



2025 Annual Report



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Chairperson's Report

The Upper Hunter Homeless Support (UHHS) continues to provide critical support to the Muswellbrook, Singleton, and Upper Hunter Shires, focusing on assisting people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. Our work also plays a pivotal role in supporting women and children escaping Domestic and Family Violence. This year has been both challenging and rewarding, with the UHHS making significant strides to ensure sustainability and excellence in service delivery. The organisation has had important projects continuing over from previous years, and this year has seen us make great headway on several.

Projects and Organisational Growth

Our Core and Cluster project in Singleton has progressed significantly, with construction now underway. Although we are a while away from being operational, the facility will provide purpose-built accommodation for women and children escaping violence, improving safety, privacy, and accessibility in the region. This is one of the most important developments for UHHS in recent years and will strengthen our service delivery footprint across the Upper Hunter.

We also welcomed new staff to our Homelessness and Domestic and Family Violence programs, further building capacity and service reach. These team changes have allowed Mary, our General Manager, to dedicate more time to community engagement, partnership development, and funding opportunities. Mary's ongoing leadership, professionalism, and unwavering commitment continue to drive UHHS forward, and on behalf of the Board, I sincerely thank her for her exceptional work.

Key Achievements

The Board and I are proud to acknowledge several significant achievements over the past year. While housing affordability and domestic and family violence remain major challenges across the region, UHHS continues to deliver strong outcomes for our clients through dedicated staff, collaboration, and practical community support.

Grants and Partnerships

- Ongoing funding from NSW DCJ remains central to our service delivery and capacity building.
- Additional funding and partnerships through the Core and Cluster Refuge program has strengthened our long-term sustainability.
- Continued participation in the Hunter Domestic Violence Collective has provided access to shared training, advocacy, and awareness campaigns.
- Community events across the Upper Hunter such as Candlelight vigils, CEO sleep outs and fundraising (Sandy Hollow Charity Motorfest and AGL Staff Fundraising Committee) have continued to raise awareness of homelessness and family violence.



Service Statistics (1 July 2024 - 30 June 2025)

Distinct clients assisted	648
Gender	63% female, 37% male, <1% other
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients	30%
Support periods	742 (505 commenced this year)
Total support days	58,182
Average support duration	80.4 days
Accommodation nights provided	14,589 total nights
Brokerage and financial support distributed	\$43,386
Unassisted persons	147 (primarily due to out-of-area requests or no available vacancies)

Gratitude

The continued success of UHHS would not be possible without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and community supporters. I extend sincere thanks to our funding partners- particularly NSW DCJ, and to Elizabeth Scroope and staff from the Newcastle Regional Office, for ongoing guidance and support.

To the UHHS Board, thank you for your commitment to sound governance and strategic planning. Your insight, integrity, and collective effort have ensured that UHHS remains strong, responsive, and forward-focused.

Closing

This year’s achievements demonstrate the resilience and dedication of everyone connected to UHHS. As we move into the coming year, our priorities will focus on completing the Core and Cluster program, strengthening post crisis support pathways, and continuing to advocate for housing solutions across our region.

Together, we remain committed to creating lasting change for individuals and families who deserve safety, dignity, and stability.

Cassandra Walker
Chairperson
Upper Hunter Homeless Support

General Manager Report

The demanding pace of work at UHHS continued this year. We once again supported more people than our funding specifies, plus staff spent time and resources on community engagement and education.

The issues our service focusses on – homelessness and domestic violence, were continually in the spotlight, with many people becoming aware of how prevalent and how far reaching both areas of need are. The Upper Hunter region – Upper Hunter, Muswellbrook and Singleton Shires have higher than average rates of domestic violence and these numbers constantly drive people to seek the free, confidential and professional assistance given at UHHS.

I would like to acknowledge the ongoing work of the staff at UHHS. The enthusiasm, creativity and persistence I see every day is impressive. As a team they support each other and give their all to the work they do with clients, walking alongside them and encouraging them to improve their situation. As well as the demanding workloads, this year has seen a host of changes to the service. We have updated our IT systems, incorporated a second Team (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) and adopted a range of DCJ dictated policy changes.

Alongside the work practice changes have been some staff movements. We farewelled 3 foundation staff this year – Una Garland has retired, Marina Lee-Warner has moved to a community role with Muswellbrook Shire Council and Amanda Clydsdale is investigating a change in career direction. These staff members have helped shaped the service into what it is today and we are incredibly grateful to each of you for your contribution.

We are looking forward to the fulfilment of several significant projects in 2026:

- George Street Singleton – will see construction of small dwellings specifically created to answer the need for Temporary Accommodation.
- Singleton will also receive a Core and Cluster refuge. Work has begun on a six dwelling complex which will incorporate service offices, communal spaces and therapy rooms. The refuge will also require 3 new staff members.
- ASES (Quality Assurance) recertification will occur in September.

With the increasing economic and social pressures being felt in our communities there has been a rise in people experiencing mental health and psychological issues. In order to work with these clients and keep the office environment a safe space, staff and the Board have worked together to increase safety procedures. Enhanced camera coverage and increased physical boundaries have been installed.

Upper Hunter Homeless Support could not operate the way we do without significant community support. The service would once again like to express our heartfelt gratitude to businesses, community groups and individuals who have assisted us. We have been the recipient of major fundraising efforts by the Sandy Hollow Motor Fest and the AGL Staff Fundraising Committee. These donations will go towards direct client supports eg setting people up in new houses, assistance in the form of vouchers for goods and services and will also support other behind the scenes costs eg trailer hire and vehicle updates.

The service has also been the recipient of many smaller and no less valuable donations. Food, kitchen goods, toiletries and money is all put towards support our clients with generosity and the dignity each person deserves.

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue. Every client has a story:

On any given night, 122,494 people in Australia are experiencing homelessness (ABS Census 2021).

One in seven people experiencing homelessness are children under 12 (ABS Census 2021).

23 per cent of people experiencing homelessness (almost one in 4) are children and young people between 12 and 24 (ABS Census 2021).

One in five people experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (ABS Census 2021).

Homelessness is not "rooflessness". Only 6.2 per cent of people without a home are sleeping rough. The majority of homelessness is hidden - people in crisis accommodation, rooming houses, insecure housing, overcrowded dwellings or couch surfing.

In 2021-22, 272,700 people were supported by homelessness services (AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2021-22) In 2021-22, a further 105,000 people sought help but were unable to be assisted because of shortages of staff, or accommodation or other services (AIHW 2022). That's 300 people a day turned away because services are overstretched (AIHW 2022).

[Homelessness fact sheet 2023 \(homelessnessaustralia.org.au\)](https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au)

Mary Spora

General Manager

Upper Hunter Homeless Support



This year UHHS applied for and gained several community grants to assist with operations. Singleton Diggers and Muswellbrook Workers Club grants will assist with client food support. Staff attended a presentation at Singleton Diggers.

TEAM LEADER REPORT

DOMESTIC, FAMILY & SEXUAL VIOLENCE TEAM

While staffing for the DF&SV team faced some initial challenges, the team is now fully staffed and operating well. The creativity of having a SHS team member as my second half has worked wonders and is gaining good results.

The DF&SV team is achieving good outcomes, particularly for a new service. Several women have been successfully housed across HIP, private rentals and within shared living arrangements.

The team has been successful in supporting women to report matters and see them through court processes and breaches. We have increased community knowledge on what DF&SV is and highlighted the impacts and importance of health checks for a number of women and they now receive appropriate treatment for both their physical and psychological injuries.

The team have attended wonderful training including LoveBites and Working with Children Impacted by DF&SV.

As DF&SV Team Leader, I attended the 5th Women's World Conference which was attended by 60 different countries. Fantastic resources, research and creative ways of working in refuges was shared. Many of the challenges faced by women's shelters and gender based violence is strikingly similar across the globe. In terms of staffing, funding and support models, Australia is behind other developed nations.

The refuge has undergone a refresh in the staff office space with the creation of a sitting/meeting area for residents/staff/outside services to meet with trauma informed practices in mind. The refuge has also updated procedures in line with DCJ expectations and direction.

The team have developed positive working connections with local services which has and is resulting in collaborative work and strong client outcomes. The team also saw a Social Work student through her first placement.



TEAM LEADER REPORT

HOMELESSNESS TEAM

Over the past year, staff from the Homelessness Team have actively participated in a range of community events, outreach initiatives, and professional development opportunities which have strengthened our connection with the community and enhanced service delivery.

Team members attended and contributed to key local events including:

- Wonnarua NAIDOC Flag Raising
- Hunter Homeless Connect Day, Newcastle
- Hannah's Story Workshop
- Mental Health Month Expo
- Murrurundi Community Connect Day
- Candlelight Vigils held across Singleton, Scone, Muswellbrook, Merriwa and Murrurundi

Staff were also invited to attend a Singleton on Hunter Rotary Dinner, where our service received generous donations of gift cards to support clients in need.

Our commitment to professional growth and staff wellbeing continued throughout the year, with training sessions focused on Coercive Control and Staff Wellness delivered both in-house and externally. Individual staff completed a range professional development workshops on topics to upskill in specific role related areas.

Several new team members joined the organisation, including new Domestic Violence staff in August and September 2024, and additional Caseworkers and an Intake Worker in April 2025.

To strengthen client engagement, we hosted a Client Christmas Party in December 2024, which was well attended and warmly received. Outreach activities were conducted in Broke, Bulga, and Warkworth, providing support to rough sleepers staying at local free camping grounds.

A significant milestone this year was the partnership with Singleton Council, who provided a three-bedroom house for use as a transitional property to support individuals and families moving toward stable, long-term housing.





UHHS staff participate in a range of community awareness raising activities, from community events to guest speaker appointments to media activities.







UHHS staff and Board recognise that we are part of a wonderful community with a huge heart. We enjoy being a part of community events and assisting to send out messages relating to homelessness and domestic violence.







UHHS is the grateful recipient of community donations, all of which go to assisting our client supports.







Singleton Refuge
starts construction



Donations
Muswellbrook Christian School



Donations
Anne Marsh and Scone CWA

Appendix A - Financials
