

GEORWEST

# Annual Report

2024-25



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## Acknowledgement of Country

GenWest recognises that the land on which we work and provide our services always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We proudly acknowledge the First Nations communities across Melbourne's west – the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their rich diversity, cultures, histories and knowledges, and the deep contribution they make to the life of this region.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, as well as the strength and resilience of First Nations people, and express solidarity with the ongoing struggle for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty, and recognition of past injustices.

## Victim Survivor Acknowledgement

GenWest acknowledges the bravery of victim survivors who have had the courage to come forward and share their experiences. We are committed to continuing to support victim survivors and others to live lives that are free from violence.

# Chair and CEO's report



Dale Wakefield  
CEO



Karen McIlwain  
Chair of the Board  
of Directors

## It is our pleasure to present the 2024-25 GenWest Annual Report.

GenWest was established over 37 years ago. Since then, we have grown, adapted, and evolved while remaining steadfast in our commitment to the safety, health, and wellbeing of individuals and communities across Melbourne's west.

GenWest's services operate across the full spectrum of family and gender-based violence - from prevention and early intervention to response, recovery, and healing. Every part of our organisation is dedicated to advancing gender equity and justice. By creating environments where all people, particularly those most affected by systemic inequality, can live safely and with dignity, GenWest continues to work towards its long-term aspiration: that everyone can live a life free from family violence and oppression.

This work is not done alone; it is strengthened through partnerships and collaboration with local communities, allies, and organisations who share the goal of a fairer, safer society.



## Strengthening services and achieving better outcomes for clients and communities

Some highlights from this year:

- Opened a dedicated Child and Youth Counselling Hub which will allow us to support more children and their families while reducing wait times. This specialised bespoke space is another step in GenWest long term commitment to ensure the voices and specific needs of children and young people are central to the service we deliver.
- Delivered the Primary Care Pathways to Safety Pilot initiative to help build the skills and confidence of primary care health providers, including GPs, allied health professionals, and mental health workers, to better recognise and respond to family violence.
- Implemented a new Supervision Framework with all family violence staff, providing clear, consistent guidance, strengthening professional practice, supporting staff development, and fostering a positive workplace culture.
- Developed a suite of internal dashboards to support improved oversight of key business functions including greater visibility of brokerage expenditure and system trends, enabling timelier and data-informed decision-making.
- Progressed work on a new Operational Guidance to support consistent practice across the family violence teams, with implementation scheduled for next year.
- Led the Maribyrnong Insurance Support program to assist community members affected by the 2022 floods with insurance challenges and equipped them with tools to navigate the insurance system. This work led to the creation of a Flood Insurance Guide in English and Vietnamese, endorsed by the Insurance Council of Australia.
- Expanded our climate resilience program Our Community Our Voice program into Melton and Wyndham, building on two years of disaster recovery in Maribyrnong following the 2022 floods.
- Worked with 24 organisations including construction companies, local councils, state government departments, community groups, community and elite sporting clubs and defined entities, providing tailored training, advice, and consultancy to help create safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable spaces and workplaces.
- We were invited to expand Project Sitara into Ballarat, in partnership with the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. This initiative provides culturally safe pathways for victim survivors and equips community leaders to educate their communities about family violence and where to seek support.
- Launched the Consent Compass educational module, in partnership with Moonee Valley Legal Service and the Victorian Law Foundation. The module builds the capacity of educators and other professionals to deliver comprehensive consent and sexuality education under new affirmative consent laws. Additionally, the sexual and reproductive team developed new partnerships at Parkville Youth Justice Precinct and Melton Specialist School to educate young people about anatomy, puberty, consent, healthy relationships, contraception, and cancer screening.
- Hosted a learning forum, Sexuality Education in Action: Preventing Gender-Based Violence, attended by partners from Action for Equity and Preventing Violence Together partnerships, to strengthened participants understanding of the role of sexuality education in prevention of gender-based violence.

## Lived experience continues to inform our work

Our Survivor Advisory Group and LGBTQIA+ Advisory Group continue to play a central role in ensuring that lived experience informs our planning, service design, and advocacy. Their insights provide valuable guidance that helps GenWest strengthen its commitment to safety, inclusion, and responsiveness to the needs of the communities and clients we serve. We are deeply grateful to the members for generously sharing their stories, knowledge, and experiences. Their contributions are essential to improving our services.

We have continued to expand and strengthen opportunities for clients and communities to inform our work. Feedback, evaluation and research help us understand and measure the impact of our programs on safety, wellbeing, and recovery outcomes. This year, we partnered with Deakin University to commence a new evaluation study that looks at victim survivor safety and recovery and the role that GenWest services have played in that journey. The findings will guide service improvements at GenWest and inform our advocacy for stronger government support.

## Implemented a new Enterprise Agreement

In April 2025, GenWest employees voted to approve a new Enterprise Agreement after six months of bargaining between GenWest and the Australian Services Union (ASU). Incredibly, 90 per cent of staff participated in the voting process with 100 per cent voting yes. It was an unprecedented result for GenWest, indicating the strength of collaboration between bargaining parties, with staff feedback and priorities deeply reflected in the new agreement.

This Enterprise Agreement reflects GenWest's commitment to gender equity by contributing to closing the gender pay gap and breaking down some of the barriers to achieving gender equality at work, by improving paid parental leave and providing leave for reproductive and chronic health conditions, among many other improved conditions. A big thank you to everyone who participated in the discussions and voting process whose input helped shape this agreement to better reflect the needs of our people. The outcome is wonderful news, and an important milestone for GenWest, as well as our sector.

## Returning to our Barkly office

In 2025, we marked a significant milestone with the reopening of our Barkly Street office, following an extended closure from late 2023 due to severe building damage caused by heavy rainfall. This return has restored client and staff access to GenWest's primary service delivery and administrative hub, reinforcing organisational stability, operational cohesion, and continuity of care for our clients. The transition was underpinned by careful planning and ongoing staff consultation to minimise disruption and ensure services remained accessible throughout the relocation period.

## Our Board

This year, GenWest welcomed four new Board members. Marija Maher, Amelia Condi, Emily Mailles and Julia Reynolds are very capable women who have each brought unique and valuable skills and experience to our organisation.

We also farewelled Adele Drago-Stevens. Adele joined the Board in 2022 and throughout her tenure she was Chair of our Finance, Risk and Audit Committee. Adele's strategic financial expertise was highly respected, as was her governance experience and sage advice in Board discussions.

We extend our thanks to all our Board members for their individual contributions and collective commitment to the work of GenWest.

## Looking to the future

In the coming year, we will implement our 2025-30 Strategy which will guide our organisational direction and priorities for the foreseeable future. A new Strategic Plan represents an important opportunity to reflect on the impact of our work and respond to the evolving needs of our communities. Grounded in our values, the new plan will set a clear and ambitious course for the years ahead.

Next year, we will launch our new Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a meaningful step forward in our ongoing journey toward truth-telling, equity, and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This RAP reaffirms our commitment to deep listening, culturally safe practice, and strengthening relationships with First Nations communities. We know that reconciliation is an active, long-term commitment, and we are determined to continue learning, evolving, and holding ourselves accountable to the values and aspirations this plan represents.

Looking ahead to 2025-26, we expect the demand for our services to continue to grow and we anticipate ongoing economic pressures and budget constraints in Victoria. These challenges serve as a reminder of the importance of staying focused on our strategic purpose. Building on existing partnerships and exploring new collaborations will be essential to ensuring the continuity and expansion of our programs and service, so we can meet client and community needs. Our commitment to achieving gender equity remains steadfast, guiding our work to ensure that everyone can live safely, with dignity, and free from violence and oppression.

## Acknowledging our staff

Our staff have continued to work incredibly hard this year to support victim survivors of family violence and communities across Melbourne's west. Their work is often complex and challenging, yet they remain committed to the safety and wellbeing of the individuals and communities we support.

We are deeply grateful for their adaptability, dedication and professionalism. Their efforts promote safety, wellbeing, and dignity for those affected by family and gender-based violence, and help create environments where individuals, families, and communities feel heard and supported to live safe and healthy lives, free from violence.



# Treasurer's report



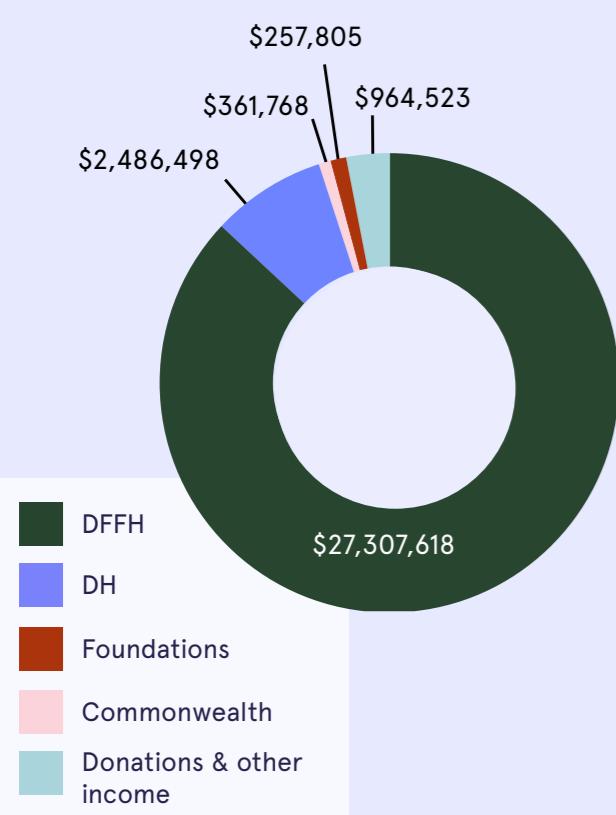
Donna Maloney  
Treasurer

## I am pleased to present the Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025.

This year has been marked by growth and continuous quality improvement across our infrastructure, systems and processes. Despite ongoing economic challenges, we maintained a stable financial position, enabling us to continue delivering on our mission promoting gender equity, preventing family violence and supporting victims through advocacy, partnerships and collaboration.

## Financial results

The 2025 financial year resulted in a small deficit compared to the 2024 financial year. This is primarily due to strategic internal investments aimed at enhancing infrastructure, systems and processes.



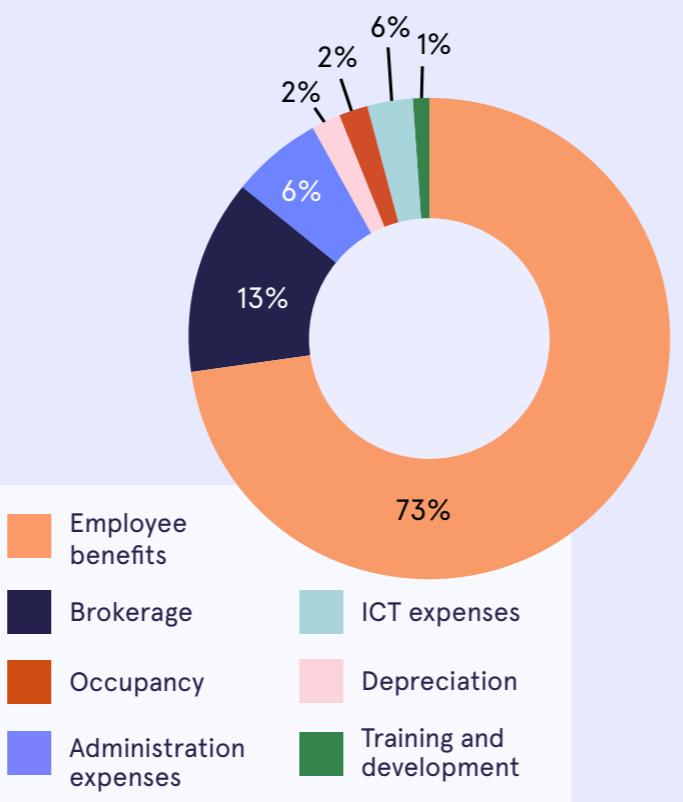
## Revenue breakdown

Revenue totalled \$31,378,212 and includes one-off grants to:

- Work with migrant and refugee communities to develop and implement their own climate adaptation and disaster preparedness plans in Melbourne's west
- Engage multilingual practitioners to build capacity in understanding the gendered drivers of violence.

## Investment income and strategic Impact

GenWest achieved a higher return on our long-term investments, driven by improved funding management and favourable market conditions. This uplift in return is instrumental in enabling us to support future strategic priorities beyond our core funding requirements.



## Major expenditure Allocation

Expenditure increased slightly due to infrastructure upgrades. However, we underspent by 37% compared to budget targets reflecting prudent financial management.

GenWest's major expenditures were:

- Salary and wages which made up 73% of total expenditure, reflecting a strong investment in staffing.
- Client support services which made up 13% of total expenditure primarily in brokerage services which play a crucial role in supporting family violence victim survivors. This service covers relocation costs, counselling, education and household appliances.

## Strategic financial decisions

Key investments and initiatives included:

- Children's Therapy Office Renovation: A new tailored space for counselling children affected by family violence, offering personalised treatment plans
- Footscray Office Renovation: Enhancing staff morale, client experience, improve health and well-being and brand identity through a comfortable and inspiring workspace.
- Enterprise Agreement (EA) Negotiation: Secured improved wages, leave conditions, and employment stability – supporting talent attraction and retention.
- Performance Dashboards: Introduced real-time visibility into key metrics, enabling data-driven decisions aligned with strategic goals.
- Framework Development:
  - Supervision Framework – promotes growth, accountability, and reflective practice in service delivery in family violence.

- Policy Framework – strengthens compliance, quality and consistency.
- Operational guideline – Enhance clarity and efficiency in day-to-day operations.

## Audit and compliance

Our financial records were reviewed/audited by BDO Auditors, resulting in an unmodified opinion affirming the integrity and transparency of our financial statements.

## Outlook

Looking ahead, we anticipate moderate growth and will continue to invest in digital transformation to enhance operational efficiency. Investment income is expected to continue growing throughout the current financial year, further strengthening GenWest's capacity to respond to emerging community needs. We will explore funding diversification to grow unrestricted funding sources.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge with gratitude the support of our funding bodies and donors, whose contributions have been essential to our financial sustainability.

We thank the Board of Directors and the Finance and Risk Committee for their oversight and guidance throughout the reporting period.

Finally, we recognise the efforts of the Executive and all GenWest staff, whose work has supported the effective management and delivery of our financial objectives.

GenWest achieved a higher return on our long-term investments, driven by improved funding management and favourable market conditions. This uplift in return is instrumental in enabling us to support future strategic priorities beyond our core funding requirements.

# Our Year at a Glance

## Supporting adults and children experiencing family violence

In 2024–25, we supported **2,444 victim survivors** through our family violence services.

*This figure does not include those assisted by our staff based at The Orange Door.*

At The Orange Door, we delivered **79,044 hours** of support—a 31% increase on the previous year.

## 71 cases

were referred to the Risk Assessment and Management Panel. GenWest co-chairs this panel with the Victoria Police and ran 24 meetings to coordinate responses to support individuals at risk of serious harm or homicide.

We provided around **1,500 nights of emergency accommodation**, mostly in hotels and motels.

Our After-Hours Program supported people in crisis, providing

**607 episodes** of emergency assistance when people most need them out of business hours.

We gave out more than **200 phones**, helping people remain connected to services and support networks and to help stop stalking and tracking.

Our Children's Counselling Program supported **322 children and young people**

during the year. Each child's key adult was also offered guidance on how to best support them.

We delivered **358 Personal Safety Initiative packages**,

helping people improve their safety through technology and security measures such as security cameras and new locks.

We helped **1,901 people**

with family violence crisis brokerage, providing short-term financial help for immediate needs such as rent, school needs, and home goods.

## 16 households

were given safe and secure accommodation at Marrageil Manggi, our crisis refuge.



## Preventing gender-based violence and supporting communities through health, wellbeing, education and social programs

### 3202 people

were reached through our prevention and health and wellbeing programs, training and community engagement activities.

### 525 people

attended health education sessions delivered by the Multilingual Health Education team.

### 848 people

(young people, educators, parents, carers and healthcare professionals) participated in sexual and reproductive health education sessions across the west including in schools, universities and at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

### 131 people

(health professionals and community members) reached with information and training about Female Genital Cutting/Circumcision.

## Building capacity of workforces and communities

### 24 organisations

including construction, local councils, state government departments, defined entities, alongside community groups and sports clubs, engaged us for training. In 2023-24 we worked with 10 organisations, which is a 140% increase on the previous year.

### 1,200 participants

reached with our training programs.

### 8 community sporting clubs

were supported by developing Gender equality action plans to make sports accessible and safe for everyone.

### \$85,000 revenue

generated from delivering training this financial year. All profits from our training and capacity building services are reinvested into our health promotion and primary prevention programs and advocacy work.

## Reached audiences and raising awareness

### 97,068

total views of our social media posts on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

### 8,200

resources downloaded.

### 84,008

visits to our website.

## Our workforce

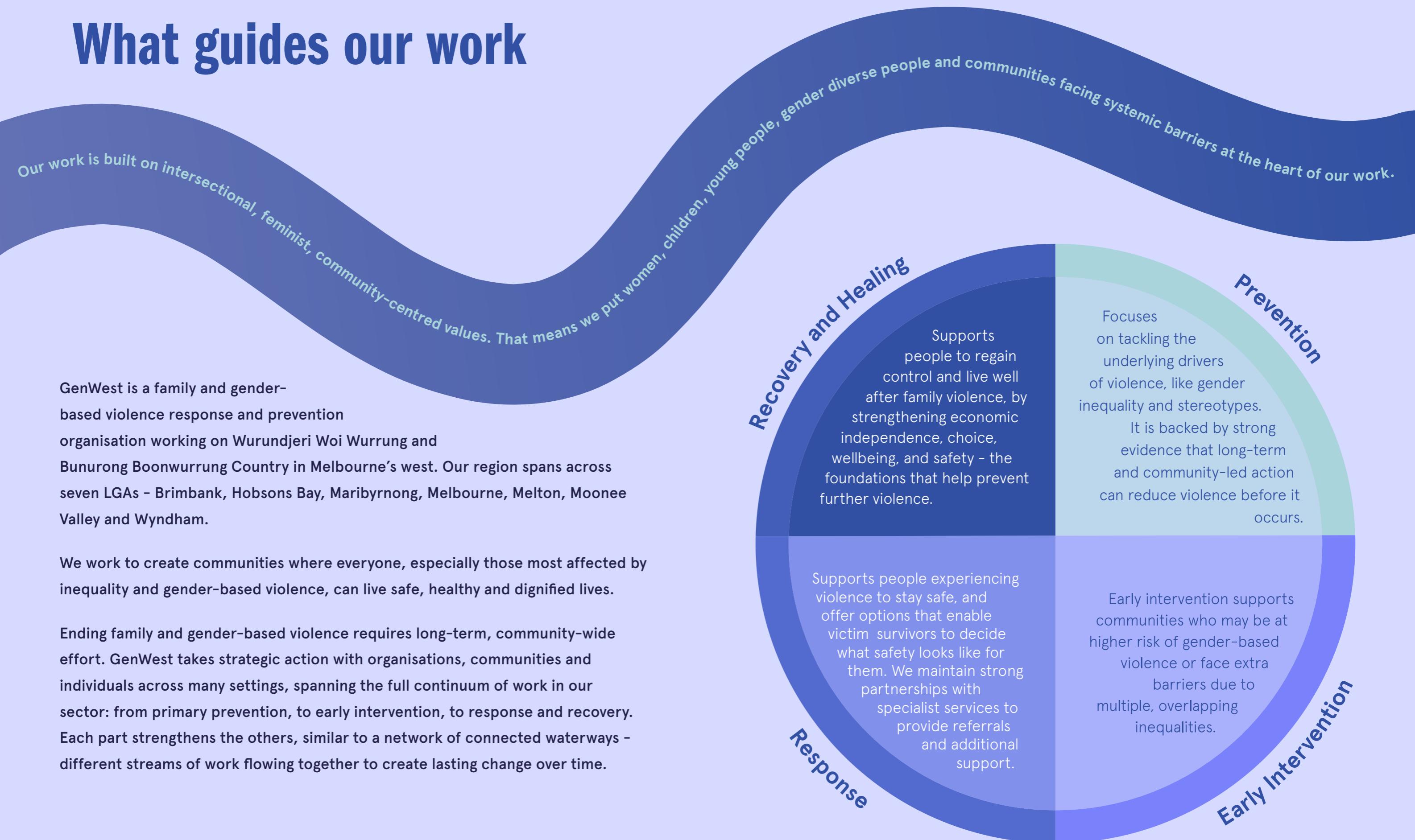
### 244 staff

as of 30 June 2025. On 30 June 2020 we had 116 staff.

Staff work across **8 sites**

in Melbourne's west.

# What guides our work



# Our strategic approach

## We build strong partnerships

and work to strengthen systems to improve safety and equality for everyone. We partner across sectors to reduce risk for victim survivors and to make sure responses to family violence are consistent, coordinated and effective. We advocate through policy advice, submissions and media, and we work with survivor advocates so lived experience shapes how the system evolves.

Our team leads major regional collaborations, including Preventing Violence Together and Action for Equity. Guided by our peak bodies GenVic and Safe and Equal, we influence policy, funding and system reform.

We support communities and workplaces to understand the role they play in preventing family violence and advancing gender equality. Thankfully, we're not in it alone in the work we do. Our work is collective and everything we achieve is thanks to the contributions, support and collaboration of our clients, communities, staff, allies and partners.

## Our prevention teams work to stop gender-based violence before it starts.

We deliver training and consultancy in schools, workplaces, sports clubs and community settings, focusing on the gendered drivers of violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, advancing gender equality, and how to safely respond to disclosures of violence.

Our sessions create a vital link between mainstream organisations and the family violence sector. People often share experiences of violence with our facilitators, and we can quickly connect them with specialist support.

Grounded in intersectional, trauma-informed practice, we recognise that different communities face different barriers. Our core goal is simple: to make sure everyone understands what causes family and gender-based violence and how we can work together to prevent it.

## We work with communities across Melbourne's west

to improve access to health information and services. Our workshops take place in schools, hospitals, prisons and community centres. They include in-language programs for migrant and refugee communities and social support groups for women and gender diverse people with disabilities.

People often disclose violence in these settings or are referred from family violence services. Our facilitators offer trauma-informed support and connect participants with specialist services.

We also help communities prepare for and recover from climate change and disasters, using an intersectional, gendered approach that recognises how different people experience risk and recovery.



## We provide coordinated family violence and crisis support to help people stay safe,

rebuild stability, make their own choices about their lives. Through The Orange Door, we offer intake, assessment and referrals to connect people with the services they need. Our crisis team assesses risk, stabilises situations and creates safety plans.

Through outreach and case management, we provide advocacy, emotional support and ongoing safety planning. Refuge accommodation gives people a safe, stable place to recover. Flexible Support Packages and the Personal Safety Initiative improve access to financial support, housing and personal security, helping people regain control and make choices that support their wellbeing. We also provide trauma-informed therapeutic support for children, young people and families. This promotes healing, strengthens resilience and creates the conditions where prevention is possible, ensuring people have the stability, support and information they need to live safely and with confidence.

# Responding to family violence and supporting victim survivors to heal and recover

This year has seen GenWest continue to respond to the needs of communities across Melbourne's west and provide more timely support to a larger number of family violence victim survivors.

## Highlights from 2024-25

### Helping more children to heal and recover from family violence

This year, our Child and Youth Counselling program exceeded annual targets reflecting the positive impact of two additional counsellors in the team. The increased workforce meant we could support more children, young people and their parents or carers, and that they did not need to wait as long to receive a service.

In May 2025, we opened our new dedicated Child and Youth Counselling Hub in Maribyrnong. This project was funded by GenWest with the generous individual donations and support from local organisations helped us set up the space. [Read more about the hub on page 22.](#)

### Improving our processes and systems to achieve better outcomes for clients

We embedded a new Supervision Framework this year for family violence staff. This framework sets a clear, consistent and equitable approach to staff supervision across all programs and teams. It helps strengthen professional practice, support staff development, and build a positive workplace culture.

We have made significant progress on our new Operational Guidance. This resource will help ensure our services are delivered consistently and to a high standard. It will give staff clear,

and accessible instructions for key parts of their work. The new guidance will be rolled out next year.

In addition, this year we have been developing a set of dashboards to improve how we track and oversee our family violence support work. These tools will help us monitor workloads, intensity and risk levels, strengthen accountability, and identify areas for improvement. [Read more about their impact on page 33.](#)

### Advice and service navigation

This year, GenWest received funding to help build the skills and confidence of primary care health providers, including GPs, allied health professionals, and mental health workers, to better recognise and respond to family violence. The 12-month initiative was part of the Primary Care Pathways to Safety Pilot, overseen by the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (NWMPHN).

The program acknowledged the key role primary care health providers play in spotting early signs of family violence and stepping in to prevent further harm and support the safety and wellbeing of adults and children experiencing family violence. Through this pilot, providers were able to contact GenWest for information, referral advice, and consultation to strengthen how they respond to family violence.

While uptake of secondary consultations was modest, participants showed genuine interest and thoughtful engagement in improving their practice. GenWest has shared evaluation findings and recommendations to help shape future partnerships between primary care and family violence services.

# Advancing gender equity to prevent violence before it occurs

GenWest delivers programs that improve health and wellbeing and promote gender equity amongst communities in Melbourne's west.

We deliver health, wellbeing, education and social connection programs in a wide range of community settings including language schools, high schools, universities, community centres, women's prisons, sports clubs and faith-based settings. These programs respond to the changing and emerging health and wellbeing needs of people in our region. Our main areas of focus include prevention of violence, mental health and wellbeing, sexual and reproductive health, multilingual health education and climate resilience in an urban setting.

We provide gender equality training and consultancy to local councils, workplaces, sports clubs, and community organisations, supporting them to create safer, fairer, and more inclusive spaces and workplaces for everyone.

## Highlights from 2024-25

### Sexual and reproductive health education across Melbourne's west

We reached 848 young people, educators, parents, carers and healthcare professionals across the west this year with our sexual and reproductive health programs. We delivered these programs in schools, universities and women's prisons. [Read more about our sexual and reproductive health programs on page 38.](#)

### Women and gender diverse people with disabilities

Sunrise Social Groups are groups for women, gender diverse and non-binary people who have a disability, chronic health issues and/or mental health challenges. The groups support participants to build friendships and a support network, get information about staying healthy, learn about local services and connect to their community.

In 2024, we implemented a new Sunrise model, Theory of Change and evaluation framework. The team supported exiting participant transitions, which included creating a regular newsletter featuring local news and updates, as well as advocacy opportunities and social events that group members could participant in. In June 2025, the team launched a pilot partnership co-designed with Western Health's HOPE (Hospital Outreach Post-Suicidal Engagement) Program and Mind Australia (lead agency for the Melton Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub). This collaboration aims to provide more integrated, trauma-informed, and accessible mental health pathways for women in Melbourne's west.



## Culturally safe, multilingual health education for communities in Melbourne's west

GenWest's Multilingual Health Education (MHE) team continues to reach more individuals and communities in Melbourne's west through in-language health and wellbeing education programs. The team create connections through long term engagement with community groups, building trust through shared language and culture.

In 2024–25, the MHE team delivered over 26 sessions and community events reaching 525 people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. The program supports migrant and refugee communities to feel more confident navigating the Australian healthcare system and improves understanding of essential health checks and chronic illness, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, healthy relationships, family violence and available support and referral pathways.

This year, the team partnered with the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre and Safe and Equal to understand the experiences of Indian women who have accessed family violence support services. Our team helped recruit participants and co-facilitates focus groups in community languages, ensuring the sessions were culturally safe and focused on participants' wellbeing.

Project Sitara continued to grow this year. In 2024–25, Project Sitara recruited and trained 11 new participants, and we were invited to expand Project Sitara into Ballarat. [Read more about Project Sitara on page 24.](#)

## Partnering with community on disaster preparedness and recovery

GenWest works with communities in Melbourne's west to build climate and disaster resilience, with particular focusing on working with women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds. This year, we continued our work in Maribyrnong with the Maribyrnong Insurance Support Program and expanded Our Community Our Voice project into Wyndham and Melton. [Read more about our community climate resilience work on page 40.](#)

## Preventing violence against women system mapping

In collaboration with Respect Victoria, GenWest successfully delivered a regional workshop as part of the statewide Prevention Systems Mapping initiative. To support the workshop, GenWest prepared a *Metropolitan Western Region Evidence Brief* summarising regional data, prevention activities and key resources relevant to primary prevention work across the west.

The workshop brought together the Preventing Violence Together partnership to consider at what helps and what gets in the way of local efforts to prevent violence against women and gender-based violence. Participants undertook an exercise to create a collective systems map. They reflected on where local organisations would like collective action, advocacy or change to happen at a statewide level and where they would like support locally to have greater impact on local prevention efforts. Download the Evidence Brief and Systems Mapping Report from our website at [genwest.org.au/pvt](http://genwest.org.au/pvt).

## Working with organisations and councils to create safe, inclusive and equitable workplaces

Our Workforce Capacity Building team provides tailored training, advice, and consultancy help councils, businesses, services and community groups create safe, inclusive, and gender-equitable spaces and workplaces.

In 2024–25, we worked with 16 organisations, including construction companies, local council, state government departments, defined entities and community groups, and 8 community sporting clubs, a 140% increase on last year. We delivered tailored support including gender impact assessments, data analysis, policy reviews, and tailored training programs.

We reached 1,200 participants and generated \$85,000 in revenue, all reinvested into GenWest's health, wellbeing and prevention programs, and family violence response and recovery services. While revenue was lower than last year, we worked with 10 more organisations, expanding our reach and impact across the region.

We asked people who attended mandatory local council workplace training whether the sessions increased their confidence and knowledge of the impacts of gender inequality. For those who had initially felt 'not confident' or only 'fairly confident' on the topic, 97% said that after the training they felt 'confident' or 'very confident'.

We delivered workplace training for a leading tertiary institute who shared: "GenWest is a leading body in their cause. It makes logical sense to call in the best".

Our training programs cover topics such as: understanding, preventing and responding to family violence and gender-based violence; building and leading gender equitable, inclusive workplaces; and equitable disaster management. Find out about training and consultancy with GenWest on our website at [genwest.org.au/training](http://genwest.org.au/training).



# Stories from GenWest

Each year, our Annual Report shares stories from victim survivors and community members who accessed our services and lived experience advocates we have worked alongside. Their stories illustrate the breadth, complexity, and impact of our work, and serve as a reminder that, even when the work is challenging, it makes a tangible and lasting difference to the safety and wellbeing of the people we support.



# Supporting children and young people to heal and recover from family violence

For children and young people who have experienced family violence, the effects can be traumatic and long-lasting. The impacts can build up over time and affect their health, development and wellbeing. They might feel anxious, have trouble managing their emotions, or find it difficult to build relationships.

GenWest's Child and Youth Counselling Program provides specialised therapeutic support to help children recover, build resilience, and learn to understand and express their feelings.

For nearly 15 years, GenWest has delivered counselling to help children and young people recover from the impacts of family violence. The Child and Youth Counselling Program delivers individual, group and family sessions, arts programs and workshops for parents and carers to support conversations around family violence and separation. Creative and arts-based methods form an important part of the program, supporting emotional expression, self-reflection, and the rebuilding of safe and trusting relationships.

In 2024–25, the program supported 322 children and young people across Melbourne's west. Between January 2023 and March 2025, we conducted an evaluation of the program which demonstrates the effectiveness of trauma-informed, arts-based interventions in improving children's emotional regulation, reducing trauma symptoms, and enhancing positive emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Children and parents described counselling as a place where safety, creativity, and connection could begin to replace fear and confusion. Their reflections illustrate the depth of recovery possible when children receive consistent, trauma-informed therapeutic support.

Even though there is strong evidence that therapeutic support works, ongoing investment in services for children and families affected by family violence is still limited. Making sure families can access counselling that is timely and suitable for their child's age is essential to breaking intergenerational cycles of family violence and building safer futures..

## A new safe space for healing

In recent years, demand for GenWest's Child and Youth Counselling Service has continued to grow, with an increasing number of families seeking support. This year, GenWest opened our new Child and Youth Counselling Hub in Maribyrnong. This purpose-built hub enables the program to support more families and reduce wait times. The Hub is a special space for children and young people to feel safe and focus on their healing. Expanding this service ensures we can continue to support kids and families to break the cycle of violence.

GenWest is fundraising to ensure this vital service continues. Find out how you can help at [genwest.org.au/support-us](https://genwest.org.au/support-us)

*"Before counselling, I felt like my feelings were too big. Now I know they're okay."*  
- Child, age 9

*"We talk more now. I can understand what she's feeling instead of just seeing the anger."*  
- Parent

*"Drawing helped me say things I couldn't talk about."*  
- Child, age 7

*"He's laughing again. That's the biggest change."*  
- Parent

*"I feel like I can start again."*  
- Child, age 12

## Louis's story

Louis\* had experienced family violence at the hands of his father. Louis and his mum, Lidia\*, and had found a safe place to stay and were rebuilding their lives. Louis came to our children's counselling services for help with making sense of his experiences of family violence and heal from his experiences.

Louis chose to have his mum, Lidia, join the sessions. This meant the counsellor could focus on their relationship and support Louis in rebuilding trust. In their counselling sessions, Louis had the chance to explore his thoughts, emotions, and memories of family violence in a safe space, with both his mother and the counsellor present. With the support of his counsellor, Louis was able to begin talking about and working through what had happened to him. He was able to explore ways of expressing himself and his emotions, while Lidia watched the interactions between Louis and his counsellor and learned ways to respond supportively to his emotional needs.

This type of counselling gives parents and children the opportunity to practice new communication and coping skills in the safety of the counselling room, and then continue using these strategies at home. This means the benefits of counselling stretch beyond the session as the parent can continue to be there for the child emotionally, so they feel safe to express themselves and start to heal.

As their sessions together came to a close, Louis, Lidia and the counsellor worked on some creative activities to reflect on their journey. In one activity, they created a 'bowl of light' where Louis imagined a bowl representing his inner light. He placed stones in the bowl to represent the hurtful or difficult experiences that sometimes dim his light. The activity helped him recognise his feelings, remember that they are valid and acknowledge his own capacity for healing. Lidia took part too, witnessing Louis' process and creating her own bowl of light.

Through the sessions, Louis found a safe and supportive space to be seen and heard. Through play, storytelling, and metaphor, he began to make sense of his experiences, build confidence, and understand his emotions.

After the sessions ended, Lidia shared that she and Louis kept the bowl of light at home. Together, they would check in at the end of the day, talking about the "hard things" he was holding and finding ways to lighten his load so his light could shine brightly again.



# Community champions preventing family violence

Project Sitara is the first initiative of its kind in Australia, working with community leaders to prevent and respond to family violence. It was created by GenWest's Multilingual Health Education (MHE) team and launched in early 2024.

The project was co-designed with a pilot group of elder Indian women, recognising their important role as community leaders and cultural custodians. These women, called 'Sitaras' (meaning 'stars' in Hindi and Urdu), act as community champions. They help women understand and recognise family violence and connect them with the support they need, offering guidance to those who may not know where to go for help.

Project Sitara grew from the strong community connections and trusted relationships the MHE team has built across Melbourne's west and our decades of experience working across the family violence continuum, from prevention to crisis support, response, recovery and healing.

In 2024-25, Project Sitara recruited and trained 11 new participants, bringing the total number of Sitaras to 20 women, aged between 35 and 85.

The program includes in-language training, peer learning, and interactive sessions covering:

- how to recognise family violence
- understanding what causes family violence
- how to respond when someone shares their experience of violence
- how to refer people to local services

Ongoing Community of Practice sessions allow Sitaras to continue their work and stay connected. Participants consistently report:

- Greater confidence in recognising and responding to family violence
- A stronger sense of connection and solidarity with other participants
- Increased ability to support others in their community
- Feeling empowered to speak out about family and gender-based violence and seek support from GenWest and other services

In early 2025, GenWest was invited to expand Project Sitara into Ballarat. In partnership with the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council, we are building culturally specific pathways to support victim survivors, ensuring no one in Ballarat faces family violence alone. The program, delivered in Hindi, will start next financial year.

This year, Project Sitara was also the winning entry at Safe + Equal's 2025 Partners in Prevention Pitch event, which highlights innovative approaches to preventing family and gender-based violence.



## Sitara stories

In this year's report, we are privileged to share the stories of two Project Sitara participants. We sincerely thank Chitra and Mona for generously sharing their time and their stories with us, and for allowing us to include them in our Annual Report. Both Chitra and Mona described Project Sitara as transformative and shared how it has already made a meaningful impact on their lives. They are excited to share their experiences so others in the community can learn about the program and the positive impact it makes.

### Chitra's Story: Growing strength and community through Project Sitara

Chitra has worked in children's services for more than 15 years. After beginning her career as a kindergarten teacher, she now runs a family day care from her home. She describes herself as someone who naturally helps others and is active in her community.

Chitra joined Project Sitara in 2024. She decided to join the program because she had seen and experienced family violence in her extended family and in her own marriage. *"I have seen domestic violence the past with my sister, and that time I couldn't help - we just thought, you know that's your choice because you choose to marry him,"* she says. *"Later I realised I was also living with controlling behaviour too, things like being told what to wear, not being allowed to talk to friends, or being shut out of money decisions. At that time, I didn't even know that was a kind of violence."*

Chitra reflected on her sister's experience of violence and her own realisation that everyone has the right to make choices about their life and relationships. She said that before Project Sitara, she hadn't recognised that things like restricting access to money, limiting social contact, or deciding who you can talk to are also forms of abuse. Through the program, she came to understand that these patterns are not acceptable, and that victim survivors can set boundaries and make changes.

She also described the pressures faced by women in her community who migrate from India and find themselves isolated or financially dependent. She said, *"When I migrated [to Australia], I had seen so many girls who are sharing their experience of moving from India. They were compromising so many things [in their marriages and relationships], but we can't help them."* She said many women don't speak about violence or controlling behaviour because of social stigma and fear of being judged. Chitra joined Project Sitara because she wanted to help women like these – to give information, encouragement and understanding so that they could seek help safely. Since completing the program, Chitra has supported several women in the Indian Australian community experiencing family violence. One woman was being pressured by her husband to undergo medical procedures and coerced into sex.

*Chitra's story continues on the next page.*

Chitra encouraged her to talk with health professionals and helped her understand that this was a form of sexual abuse.

In another case, she helped a woman who was in immediate danger from her husband. Chitra offered her a safe place for the night, supported her to contact police, and helped connect her with The Orange Door for emergency accommodation and with GenWest for follow-up support. The woman and her children are now safe and rebuilding their lives.

*"We need a more Sitara's because women need a hand to hold. Someone who can take them step by step through the process because sometimes they [victim survivors] are already going through a lot and they don't have that courage. Sometimes they change their minds because there's so much to process. But [it helps] if there is one person to hold their hand and say 'everything will be fine, have faith in this system' - I think [Project Sitara] has changed things a lot."*

Through these experiences, Chitra has become a trusted point of contact for others in her community. She continues to use what she learned through Project Sitara to talk openly about gender roles, safety and respect. She often challenges everyday inequality, encouraging parents to teach both boys and girls to be independent and caring.

*"[For people who want to join Project Sitara], they will realise that we have to do some work for community and for ourselves. I changed a lot after joining Project Sitara and now, I'm so confident."*

Reflecting on her journey, Chitra said she feels more confident and knowledgeable, and she values the opportunity Project Sitara gave her to help others. She believes that more people should have the chance to take part. As Chitra said, more Sitaras means women don't have to face family violence alone, someone is there to walk beside them, step by step.

## Mona's Story: Learning, transforming, and innovating with Project Sitara

Mona runs a family day care service in Melbourne's west where she has lived for over fifteen years. She migrated from India to Australia with her husband and they live with their two young children in a close-knit Indian community in Melbourne's west.

It was through her community that Mona heard about Project Sitara. Mona signed up out of curiosity and encouragement from her friend Chitra, but after the first session she recognised the program would be useful in her daily life. In her work, she sometimes learns that families are facing difficult situations at home, and in the past, she has felt unsure about how to respond.

*"You get to know other parents and they share their story, and sometimes you don't know how to help or take that further. Back in India you have support from family and*

*friends, but here you go through everything alone. When you see things are going on in somebody's life here [in Australia] you try to help, you try whatever you can."*

Mona is in her forties and thought that most people joining Sitara would be a similar age, but she was surprised to find many women were older. She reflected on her joy in learning from the older women and says their stories and experiences completely changed her perspective.

Mona shared that Sitara is full of lively discussions, and in the beginning, Mona didn't fully agree with everything she heard. *"I used to ask, 'Why do we only talk about women as victims? Why not men?' She explained that the GenWest facilitator shared the statistics which helped her understand the problem of men's violence against women on a larger scale. "She is a very good teacher. She is amazing and the way she teaches and explains things is very clear."*

One statement shared by facilitators in the program had a big impact on Mona: *'Violence is a choice.'* Mona explained:

*"That sentence completely changed me. I was shocked - how it was a choice? And when [the GenWest facilitator] asked 'Why don't they act out this kind of behaviour in the office, or in other public settings? Why with women, why in the home?' I thought yeah, you're right! Why don't they show this kind of behaviour in other settings? Why with us? The whole thing changed my mind."*

Since finishing Project Sitara, Mona says her thinking and her conversations have changed. This has included advocating to bring Project Sitara to men in her community. *"Project Sitara is very good, but if we have a men's Sitara - I am telling you, it will be more beneficial. I wish this will start."*

*"Women alone can't do these things. We can discuss with each other, we can cry, we can give the shoulder, but we can't change everything. Men need to talk with men, in every office environment or school, they should go through this training. And not once every year, they should keep on reminding - 'this is right', 'this is wrong', 'this is the limit', and 'this is what to expect'."*

Through Project Sitara, Mona says she's also learned the importance of teaching children boundaries and equality early in life. *"I have learned that you have to set limits. Then people know, 'this is the limit'. That is very, very necessary in any kind of a relationship - whether it's a friendship or it's married life. When we know that limit, people start respecting that, and [it brings the] power [back into our own hands]."*

Asked what she'd say to someone thinking about joining Project Sitara, Mona says *"Go! Don't think twice. You'll learn things you thought you already knew. There are a lot of open discussions where you can speak your mind, and your whole perspective might change, as mine has changed."*



# Flexible, responsive support for victim survivors of family violence

GenWest's family violence services provide flexible, person-centred support for victim-survivors of family violence and their families. Our work is grounded in a trauma-informed approach that prioritises safety, choice, and dignity.

Our dedicated family violence teams work across multiple sites in Melbourne's west, including three Orange Door locations, our main office in Footscray, the new Child and Youth Counselling Hub, and our refuge.

Our Crisis Response and Case Management teams offer a range of supports for victim survivors designed to enhance safety, stability, and wellbeing.

Each case management response is tailored to the unique risks, experiences, and needs of each individual and family group. Our teams deliver holistic support to victim survivors who often have multiple, complex needs and have experienced significant trauma.

Support can look different for everyone, but it may include:

- Assessing risk and exploring ways to reduce risk of harm
- Developing safety plans and working collaboratively with clients to set personal goals
- Coordinating safety and security measures
- Providing vouchers and essential items such as toiletries, food, and clothing for those who have left their homes with nothing



- Offering emotional, health, and wellbeing support, and advocating on behalf of clients with other services such as housing providers and Centrelink
- Organising emergency accommodation, when a victim survivor doesn't have a safe place to stay
- Supporting with referrals and applications for safe, stable, and appropriate medium- and long- housing options

In the past year, the Crisis Response and Case Management teams provided over 50,000 hours of support to victim survivors. They distributed 358 Personal Safety Initiative packages, assisted 1,901 people with crisis financial assistance, and booked 1,500 nights of emergency accommodation.

## Malee's story

Malee\* had experienced years of physical and emotional violence at the hands of her wife. When she knew she needed to leave her marriage, she wasn't sure where or who she could turn to for help.

Statistics show that, by far, the most prevalent type of family violence is perpetrated by men against women, but it is not the only type of violence. Anyone, regardless of their gender or sexuality, can choose to use controlling and abusive behaviours. Victim survivors in LGBTIQ+ relationships often say that their concerns and experiences are dismissed or minimised – either by their community or by services. GenWest has supported LGBTIQ+ women and gender diverse victim survivors for many years, alongside our partners at The Orange Door.

When Malee attended The Orange Door, the team worked with her to complete a risk assessment. They referred Malee and her young child, Sunan\*, to GenWest's Crisis Response team and they were provided a case manager and emergency hotel accommodation. While in the safety of the hotel, Malee and Sunan had frequent visits from their GenWest case manager, and they worked together to develop a safety plan in case their situation became more dangerous. Malee's case manager supported her in accessing additional support services and in communicating with the police.

Malee had moved to Australia from overseas two years ago and didn't have family or a support network in Australia. Her wife had gone to great efforts to isolate her from a wider community. Malee experienced language barriers which made communicating with services difficult. And because she and Susan didn't hold substantive visas, they weren't eligible for Centrelink payments or other financial support, which made it very difficult for them to find safe and stable housing. They couldn't stay in emergency accommodation long term and it was critically important that Malee and Sunan had access to a safe place to stay. Malee's case manager made a referral to a refuge and they were placed on a wait list.

Victim survivors can sometimes be one of around 50 people on a waitlist for a refuge. Decisions about whether, and when, they can access a refuge are based on an assessment of risk. If their risk is judged to have decreased, they might no longer be eligible. This is what happened for Malee due to limited contact from her wife. As she could not access Centrelink or mainstream housing supports, losing her place on the list meant she would be forced to return to the violent relationship or be at risk of homelessness. GenWest staff strongly advocated for Malee and Sunan to secure a place in refuge.

With persistent effort and advocacy, Malee and Susan were accepted at a refuge. The team at the refuge have provided them with ongoing support to increase their safety and wellbeing, which includes safety planning so Sunan can continue to attend school and assisting with visa applications.

# Coordinating support and enabling better outcomes for victim survivors

At GenWest, our System Enablers team work behind the scenes to make sure frontline family violence teams can act quickly and effectively. They help to book emergency accommodation, coordinate funding, housing pathways and personal safety measure, co-chair risk assessment meeting and manage material aid and donations. Their work supports the wider family violence teams and helps to make sure clients get the right support, when they need it, in a way that meets their needs.

## Supporting teams to meet client needs

The Client Services Administration (CSA) team was established in 2024 to provide centralised, coordinated administrative support to our family violence programs. By streamlining administrative processes, the team enables case managers and practitioners to dedicate more time to directly supporting clients and their families.

The CSA team greets clients, community members, and visitors as the friendly faces at our Barkly Street office. Behind the scenes, they booking emergency accommodation and in some cases, provide support when a client is leaving our service with final tasks like applying for Flexible Support Packages or Personal Safety Initiative - read more about these on the next page.

The team coordinate and distribute purchased material aid and physical donations from local businesses, community groups, and partner organisations. These donations include gift vouchers, care packs, toiletries and clothes, as well as gifts and toys for children and young

people staying in emergency accommodation or refuge. These contributions are especially meaningful during the holiday season, offering comfort and a sense of normal life at a time that can be very challenging.

Find out how you can help support victim survivors through monetary or physical donations at [genwest.org.au/donate](https://genwest.org.au/donate).

This year, the team focused on strengthening partnerships and improving processes with suppliers and partner organisations to better support clients. Key highlights include partnering and establishing relationships with:

- Hotels to improve booking processes, communication, and increase understanding of family violence, ensuring safer and more comfortable stays for clients in crisis.
- Mobile phone suppliers to provide new or refurbished phones to victim survivors, helping them remain connected to services and support networks, and helping to prevent stalking and tracking.
- Taxi services to improve transport safety and visibility for clients and practitioners.
- Charities such as Thread Together, Share the Dignity, The Nappy Collective, Impact for Women and Rize Up to supply new clothing and accessories, free period care products, baby essential and gifts for families during the holiday season.

## Financial support to help victim survivors and families rebuild their lives

Flexible Support Packages (FSP) provide personalised assistance people experiencing family violence. These packages offer flexible funding so victim survivors can access the help they need to stay safe and rebuild their lives.

This year, we helped 1,901 people with family violence crisis brokerage, providing short-term financial support to help meet their immediate needs such as rent in advance, removalists costs, school expenses, furniture and home goods for newly established properties.

## Personal Safety Initiative: helping victim survivors stay safe

The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) is a program that helps people experiencing family violence stay safe, and for some, remain in or safely return to their homes.

The program provides specialist case management, safety planning, and practical support, including home security upgrades, personal safety devices, and technology "sweeps" to check that phones, computers, homes, and vehicles haven't been tampered with.

This year, we delivered 358 PSI packages across Melbourne's west.

These packages helped people improve their safety through measures such as installing security cameras, new locks, alarms, additional lighting, and mobile safety devices. For some victim survivors, this meant being able to stay in familiar surroundings near schools, work, and support networks, without fear.

## Working in partnership to respond to the housing crisis

Sourcing safe, affordable and longer-term housing for victim survivors is an ongoing challenge for GenWest's family violence support workers. In 2023, GenWest created a Housing Pathways Program led by a Housing Pathways Coordinator. The program focuses on developing relationships with local housing providers and building the capacity of family violence case managers to navigate the housing system.

This year, Victorian Western Metro Family Violence and Access Point Alliance was set up, bringing together workers from Safe Steps, GenWest, The Orange Door, Unison, Melbourne City Mission, McAuley, and The Salvation Army. The Alliance meets once a month, to share knowledge, break down barriers and work on better referral pathways for victim survivors in Melbourne's western suburbs. The Alliance was nominated for the We Are Brimbank Awards 2025, acknowledging the impact of this cross-sector collaboration in building bridges across organisations, amplifying the voices of those with lived experience and creating safer, more inclusive pathways to support.



## Shelly's story

Shelly\* had experienced many years of verbal abuse, control and stalking from her husband. Her husband controlled almost every aspect of her life.

Coercive control is a pattern of behaviours used to control, manipulate, and dominate another person. Over time, it creates fear, erodes a victim survivors' sense of identity and independence, and traps them in the relationship by limiting their access to safety and support.

Shelly contacted The Orange Door because she wanted help to stay safe, understand her options, and access both practical and emotional support. The team at The Orange Door completed a risk assessment with her and referred her to GenWest's Case Management team.

Shelly decided to leave the relationship, so her case manager helped her create a safety plan and the Client Services Administration team arranged emergency accommodation. Her case manager applied for a PSI (Personal Safety Initiative) response so a specialist service could complete a 'tech sweep' to check if her husband had tampered with her personal devices or vehicles to monitor her. The tech sweep was completed on her vehicle and phone before she entered emergency accommodation to ensure she could not be tracked. No tracking devices were found in Shelly's car, but some tracking apps were found on her phone. The service carried out further safety checks and helped Shelly change her passwords on her phone and other personal devices.

Shelly's case manager helped her to navigate applying for an intervention order and keep her safety plan up to date. When Shelly left her home, she had to leave many of her personal belongings behind. GenWest was able to provide her with toiletries and clothes, and her case manager met with her in her emergency accommodation to offer emotional support.



# Being informed by lived experience and strengthening our evidence base

## Honouring lived experience and expertise

Lived experience continues to guide our work. Our Survivor Advisory Group and LGBTQIA+ Advisory Group continue to play a central role in ensuring lived experience informs our planning, service design, and advocacy. Their insights strengthen GenWest's commitment to safety, inclusion, and responsiveness to the needs of the communities and clients we serve. We are deeply grateful to the members for generously sharing their experiences and expertise.

This year, these groups provided advice on strategic decisions and initiatives to improve our services and took part in a range of advocacy activities.

### The Survivor Advisory Group:

- Consulted on our health and wellbeing and prevention of violence programs and Advocacy Strategy.
- Helped shape our approach to how we use survivor stories responsibly and ethically when working with funders, partners, and other organisations
- Provided feedback on the Clinical Practice Framework and Client Closure Survey.
- Provided feedback on policy submissions and papers, including the review of the Victims' Charter Act and VCOSS's Insights Paper, *Hidden Hurdles: Barriers to rental fairness for family violence victim survivors and ways to dismantle them*.

Some members also contributed to external advocacy by sharing their stories at events including GenWest's 2024 AGM, the Women's Health Services Network Conference, the

opening of our new Children's Counselling Hub and at an International Women's Day Event hosted by The Orange Door. One member spoke on local radio about family violence and housing insecurity and a few members have shared their stories in our 2023-24 and 2024-25 Annual Reports.

### The LGBTQIA+ Advisory Group

- Gave advice on our advocacy campaign about bodily autonomy and our Statement of Solidarity with Trans and Gender Diverse People.
- Provided input into our Equal Opportunity exemption, Communications Strategy, Advocacy Strategy, HR systems and the ethical collection of staff information.

### Advisory group members shared:

*"[I have] a chance to advocate for my community, meet other likeminded people who are passionate about change and see my suggestions turn into action that makes a difference."*

– LGBTQIA+ Advisory Group Member

*"[I] feel like I'm making a difference [and] helping to advocate for others. [I'm having] a say in what works and what doesn't."*

– Survivor Advisory Group Member

*"The Group has helped me with my own recovery from grief and trauma as a result of family violence. It's given me a sense of purpose and allowed me to hold my head up high in the community."*

– Survivor Advisory Group Member

## Listening to client experience and feedback to improve our services

This year, we strengthened how we collect and use client feedback and learn from client experiences and data. We drew on client surveys, service data, input from lived experience advisory groups, feedback and research partnerships. Together, these sources give us a picture of who our clients are, the support they receive, and how that support helps with safety and recovery. These insights help us improve our services and advocacy.

Key projects from this year included:

- A new survey was developed so we can hear from clients when their support with us ends. The survey will help us understand their experiences of our services and what impact it had on their safety and recovery. It will help us ensure our services is fair, accessible and responsive to all victim survivors needs.
- A two-year review of our Child and Youth Counselling program was concluded, which combined service data, feedback from children and parents, and analysis of creative therapy sessions. The evaluation shows that this services is essential in helping children recover from family violence, strengthen their bond with their protective parent or carer, and to help break the cycle of violence.
- A new partnership with Deakin University was launched, which will examine how our services support victim survivors to achieve safety and wellbeing. The study will use service data and interviews with clients and family violence workers and will begin early next year.



## Building a stronger evidence base and turning data into action

This year, we have been working on a centralised 'data warehouse' which brings together information from across our services including client service data, demographics and client journeys through our service. The data warehouse includes a range of dashboards that:

- Support transparent, consistent decisions on brokerage (funding to support clients to move out of crisis, stabilise and improve their safety, while also promoting recovery, wellbeing, and independence).
- Monitor team workloads, intensity of cases and risk levels.
- Provide organisation-wide insight into client journeys and community needs, supporting service planning and advocacy.

Alongside these tools, we are developing policies and systems to keep up with digital changes. We are committed to using data, digital tools, and AI in an ethical way, so the insights we gather are reliable, respectful, and reflect our values of safety, dignity, and accountability.

## Survivor Advisory Group Reflections

In last year's Annual Report, we had the privilege of sharing the stories of some of the Survivor Advisory Group members. They shared their journey of healing and recovery from their experiences of violence and are hopeful that sharing their stories will support other victim survivors on this journey. Download the 2023-24 GenWest Annual Report to read their stories at [genwest.org.au/AR23-24](https://genwest.org.au/AR23-24). This year, three of the members have shared their reflections of being lived experience advocates and part of GenWest's Survivor Advocacy Group.

### Liz's story, in her own words

Being part of the Survivor Advisory Group has been one of the most grounding experiences of my life. It's not just a space to share—it's a space where lived experience is respected, valued, and used to drive real change. GenWest didn't just invite us to the table—they made sure our voices shaped the agenda.

Since joining, I've grown in ways I didn't expect. Professionally, I've refined trauma-informed intake tools, strengthened documentation practices, and supported others to do the same. Personally, it's helped me reconnect with my own journey not just as a survivor, but as someone who can lead, influence, and reform systems. This group gave me the confidence to speak publicly. I've spoken at rallies, recorded a podcast and video with my brother Phil Cleary on justice reform, and begun other media projects involving further podcasts. It's emotional, yes, but also empowering reclaiming space and turning pain into purpose.

One of the most meaningful contributions I've made was to GenWest's policy submission on service gaps for women experiencing family violence. Drawing from lived experience, I helped shape survivor-informed recommendations. It felt like everything I'd been through was being channelled into something that could make a difference.

Survivor voice is incredibly precise. We know where systems fail because we've lived it. When supported to speak, we don't just raise awareness we raise standards.

The connection between members is powerful. We hold space for each other, challenge systems together, and celebrate growth. It's not just a group, it's a community of reformers and truth-tellers.

I encourage others with lived experience to get involved. It takes emotional preparation and strong boundaries, but the impact is real. You're not just telling your story you're helping shape the future.

To policymakers and service providers: groups like this aren't optional. They're essential. If you want ethical, effective systems, you must centre survivor voices in co-design, decision-making, and accountability.

This course also inspired me to pursue further study. I'm close to completing my Advanced Certificate in Community Services, which has deepened my understanding and strengthened my ability to advocate for ethical, trauma-informed practice. I've thoroughly enjoyed my involvement with GenWest.

## Lauren's story, in her own words

I was hesitant when I saw the job posting for GenWest's Victim Survivor Advisory Group. I was still grappling with naming my experiences of family violence, and I didn't have service user experience. I felt insecure about my experience, my latency in understanding my childhood abuse, and it felt dizzyingly counterintuitive to choose to take up space in that way.

I sat with it, forgot about it, and the job posting came up again. Two years and some months later I know fate nudged me into this group. Two years later and I've hardly begun. I am now a family violence professional, and have been appointed to the Victim Survivor Advisory Council. I am proud to represent GenWest, who I feel truly and deeply listen to the voices of victim survivors. Being a victim survivor advocate has felt crystallising, like something truly clicked and settled within me. People often think victim survivors are weak; vulnerable, needing protection from a familiar world. I hope to destigmatise the role of lived experience in the workforce, to have difficult and uncomfortable conversations with heart and to change the way we see victim survivors. I hope to be an advocate that listens more than I speak, and to be someone that uplifts and makes space for the voices we don't often hear and to whom we owe the most.

I would like to end with a note of gratitude to the people in this group: I have learned so much from each and every one of you. It is not easy work, but you make it feel safe and palpably possible. We are not similar in many ways, and for these differences I am so grateful. You bridge service gaps, build wisdom and bring others along with you. You make me think bigger and you make me bolder, it is a privilege to do this work alongside you.



## Joal's story, in her own words

Being part of the Survivor Advisory Group has been deeply meaningful, both personally and professionally. Coming together with others who share lived experience created a space of genuine understanding and safety, where our voices weren't just heard but valued as integral to shaping better outcomes for those affected by violence.

Through this experience, I've grown by both sharing my story and insights but also by listening to the experience of the other women. We may all come from different walks of life, but lived experience ties us together, giving each of us a sense of unity, sisterhood, and we are transformed simply by listening.

The Survivor Advisory Group allowed me to transform difficult past experiences into a source of purpose and advocacy. I've learned that healing doesn't always happen in isolation, sometimes, it's found in collective voice, collaboration, and being part of change that reaches beyond ourselves.

One project that stood out to me was our contribution to GenWest's submission into the Victims Charter Review. It was powerful to see our input directly influence the language, tone, and approach of what it truly means to 'see' victim survivors, and help shape that submission to change the Victims Charter. Ensuring that language and definitions reflect compassion, dignity, and real-world understanding. That sense of tangible impact reminded me that lived experience is not a story of survival alone, but a source of wisdom that can guide systemic reform that will last beyond the Advisory Group's lifespan. It's truly a beautiful opportunity to be able to assist in shaping such valuable work.

Being part of the group has strengthened my ability to advocate with clarity and confidence. Personally, it's deepened my healing, simply as a by-product of participation. Being in unity with the other women has helped me see how my journey can create ripples of safety, hope, and empowerment for others. I've learned that advisory groups like ours are vital. They ensure the systems that aim to protect and support are informed by the people who've actually walked the path and used them.

To policymakers and service providers, I would say this: the inclusion of lived experience voice isn't optional, it's essential. It bridges the gap between intention and impact, policy and person.

I would absolutely encourage others with lived experience to get involved. It's not always easy to revisit parts of your story, but the process is profoundly empowering. Its healing by sharing. You're not only reclaiming your narrative, you're helping to build a future where others may not have to endure what you did.

# Building confidence, access and understanding in sexual and reproductive health

GenWest's Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) team works across Melbourne's west to provide sexual and reproductive health information and support. Their work is innovative, evidence-based and ensures women, girls, and gender-diverse people have the knowledge, confidence, and access they need to make informed choices about their bodies and health.

This year, the team delivered a range of initiatives. Here are some highlights:

Action for Equity 2024–2030 is the regional SRH partnership and strategy for Melbourne's west. GenWest leads the partnership, which includes 14 organisations from local government and community health services. Together, they coordinate SRH action and share knowledge across the region.

*"It was a genuine joy to see the students engaging in respectful discourse around such important topics whilst also feeling comfortable to laugh and joke. It's a real testament to the encouraging and supportive space that the presenters and interpreters fostered throughout the sessions."*

- Teacher at WELS

*"As a community leader this program is so important. Girls in our culture often do not get this information and you can see how much it helps them and how much their confidence has grown from the first session until now, it's amazing."*

- Female Interpreter

This year, the partnership hosted a learning forum attended by 41 partners from Action for Equity and Preventing Violence Together partnerships. The forum, Sexuality Education in Action: Preventing Gender-Based Violence, strengthened participants' understanding of the role of sexuality education in prevention of gender-based violence.

GenWest's long running Human Relations program celebrated its 24<sup>th</sup> year working with students at Western English Language Schools (WELS) in Braybrook and Werribee.

Human Relations a culturally responsive sexuality and respectful relationships education program delivered at WELS campuses, in partnership with community health and local government youth services. This year, the program reached 46 newly-arrived young people from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iran, and Democratic Republic of the Congo. The program was delivered in-language, with the support of interpreters, in Vietnamese, Pashto, Persian and Swahili. The principal of Werribee WELS shared that some students have engaged with local SRH services as a direct result of the program.

*"Last term, many students had never heard of the LGBTQIA+ community, and didn't know that same sex relationships are legal in Australia. After we'd discussed LGBTQIA+ relationships in the program, we were later talking about what a healthy relationship looked like - a lot of the students [shared that] a healthy relationship is about respect and how you treat people, not your sexuality or gender."*

- WELS Facilitator



GenWest's SRH team are deeply committed to providing inclusive, age-appropriate, and rights-based sexual and reproductive health education, especially for young people and people who face additional barriers, discrimination or disadvantage. This year, the team developed new partnerships at Parkville Youth Justice Precinct and Melton Specialist School, teaching young people about anatomy, puberty, consent, healthy relationships, contraception, and cancer screening. They also ran programs for women incarcerated at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, covering topics such as healthy relationships, cervical screening, menopause, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and safer sex.

The team provided training for midwives and nurses at Joan Kirner Hospital to help them provide sexual and reproductive healthcare that is respectful and culturally safe for women affected by female genital cutting (FGC). Following the sessions, participants shared significantly positive feedback and outcomes.

- 92% of participants said the training increased their knowledge of how FGC impacts someone's sexual and reproductive health

- 93% said they gained greater understanding of how to provide culturally appropriate care
- 96% felt more confident to have sensitive conversations about FGC with clients

In partnership with Moonee Valley Legal Service, the team developed Consent Compass: Navigating Sex, Pleasure and the Law. The project is designed to build the confidence and capacity of educators, youth workers, and legal professionals so they can teach young people about affirmative consent. Consent Compass provides practical resources, online learning and expert information to support discussions with young people about sex, pleasure and the law. The online learning module, launched in October 2024, is complemented by classroom resources including conversation cards, activity booklets, and other online resources. Over the year, 82 professionals completed the module and 75% reported increased confidence to discuss pleasure, consent, and the law in inclusive, evidence-based ways. Consent Compass helps professionals to talk about consent with young people in a way that recognises experiences of discrimination and marginalisation.

# Partnering with community on disaster preparedness and recovery

GenWest supports people in Melbourne's west who are affected by, or at risk from, climate change and disasters, with a particular focus on the impact on women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds. We aim to strengthen community and social connections, support local action, and advocate for fair and effective policies.

## Maribyrnong Insurance Support Program

This year, GenWest's Climate Resilience team continued our work in Maribyrnong through the Maribyrnong Insurance Support Program, in partnership with Maribyrnong City Council. The idea for this guide came directly from community members impacted by the 2022 Maribyrnong River Flood. Through conversations in English and Vietnamese, the community shared their experiences and expressed the need for clear, accessible information on flood insurance – information they wished they had before the flood.

In response, the team developed *Flood Insurance Guide: A Maribyrnong Community Initiative*, published in both English and Vietnamese. The guide provides clear, practical information and case studies for anyone impacted by future flood events. Local residents contributed their stories, while partner agencies shared expert advice and resources. The guide focuses on supporting current community members with any ongoing insurance challenges and equipping community members with tools to navigate the insurance system. The Insurance Council of Australia reviewed and endorsed the guide, which was launched in March 2025 at an event attended by community members and local councillors.

### Local community members shared:

*"This guide is a treasure book that has a wealth of information useful for people who live in flood zones. If we knew all this information before the flood, we would not have gone through so much of trauma. We would be well-prepared. I am so glad this guide has been created and can help people in other states of Australia."*

*"If I had this guide before, life would have been much easier for me. I did not know exactly where to start. I did not know what questions to ask. I did not know who to speak to. So having this guide now – it clearly tells us what to do, when."*

*"If only I had been given a guide and given the right information and instructions of what to do and what not to do after a flood, as I was just going by what my insurance said from the start. This booklet will be useful for me as there is so much for me to learn and understand about flood insurance claims."*

## Engagement and advocacy

The Climate Resilience team contributes to a range of advisory and reference groups, communities of practice, networks, conferences, and events throughout the year. They bring an intersectional, gender-informed perspective to all their work on climate resilience.

In 2025, they participated in:

- 18 meetings as active members of Maribyrnong City Council's Community Recovery Committee and Social Recovery Committee
- 8 communities of practice or advisory and reference groups
- 6 events and conferences where they presented, joined panel discussions, or delivered keynote speeches
- 10 VCOSS climate and disaster resilience network meetings

## Extending Our Community, Our Voice into Wyndham and Melton

This year, we expanded our Our Community, Our Voice project into Wyndham and Melton, building on two years of disaster recovery work with Maribyrnong communities. Funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, the project supports migrant and refugee communities to strengthen their knowledge, preparedness, and long-term climate resilience.

The team began by meeting with local organisations, community leaders, and residents to understand what communities already know about disasters and to identify any gaps. We spoke with over 200 people from the South Asian diaspora on their current understanding of climate change and disasters and what they wanted to learn more about. Based on these insights, they will design training, events, and activities that meet local needs, increase understanding of disasters,

and highlight how climate events can affect women and people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in distinct ways. We will focus on practical strategies for preparing for and responding to climate-related disasters.

### Local community members shared:

*"I am quite dependent on my son who is mostly away at work throughout the day. It is very difficult for me to talk with my neighbours as they don't speak my language. I don't really know what I would do if there was something like a flood or fire... Do you think that could happen here?"*

*"I don't drive a car or speak English very well. I also often care for my granddaughter during the day, so I would need to make sure she is ok if something like a fire happened."*

*"I know from firsthand experience that the voices and agency of vulnerable members of the community, particularly women who are culturally diverse, can be lost during disasters. I would welcome the support from GenWest to build more preparedness in my community."*

Read more about our climate resilience work at [genwest.org.au/ocov](http://genwest.org.au/ocov).



# Financial report and governance

## Financial statements

Full financial statements and accompanying notes are available at [genwest.org.au](http://genwest.org.au).

### Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$
Revenue	31,378,212	31,278,575
Change in fair value – Equity investments through profit and loss	177,158	75,505
Employment expenses	(23,156,492)	(22,446,342)
Client support services expenses	(4,248,366)	(5,561,070)
Management and administrative expenses	(1,980,866)	(2,411,941)
Finance costs	(61,218)	(53,108)
Travel expenses	(13,852)	(13,865)
Motor vehicle expenses	(53,739)	(39,730)
Depreciation and amortisation	(554,799)	(495,067)
Occupancy expenses	(454,442)	(271,664)
ICT expenses	(936,455)	(704,246)
Training and development expenses	(359,316)	(536,764)
Communication expenses	(33,636)	(39,741)
(Deficit) before income tax	(297,811)	(1,219,457)
Income tax expense	-	-
Other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>(297,811)</b>	<b>(1,219,457)</b>

### Statement of financial position as at 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	2,754,601	10,658,943
Other financial assets	6,350,775	1,496,584
Trade and other receivables	749,315	685,818
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>9,854,691</b>	<b>12,841,345</b>
<b>Non-Current assets</b>		
Other financial assets	3,299,080	2,946,535
Plant and equipment	878,879	685,137
Right-of-use assets	967,337	797,502
Trade and other receivables	202,766	98,828
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>5,348,062</b>	<b>4,528,003</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>15,202,753</b>	<b>17,369,348</b>
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	2,061,574	2,159,174
Lease liabilities	296,779	283,225
Auspice funds	204,804	320,831
Employee benefits	2,293,588	3,381,617
Grant in advance	3,222,068	4,153,790
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>8,078,813</b>	<b>10,298,637</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Employee benefits	327,139	157,951
Payment for Lease liabilities	872,072	690,220
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>1,199,211</b>	<b>848,171</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>9,278,024</b>	<b>11,146,808</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>5,924,729</b>	<b>6,222,540</b>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	3,922,749	3,922,749
Retained earnings	2,001,980	2,299,791
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>5,924,729</b>	<b>6,222,540</b>

## Statement of changes in equity for the year ended 30 June 2025

	Reserves \$	Retained earnings \$	Total equity \$
Balance as at 1 July 2023	2,672,749	4,769,248	7,441,997
<b>Deficit</b>	-	(1,219,457)	(1,219,457)
Transferred	1,250,000	(1,250,000)	-
<b>Balance as at 30 June 2024</b>	<b>3,922,749</b>	<b>2,299,791</b>	<b>6,222,540</b>
 Balance as at 1 July 2024	 3,922,749	 2,299,791	 6,222,540
Deficit	-	(297,811)	(297,811)
<b>Balance as at 30 June 2025</b>	<b>3,922,749</b>	<b>2,001,980</b>	<b>5,924,729</b>

## Statement of cash flows for the year ended 30 June 2025

	2025 \$	2024 \$
<b>Cash flow from operating activities</b>		
Grant revenue and other receipts (inclusive of GST)	33,154,751	33,556,935
Interest receipts	310,218	481,234
Payments to employees and suppliers (inclusive of GST)	(35,391,847)	(33,267,769)
Interest paid – Lease liabilities	(61,218)	(53,108)
<b>Net cash (used in)/generated from operating activities</b>	<b>(1,988,096)</b>	<b>717,292</b>
<b>Cash flow from investing activities</b>		
Acquisition of financial assets	(4,444,236)	(411,190)
(Proceeds)/Investment in term deposits	(762,500)	5,401,919
Payments for property, plant and equipment	(476,059)	(250,482)
Proceeds from sale of property, plant and equipment	29,662	-
<b>Net cash (used in)/proceeds from investing activities</b>	<b>(5,653,133)</b>	<b>4,740,247</b>
<b>Cash flow from financing activities</b>		
Payment for Lease liabilities	(263,113)	(262,075)
<b>Net cash used in financing activities</b>	<b>(263,113)</b>	<b>(262,075)</b>
<b>Net increase / (decrease) in cash</b>	<b>(7,904,342)</b>	<b>5,195,464</b>
Cash and cash equivalents at the beginning of the financial year	10,658,943	5,463,479
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at the end of the financial year</b>	<b>2,754,601</b>	<b>10,658,943</b>

## Governance: our board of directors

Our board directors govern our organisation by setting our strategic direction, ensuring our operations are legally compliant and our finances are sound.

The directors are drawn from and elected by our individual and organisational members – the community and sector in which we work. If you are an eligible member and interested in joining our board, please contact us.

### Meet our board directors



#### Karen McIlwain, Board Chair

Karen is a strategy, coaching and facilitation consultant who has a Bachelor of Arts (Sociology/Psychology) and a Graduate Diploma in Business Administration.



#### Rebecca Burdon, Deputy Chair

Rebecca is a legal practitioner, advocate and people leader having spent most of her career in the government and criminal justice sectors. Rebecca holds a Bachelor of Arts, Social Work (Hons), Masters of Criminology (For Psych) and Bachelor of Laws.



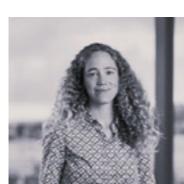
#### Donna Maloney, Treasurer

Donna is the Regional Finance Manager for the Department of Education, and has extensive Government sector finance and leadership experience. Donna holds a Bachelor of Business in Accounting and is a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA).



#### Amelia Condi, Board Director

Amelia is a fellow of the Williamson Community Leadership Program and an experienced senior executive. She has extensive experience in the 'for purpose' sector and working across social policy for the Federal and state governments. Amelia holds a Masters in Business Administration.



#### Emily Mailes, Board Director

Emily is the Chief Digital Strategy Officer for the Department of Health, leading strategy, innovation and emerging technology, and cybersecurity. She has a Bachelor of Information and Computer Science and has completed post graduate research in Health Technology.



#### Julia Reynolds, Board Director

Julia is the Principal at Austech Surveying and Mapping Pty Ltd, specialising in underground mine void investigation surveys. With over 15 years of experience, Julia brings expertise in profit and loss management, enterprise risk management, corporate strategy, global sales and marketing, and corporate governance. She holds an MBA, a Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate Governance and Applied Corporate Governance, and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



#### Marija Maher, Board Director

Marija is a people leader specialising in business transformations and building organisational capability. She is deeply committed to human rights, social justice and social outcomes, equity and access. Those values have shaped a career in higher education and public sector, and a not-for-profit boards portfolio in human rights, disability advocacy and education. Marija is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has a Doctorate in leadership and management.



#### Nicole Bieske, Board Director

Nicole is the Director of Social Policy and Research Centre at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, previously the Manager of the Delivery Strategy Team at Homes Victoria. She has PhD in human rights and is a qualified lawyer.

## Statement by the members of our board

In the opinion of the members of the board:

- a) The attached financial statements comprising the Statement of Comprehensive Income, Balance Sheet, Statement of Changes in Equity, Statement of Cash Flows and notes thereto are drawn up so as to give a true and fair view of the state of the Association's affairs at 30 June 2025 and of its results for the year ended on that date.
- b) At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Association will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due.
- c) The financial statements have been compiled in accordance with the Australian Accounting Standards Reduced Disclosure Requirements, the Associations Incorporation Act (Vic) 2012 and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Act 2012.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the members of the board by:



Karen McIlwain  
Chairperson



Donna Maloney  
Treasurer

## Annual Report 2024-25

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Published November 2025

*"I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the exceptional support and assistance I received from [GenWest], particularly from [my case manager], during a challenging period in my life. As a newcomer to Australia, I faced significant challenges due to limited English proficiency and lack of a support network.*

*During this difficult time, I approached GenWest and was met with remarkable warmth and compassion. GenWest provided essential shelter and invaluable assistance in various forms. My dedicated support worker demonstrated exceptional dedication in ensuring my wellbeing and that of my four-year-old child. Her assistance encompassed practical matters such as day-to-day support, legal advice, and finding appropriate medical care for my son, as well as providing emotional support and guidance. [Her] unwavering commitment made me feel as though I had a guardian angel by my side. As a non-native English speaker, I deeply appreciated [her] ability to communicate with me in Arabic, fostering a strong bond and enabling me to express my emotions and concerns more effectively.*

*The support and assistance I received from GenWest and [my case manager] have had a profound impact on my life, and I am eternally grateful for their intervention. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you and the entire GenWest team for saving my son and me from homelessness. Your organisation plays a vital role in our community, and I encourage you to continue your remarkable work."*

- GenWest client and survivor

\* Where an asterisk is used, names and identifying details have been changed to protect the safety of clients.

All quotes are taken from real feedback we received throughout the year.

# Acknowledgement and thanks



We would like to thank and acknowledge the members of GenWest's advisory groups. We have three groups, a Survivor Advisory Group, Aboriginal Advisory Group, and an LGBTIQA+ Advisory Group.



GenWest recognises that the land on which we work and provide our services always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We proudly acknowledge the First Nations communities across Naarm / Melbourne's west – the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their rich diversity, cultures, histories and knowledges, and the deep contribution they make to the life of this region.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, as well as the strength and resilience of First Nations people, and express solidarity with the ongoing struggle for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty, and recognition of past injustices.



GenWest champions diversity in everything we do. We are committed to providing a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTIQA+ clients and staff.

Thank you to our staff, who have remained hugely committed and adaptable during times of immense change. Our staff continually deliver high quality services and support, which is highlighted in many of the quotes throughout this report.

We would like to thank our skilled and dedicated board of directors, who show great commitment and energy in supporting and guiding our work.



We are enormously grateful for the generosity of everyone who donated to or fundraised for GenWest this year. The donations we receive provide vital funding for our programs and services, and we are hugely thankful to the generous philanthropic organisations and community members who donate.



Thank you to our members, subscribers and allies, who have given their time, energy and expertise to our organisation throughout the year. We could not achieve our goals without their commitment, dedication to gender equity and human rights, and to sharing their stories with us.



GenWest could not undertake our work without the significant funding support we receive from the Victorian State Government, as well as funds received from the Federal Government.



We acknowledge and thank our two peak bodies, Safe and Equal and GEN VIC, for their leadership and ongoing advocacy.



Thank you to our partner organisations. The support and collaboration of our partners enables us to deliver responsive, impactful programs and services across the west.



**GenWest, 317–319 Barkly Street, Footscray, Melbourne VIC 3011**

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Illustrations by Emma Ismawi, Carla McRae, Michelle Pereira and Jacq Moon.

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