delivered a comprehensive, trauma-informed wellbeing program at St James College, supporting *139* students through a full-time onsite therapist and a flexible, highly responsive Hub model. Individual therapy, small group interventions and day programs strengthened students' emotional regulation, school engagement and social connectedness.

HEAL provided targeted support for newly arrived and refugee-background students through initiatives such as the three-day end-of-year holiday program - combining English support, arts and drama activities, excursions and cooking to build confidence and peer relationships. A junior wellbeing program for Years 5-6 supported self-regulation and intercultural friendships, while senior wellbeing groups integrated creative therapies with physical training, curriculum support and essential life skills.

HEAL also contributed to whole-school wellbeing and community connection through staff art therapy, Refugee Week mural projects and cooking activities, student participation in school sports successes, and partnership with the Romero Centre for the annual Luminous Parade.

Students supported came from Afghanistan, Congo, Iran, Rwanda and Eritrea, with key reasons for referral including transition needs, worry, withdrawal, peer conflict and slower learning progress. The program continues to play a vital role in strengthening pathways for settlement, wellbeing and educational success.



Marsden State High School

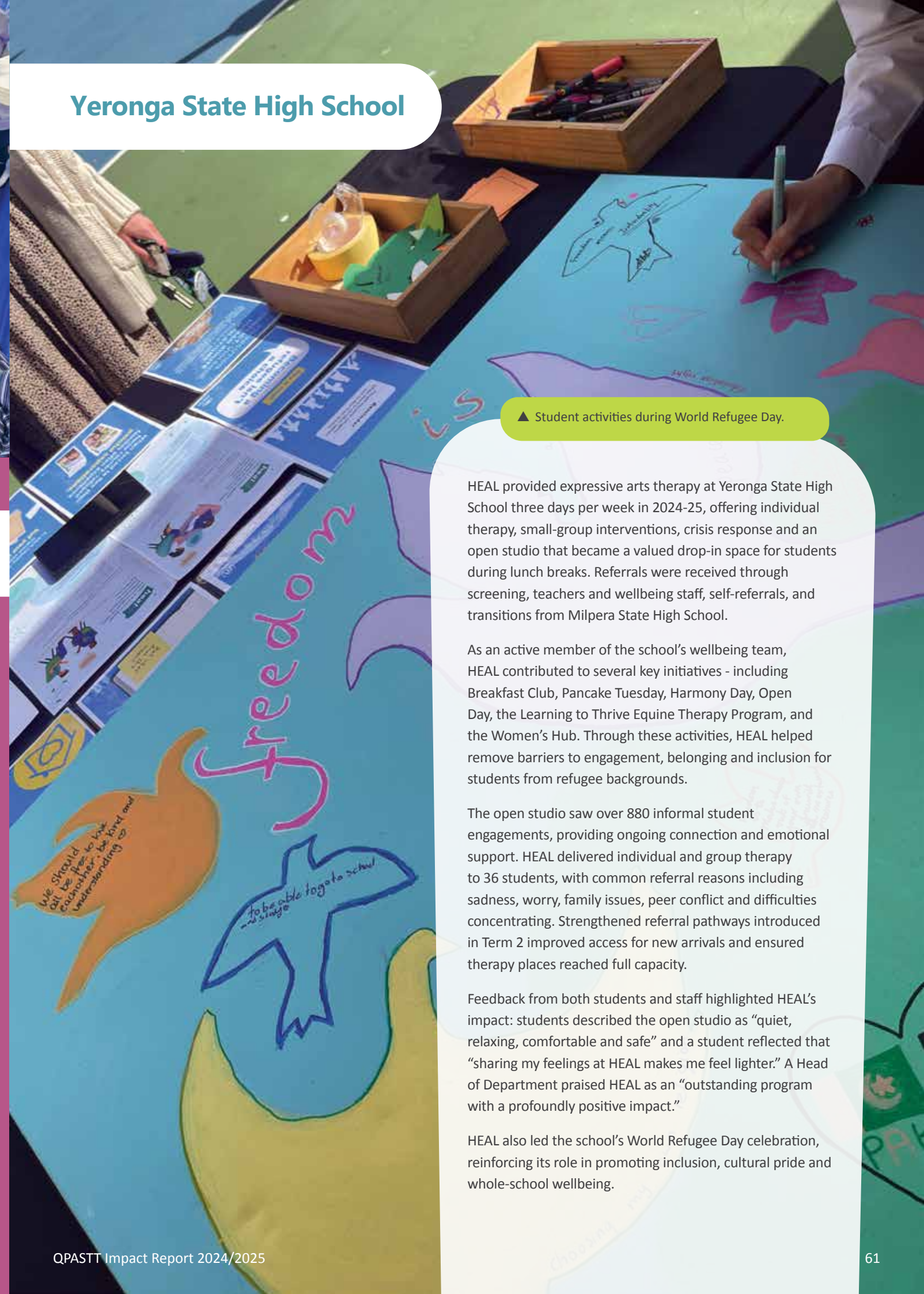
HEAL's expressive arts therapy program at Marsden State High School continued in 2024-25 following a successful pilot. With an art therapist onsite one day per week, the program offered early intervention and targeted therapeutic support for students from refugee backgrounds experiencing challenges with emotional regulation, school attendance and peer relationships.

A dedicated therapeutic space provided by the school enabled a calm, consistent environment for students to engage in individual support and a Lunchtime Wellbeing Group. Across the year, HEAL supported students from Afghan, Hazara, Eritrean, Hutu, Pakistani and Swahili-speaking backgrounds, helping them stabilise, develop coping strategies and strengthen peer connections.

In addition to arts therapy, the school also offered Dance Movement Therapy one day per week, building on a successful HEAL pilot funded by Health and Wellbeing Queensland. This modality strengthened students' body awareness, emotional expression and sense of connection through movement-based practice.

The program enhanced students' emotional regulation, promoted positive relationships and supported ongoing engagement in learning - demonstrating the value of school-based expressive arts therapies in diverse and multicultural school settings.

Yeronga State High School



▲ Student activities during World Refugee Day.

HEAL provided expressive arts therapy at Yeronga State High School three days per week in 2024-25, offering individual therapy, small-group interventions, crisis response and an open studio that became a valued drop-in space for students during lunch breaks. Referrals were received through screening, teachers and wellbeing staff, self-referrals, and transitions from Milpera State High School.

As an active member of the school's wellbeing team, HEAL contributed to several key initiatives - including Breakfast Club, Pancake Tuesday, Harmony Day, Open Day, the Learning to Thrive Equine Therapy Program, and the Women's Hub. Through these activities, HEAL helped remove barriers to engagement, belonging and inclusion for students from refugee backgrounds.

The open studio saw over 880 informal student engagements, providing ongoing connection and emotional support. HEAL delivered individual and group therapy to 36 students, with common referral reasons including sadness, worry, family issues, peer conflict and difficulties concentrating. Strengthened referral pathways introduced in Term 2 improved access for new arrivals and ensured therapy places reached full capacity.

Feedback from both students and staff highlighted HEAL's impact: students described the open studio as "quiet, relaxing, comfortable and safe" and a student reflected that "sharing my feelings at HEAL makes me feel lighter." A Head of Department praised HEAL as an "outstanding program with a profoundly positive impact."

HEAL also led the school's World Refugee Day celebration, reinforcing its role in promoting inclusion, cultural pride and whole-school wellbeing.

Harristown State School Pilot

Harristown State School is located within one of Queensland's most diverse regional communities. With almost 60% of Toowoomba residents reporting diverse ancestry, and the region recognised as a Refugee Welcome Zone since 2013, the school reflects this diversity within its student body. Of more than 400 students, 126 were from refugee backgrounds in early 2025, prompting the school to secure funding to implement a six-month pilot of HEAL's expressive therapies program.

The pilot commenced with a collaborative referral process involving school leadership, teachers and cultural support staff, ensuring appropriate identification of students and active engagement with parents and carers. A master's-qualified drama therapist was welcomed into the school community and delivered the HEAL program two days per week.

Across the pilot, HEAL provided therapeutic support to 25 students through a flexible mix of individual sessions and small-group interventions. Drawing on drama therapy, play therapy, art-making, storytelling, sensory activities and somatic approaches, the program offered developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive ways for children to express emotions, process experiences and build regulation skills - particularly important for students for whom traditional talk therapy is not suitable.

Evaluation results demonstrated strong improvements across HEAL's four key domains. Among students who completed feedback forms, 94% reported improved concentration and learning, a stronger sense of belonging, and that they felt supported by teachers.

Moderate-to-strong gains (64-70%) were also recorded in getting along with others, reduced worry, and participation in school activities. Overall, 88% of students reported improvement across all domains. Teacher feedback aligned with these outcomes, noting significant improvements in transitions (88%), engagement in learning (82%), emotional regulation (76%) and connection to the wider school community (76%).

The pilot demonstrated the effectiveness of expressive therapies in supporting the wellbeing, learning engagement and emotional resilience of primary-school-aged children from refugee backgrounds. Strong collaboration between the HEAL therapist, teaching staff, bi-cultural workers and school leadership was central to these outcomes, helping to build whole-school capacity for trauma-informed, inclusive practice.



Students described feeling **“calm and happy”** when sharing their feelings, while teachers observed that students became **“more confident,” “better able to express themselves,”** and **“more aware of how they feel.”**



Drama therapy in action: Hear from Maddy, HEAL's Drama Therapist supporting children in Toowoomba



▲ Maddy (left) with HEAL colleagues.

“Drama therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses creative expression - theatre, storytelling, role play, sensory play, and sand tray work - to help children explore emotions they may not have words for. It's a way of connecting through play and creativity, helping them process their experiences safely.”

My work is part of a HEAL pilot program in a Toowoomba primary school, supporting children from refugee backgrounds. Many have experienced intergenerational trauma, where harm has been passed through generations. Trauma tends to be stored in the body, and drama therapy helps release and process it in ways that talking alone can't.

Many children referred to me show big emotions - aggression, dysregulation or withdrawal. A typical session begins with creating a ritual space of safety and predictability. We check in, often through playful tools like figurines that represent feelings, before moving into child-led creative exploration. Through play, they can express anger, sadness, fear - even re-enact difficult experiences, trying out new endings that give them a sense of mastery and control.

Over time, I've seen remarkable change. When we started, many children would insist they were “fine,” even when their emotions showed otherwise. Now, they can name feelings - saying, “I'm angry,” or “I've had a bad day.” Some can even cry in front of me.

It might sound upsetting, but it's actually healing - a sign of trust, and of them beginning to connect with, name and regulate their emotions.

Success looks like hearing from teachers or parents that a child is calmer, more reflective, or asking for help when they need it. It's when a child confidently tells me what they want to play or explore that day - they are beginning to build their own sense of self-expression and autonomy.

Drama therapy is especially powerful for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, because it allows connection to culture through movement, rhythm, and expression. Some of the children I work with from Rwanda love playing the djembe drum. They showed me rhythms they had learned in Rwanda, and it was clear how this supported them to maintain a connection to their culture here in Australia.

I love working with these children and the different energies they bring every day. Considering what they've been through, they are the brightest, funniest children. Their courage and creativity constantly remind me why this work matters - it's an honour to walk alongside them in their healing journey. “

Our response:

Restoring justice for survivors

The goal of persecution and torture is to destroy the human spirit and fracture communities. To heal and belong are fundamental human rights. The restoration of justice means enabling equitable opportunities for refugee survivors of torture and trauma to heal, belong and thrive. We do this through a focus on:

- ▶ Investing in opportunities to improve access and equity.
- ▶ Influence and advocacy that amplify the voices of survivors and uphold equity of outcomes.
- ▶ Research and evaluation that contributes to our understanding of recovery impact.
- ▶ Training to enable colleagues in other agencies to become trauma-informed and culturally safe.
- ▶ Partnering with community leaders to foster community healing and reduce stigma.

Advocacy

QPASTT has growing concerns about communities from refugee backgrounds being able to equitably access the suite of supports necessary for their health, wellbeing and full community participation. Limitations in the trauma-informed and culturally responsive nature of services being offered across a range of areas are commonly being experienced by clients, including in NDIS access and interventions, housing, family support, health and education. This can result in inadequate responses to clients' needs by services and client disengagement.

QPASTT's systemic advocacy aims to amplify the voices of survivors, including people seeking asylum, and influence policy and practice. We do this through submissions to government inquiries, participation in advisory committees and sector networks, and cross-agency collaborations.

Read our briefs and submissions at qpastt.org.au/advocacy.



In October 2024,

we provided case studies and recommendations to enhance civil protections and remedies for forced marriage, in response to a Consultation Paper from the Department of the Attorney-General.

In November 2024,

we contributed to the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) Response to the Consultation for the Draft Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, which provided four comprehensive recommendations to ensure the Strategy recognises the distinct needs of people from both refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds and that the distinct needs of these priority populations are acknowledged and addressed in all of the Strategy's action items and recommendations.

In March 2025

we provided additional commentary to the Expert Legal Panel on the Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation. Our submission emphasised the need for youth justice reforms that ensure the consistent use of interpreters, culturally safe and trauma-informed support from first contact, and court processes that recognise the specific needs of young people from refugee backgrounds and their families. We also highlighted the importance of strengthening community-led transition programs, improving biodata collection, and ensuring legal professionals understand the visa implications of criminal convictions to prevent further system involvement and safeguard young people's long-term wellbeing.

In May 2025,

we responded to the Youth Models of Care Consortium Survey, outlining recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness, accessibility and coordination of services for young people from diverse backgrounds, including refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

In November 2024,

we responded to the General Foundational Supports Discussion Paper issued by the Department of Social Services, outlining how services and supports can be enhanced for people with disabilities from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

In December 2024,

we made a submission to the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 - Queensland Parliament Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee, arguing that the amendments within the Bill would further entrench systemic disadvantage and harm to children and young people.

In January 2025

we responded to the Queensland Government's proposed Youth Justice Early Intervention Programs, recommending that any new programs be designed with a trauma-informed and restorative justice approach, and that service providers delivering these initiatives should demonstrate connection and collaboration with local communities.

In April 2025

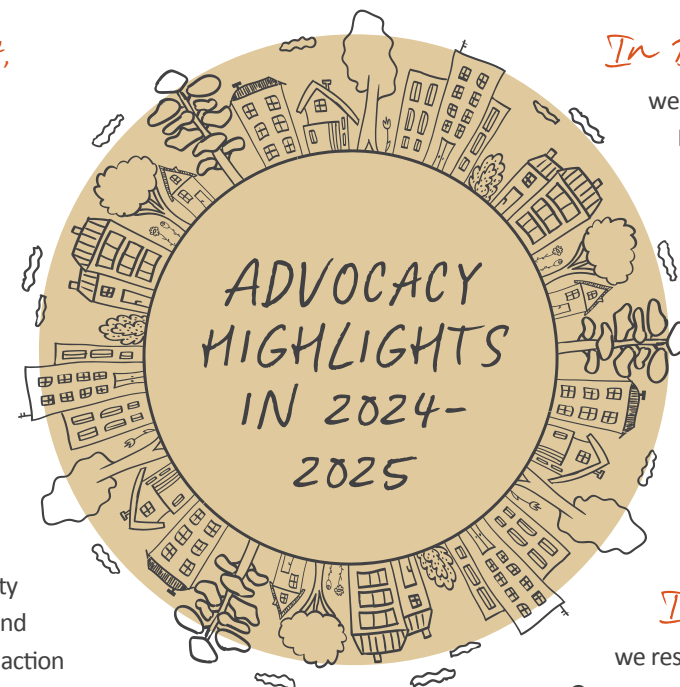
we responded to The Voice of Queenslanders with Disability Survey, highlighting that people from refugee backgrounds need culturally informed and long-term support to be able to apply for the NDIS and recommending the disability sector build capacity in cultural safety, trauma-informed practice and understanding of the refugee and settlement experience.

In June 2025,

we presented our Community Consultations Synthesis Report: Building Inclusive Partnerships for Refugee Wellbeing, offering a blueprint for reform on how systems and services can work with communities for better outcomes.

In June 2025,

we responded to the National Anti-Bullying Rapid Review, encouraging the creation of a robust national anti-racism framework to sit alongside an anti-bullying framework.



Research and evaluation

QPASTT aims to cultivate an organisational culture where research and evaluation improve practice and inform advocacy, assisting people from refugee backgrounds to heal, belong and thrive in a just Australian community.

We continued to participate in the Becoming Aware and Bringing Ideas (BABI) research project focused on the perinatal experience for refugee and asylum seeker families. This is an ongoing collaboration with The University of Queensland researcher Dr Emma Crawford.

We continued to partner with PhD candidate Sanam Ahmadzada from The University of Queensland to support participant recruitment and data collection for the Mental Health Promotion Framework research project.

We continued to participate in the Creative Connections Project: Inclusive education for culturally and linguistically diverse students across key school transitions, led by Dr Dorothee Hölscher, The University of Queensland, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work.

QPASTT is also on the advisory groups for the Social Determinants of Health for Young People from Refugee Backgrounds national Medical Research Future Fund grant, and Voice and Belonging: Pathways to inclusion for new migrant communities, funded by the Australian Research Council with former Co-CEO Dr Ignacio Correa-Velez as Co-Investigator.

Understanding our impact: Building a culture of reflection and evidence

QPASTT’s Research, Evaluation and Strategic Projects Officer strengthens how we understand, measure and communicate the impact of our work. This role supports teams across the organisation to document and reflect on the outcomes of their programs - not just through numbers, but through stories, relationships, and community change.

By building tools and frameworks for monitoring, evaluation and learning, the role helps ensure QPASTT’s programs remain trauma-informed, culturally grounded and aligned with our purpose of healing, belonging, thriving and justice. It also ensures that the voices and experiences of clients and communities are visible in how we measure success - shaping stronger programs, more responsive services, and evidence-based advocacy for systemic change.

Activities during 2024-25 included:

- Developing relationships with teams to strengthen confidence in collecting, analysing and communicating data.
- Supporting program design and evaluation frameworks for initiatives such as Peace Leadership, Connected Parenting, Communities Healing to Thrive and HEAL.
- Creating a research and evaluation framework grounded in QPASTT’s liberatory, collectivist and trauma-informed practice model.
- Leading the Research and Evaluation Advisory Group to ensure alignment with QPASTT’s strategic plan.

Meet Jackie, our Research, Evaluation and Strategic Projects Officer

“My role is about helping us understand the impact of our work - not just what we do, but what it means for the people and communities we support. It’s about capturing evidence of healing and change in a way that’s human-centred and meaningful.”

When we understand our impact, we can strengthen our programs, respond better to our communities, and advocate more powerfully for justice. Data and stories together tell the truth about our work - the challenges as well as the successes. That honesty makes us stronger. We embrace finding out where we need to change or improve our services because we want to design and deliver programs that really serve communities.

Every person has the right to be here and to thrive. To make that real, we need spaces for reflection and evidence that can drive change - within QPASTT and beyond - including legislation, policy and the service system. “

-Jackie Kowli
Research, Evaluation and Strategic Projects Officer



People, culture, governance and systems

Our People

Just as we build community with our clients, we foster community with our staff through listening to staff voices and nurturing a healthy culture where we live our values of kindness, optimism, perseverance, fairness and honesty.



IN 2024-25, QPASTT was a team of 154 staff from 54 different countries, speaking over 36 different languages. 75% of our workforce is from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.



Patron

Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM
*Governor of Queensland
Patron of QPASTT*

Ms Jasmina Joldić PSM
Patron of HEAL

Board

Professor Emerita Keithia Wilson
Chair (part-year)

Robin Lonergan
Chair (part-year)

Adele Rice AM
Director

Fardowsa Yussuf
Director (part-year)

Fraser Power
Director

Dr Ian Mannion
Director

Kerrin Benson
Director (part-year)

Dr Pamela Douglas
Director

Paula Peterson
Director (part-year)

Raziq Qasimi
Director

Sanam Ahmadzada
Director

Vivienne Braddock
Director (part-year)

Leadership Team

Senior Leadership Team

Sally Stewart
Co-CEO for Partnerships and Opportunity Development

Liz Gordon
Co-CEO for Practice Leadership and Service Delivery (part-year)

Tanya Van Bael
Acting Co-CEO for Practice Leadership and Service Delivery (part-year)

Angela Ng
CFO

Beny Bol OAM
Senior Leader, Youth Engagement and Community Partnerships

Regina Hamilton
Senior Leader, People and Systems

Susan Wyatt
Senior Leader, Youth, Groups and Community Recovery

Tania Herbert
Senior Leader, Clinical Services

Vickie Pastellas
Senior Leader, Capability and Governance

Team Leaders

Elijah Mwatha
Team Leader, Regional Services, North Queensland

Girmay Gebremedhin
Team Leader, Community Partnerships

Julie Huysman
Acting Senior Leader, Individual and Family Recovery (part-year)

Kani Kenyi
Co-Team Leader, Youth Enterprise and Innovation

Kellie Chenoweth
Team Leader, Group Work (part-year)

Mavice Hove
Team Leader, Regional Services, Toowoomba

Meredith Hands
Co-Team Leader, Youth Enterprise and Innovation

Meriam Aman
Team Leader, Group Work (part-year)

Merlijn Nicholson
Team Leader, Intake and Connect

Natalie Youssef
Team Leader, Individual and Family Recovery Regional Services

Rima Flihan
Acting Team Leader, Counselling Services (Moringa) (part-year)

Roxanne Taylor
Co-Manager, HEAL

Sarah Pember
Co-Manager, HEAL and Communications Advisor

Stephanie Long
Team Leader, Training, Advocacy and Research

Susannah Tipping
Team Leader, Counselling Services (Oak)

Taryn McBurney
Team Leader, Children and Youth Counselling

Vedrana Jovicic
Team Leader, Logan and Gold Coast

Clinical Supervisors

Elham Rezaei
Clinical Supervisor

Emma Cashman
Clinical Supervisor

Romina Iebra Aizpurua
Clinical Supervisor

Rosalind Dunne
Clinical Supervisor

Yasmeen Ali
Clinical Supervisor

Walking in solidarity with First Nations Australians

At QPASTT, the restoration of justice and human rights is at the heart of our work. We recognise that thriving communities cannot be built on a foundation of injustice, and that the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has never been ceded.

The nation we call home has been shaped by the displacement and dispossession of First Nations peoples, whose lands, cultures and rights continue to be impacted by colonisation. Their resilience, strength and generosity inspire our ongoing commitment to justice and healing for all.

As an organisation supporting survivors of persecution and trauma, we understand that liberation must be collective - grounded in truth-telling, cultural connection and the restoration of dignity and belonging.

QPASTT stands in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and commits to:

- Building respectful, enduring partnerships with First Nations peoples and organisations.
- Embedding reconciliation and cultural safety across our systems, culture and practice.
- Educating staff and communities about the histories, cultures and contributions of First Nations Australians.
- Pursuing decolonising and justice-centred approaches that advance mutual healing and liberation.

In the spirit of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, QPASTT walks alongside First Nations peoples to help create a nation founded on truth, equity and belonging for all.

IN 2024-25, QPASTT PROGRESSED THIS VISION BY:

- Finalising our Statement of Commitment to Walking in Solidarity.
- Continuing to develop a Walking in Solidarity resource and training package for staff induction.
- Offering all staff First Nations Inclusion Training through SBS.
- Providing opportunities to connect with First Nations cultures through:
 - A First Nations Walking Tour at South Bank (Black Card Tours).
 - A weaving workshop (Red, Black and Yellow Shop).
 - Guest speakers at Offline Weeks, including Uncle Fred Leone.
- Consulting with staff on their priorities for next steps in implementing our Walking in Solidarity commitment.

QPASTT's commitment to walking in solidarity with First Nations Australians continues to deepen each year. Through these actions, we are embedding reconciliation as an ongoing practice - woven through our culture, relationships and everyday work.



▲ QPASTT staff on a walking tour of the Southbank cultural precinct with BlackCard.



Strategic planning for 2025-2029: Shaping the future of healing, belonging and thriving

In 2024-25, QPASTT undertook a major strategic planning process to shape our direction for the next five years. The new Strategic Plan 2025-2029 reaffirms our vision for people from refugee backgrounds to live lives liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights injustice.

Developed through consultation with staff, clients, community and faith leaders, partners and funders, the plan builds on QPASTT's strong foundation of trauma recovery and community partnership. **It positions QPASTT to respond to emerging needs across Queensland through four strategic objectives:**

- Equitable and integrated services - ensuring access to healing and recovery wherever it is needed most.
- A clear and committed voice - championing the rights and dignity of survivors and influencing systemic change.
- A workplace of opportunity, learning and thriving - investing in our people and sector sustainability.
- New knowledge and collaboration - embracing innovation, diverse knowledges and partnerships to enhance recovery outcomes.

Guided by our values of Kindness, Optimism, Perseverance, Fairness and Honesty, QPASTT's strategic priorities place the voices of survivors at the centre - strengthening our collective capacity to create communities of healing, belonging and justice for the future.

Excellence recognised through national accreditation

Every three years, QPASTT undertakes accreditation against the National Standards for Mental Health Services, reaffirming our ongoing commitment to quality, safety and continuous improvement.

QPASTT's outstanding results of previous accreditation cycles have reflected the dedication and skill of our staff and the strength of our organisational culture. Results confirmed that QPASTT continues to model best practice in trauma-informed, culturally responsive care for people from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

In 2024-25, QPASTT prepared for its next accreditation review, scheduled for October 2025, subsequently meeting all required standards and being formally awarded accreditation - a recognition of QPASTT's commitment to excellence and accountability in trauma-informed care.

The audit report commended QPASTT for its **“consistently values-based, trauma-informed, and client-led approach to service design and delivery - principles that are not only stated but deeply lived.”**

Our commitment to quality practice and development



▲ Clinical Supervisors Elham and Emma with Septime (Community Engagement & Group Work Facilitator) at QPASTT's 30th anniversary event.

Building national data capability: Strengthening evidence and advocacy

In 2024-25, QPASTT played a key role in the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) Data Capability Improvement Project, a major national initiative to strengthen how refugee trauma recovery services collect and use data.

The project updated the National Minimum Data Set to better capture the breadth and depth of services delivered across Australia's eight FASSTT agencies. The new framework includes new data collection domains across Group Work, Community Capacity Building, Sector Development and Client Experience, Satisfaction and Impact.

Through the implementation of the Data Capability Improvement Project and enhanced digital tools, QPASTT and its FASSTT partners can now generate real-time, comparable data on client outcomes, community engagement, and program delivery. This shared evidence base will strengthen accountability, inform program design, and deepen understanding of trauma recovery at both individual and community levels.

By improving the way we collect and interpret data, QPASTT is helping ensure that the voices and experiences of survivors and communities are represented in national policy, funding, and advocacy - driving systemic change grounded in evidence, partnership, and lived experience.

Clinical Supervision

QPASTT has embedded clinical supervision within our organisation since 2005. This commitment was made to ensure our staff are supported to provide the best possible service to our clients while minimising the impact of vicarious trauma and burnout. A team of five clinical supervisors, led by a Senior Leader, provide regular and ad hoc supervision and support to our staff, contribute to external client reports, develop and oversee clinical induction processes, contribute to staff probation and annual review processes and are members of QPASTT's leadership team.

IN 2024-25, our Supervision Team delivered **856** individual supervision sessions to **78** staff members.



EMDR therapy and national peer support

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) is one of the most effective, evidence-based therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It helps the brain process traumatic memories using bilateral stimulation - such as eye movements, tapping or rhythmic sounds - to replicate what naturally happens during REM sleep. This process "unsticks" distressing memories so the brain can reframe them, allowing survivors to move from feelings of danger or shame toward safety and trust.

At QPASTT, EMDR is offered as part of an integrated, trauma-informed approach. It can bring relief quickly for some clients, particularly those with stable support systems, but it requires careful preparation for those experiencing ongoing stress. Because of this, practitioners must complete rigorous training and supervision. Currently, QPASTT has six EMDR-trained practitioners, with two fully accredited.

Recognising the need for shared learning across the sector, QPASTT practitioners Romina Iebra Aizpurua and Noémie Rigaud established and now lead a national EMDR Special Interest Group of peers through the FASSTT network, with 40 members from FASSTT agencies across Australia meeting regularly to discuss complex cases, share resources, and strengthen culturally responsive practice.

Through this leadership, QPASTT practitioners are helping ensure high-quality, culturally sensitive EMDR practice across Australia, expanding access to one of the most effective trauma therapies available.

"The success of EMDR is equally about a practitioner's success in creating a safe, compassionate, culturally sensitive environment where the client is supported to work at their own pace. For many of our clients, experiencing EMDR with a skilled practitioner allows healing without them needing to relive or describe traumatic events in detail. This is very protective and especially helpful where feelings of guilt or shame are a barrier for treatment."

- Romina Iebra Aizpurua
Clinical Supervisor



Embedding excellence: QPASTT’s peer-led approach to Narrative Exposure Therapy

Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) is a trauma-focused, human-rights-based therapy developed for people who have survived multiple traumatic events across their lifespan, including war, persecution, torture, racism and other forms of social exclusion. Using a symbolic “Lifeline” of rocks (traumas), flowers (moments of safety or connection), candles (times of grief) and sticks (forced combat or violence), NET helps people organise and reclaim their life story, connecting and anchoring overwhelming emotions, memories and bodily sensations to specific events in the past – so that the past does not intrude on the present. Grounded in a justice framework, NET validates that trauma results from profound violations of human rights - not individual weakness - and supports survivors to integrate their experiences with dignity while addressing safety, settlement stressors and the broader social determinants of health.

Since adopting NET in 2015, QPASTT has built significant practice leadership in this modality. Our investment in an Advanced Practitioner has enabled a peer-led training model for all interested staff - from counsellors to clinical supervisors, community development workers to team leaders. This approach fosters shared language, mentorship and cultural responsiveness, with staff supported through case formulation, peer mentoring, practice discussion groups and peer supervision.

Our Advanced Practitioner is contributing QPASTT-developed processes and protocols to the third edition of the international NET manual - particularly around how lived-experience facilitators can safely share aspects of their stories during training. QPASTT will also present at the 2026 FASSTT Conference on embedding NET within a peer-led practice development framework.

In 2024, the Australian Psychological Society formally recognised NET as the recommended trauma-focused therapy for people from a refugee background - validating QPASTT’s early investment and decade-long commitment to this approach. Today, NET informs individual counselling, group programs and community capacity-building across QPASTT, offering survivors a safe and contained way to make sense of their experiences, honour their strengths and reconnect with their story.



“What has been exciting in recent years is seeing our local practice connect with international developments. There is a growing understanding globally that trauma isn’t only about life-threatening events. Social trauma - racism, exclusion, bullying, homophobia, or any experience that strips someone of belonging and dignity - can be just as damaging. NET acknowledges this clearly. In practice, it means we’re not only looking at the ‘rocks’ from the past, but also the painful events people can face here in Australia. Helping clients identify both the harms and the moments of joy, connection and acceptance can offer a safe, contained way to emotionally process trauma, reconnect with their own wisdom and resilience, and sustain relationships with friends, family and communities.”

- Kathleen McBride
Advanced Practitioner



Offline Weeks

QPASTT’s Offline Weeks are triannual events where our staff can focus on professional development, training and team building, replenishing and refreshing themselves and their practice.

In 2024-25, our Offline Weeks included:

- Clinical induction.
- A presentation on Child Safe Principles and Practice with the Australian Childhood Foundation.
- Training on the National Data Capability Improvement Project.
- First Nations learning and traditional healing session with special guest Uncle Fred Leone.
- A weaving workshop with Kaiyu Bayles from Red, Black and Yellow Shop.
- Panel discussions on cultural healing practices.
- Wellbeing and team-building activities including yoga, dance movement therapy, expressive therapies, meditation.

SUPPORT OUR WORK

Donate at qpastt.org.au/donate

To discuss corporate and philanthropic partnership opportunities with QPASTT, contact Sally Stewart, Co-CEO for Partnerships and Opportunity Development at sallystewart@qpastt.org.au.





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LOGAN

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19/390 Kingston Road,
Slacks Creek, QLD 4127

LOGAN YOUTH SPACE

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Units 3 & 4 84 Wembley Road,
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TOOWOOMBA

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