

# Insights

Our Impact  
FY 2023/24

## our purpose

Provide housing & support options for the people in our community experiencing family violence, housing insecurity & homelessness



## our vision

People have a safe home & freedom from discrimination & violence

## our values

Compassionate, inquisitive & non-judgemental in the way we work

Courageous & not afraid to speak up when it matters

Thoughtful & intentional in what we want to achieve



# 25,652

people in the southeast  
region accessed our  
support & services





# Message from our chair

## Reflecting on achievements & looking ahead

At wayss, we remain steadfast in our mission to support individuals and families facing homelessness, family violence, and housing insecurity, particularly in high-need areas like Dandenong, Cardinia, and Casey. This year has posed significant challenges, with rising living costs and a tightening rental market impacting vulnerable communities. Yet, our dedicated team has shown unparalleled resilience, professionalism, and compassion in delivering vital services during these tough times.

2024 marks a pivotal year with the launch of our Strategic Plan, focused on expanding access to safe, affordable housing paired with wrap-around support. Initiatives such as our Market Street project in Dandenong exemplify our commitment to creating tangible, long-term solutions to the housing crisis.

Our achievements would not be possible without the collaboration and support of key partners, including State and Local Governments. Together, we continue to deliver critical services with integrity and purpose.

With a clear vision, strong leadership, and the dedication of our team, wayss is well-positioned to create a lasting impact. We look forward to building on our legacy and making measurable strides in the communities we serve.



A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Cath Evans'.

Cath Evans  
Chair

# Message from our CEO

## A year of significant growth, resilience, and impact.

Our team has shown unwavering commitment to supporting vulnerable communities and driving social justice. Their dedication inspires me every day and serves as the foundation for everything we achieve.

We've seen increased demand for homelessness and family violence services, underscoring the urgency of our mission. Our new Strategic Plan prioritises safe housing and comprehensive support services, enabling us to break harmful cycles more effectively. Despite rising living costs and decades of underinvestment in social housing, our work has pushed forward. Projects like Market Street in Dandenong, the Big Housing Build of five townhouses, and the acquisition of five new land blocks demonstrate our commitment to creating safe and affordable housing.

Collaboration has been central to our success. Partnerships with government bodies, community organisations, and industry have allowed us to pool resources and enhance service delivery. New corporate partnerships have already begun yielding tangible benefits for the people we serve.

Our dedicated teams answered thousands of calls, provided thousands of nights of accommodation and hours of support to those in need across the south-east. Alongside this, we achieved milestones such as the completion of Tartan Drive and successfully applied for a \$5.7 million grant for 12 family violence homes.

As we close out 2024, I feel we are one step closer to tackling the complex challenges before us and ensuring wayss stands as a beacon of hope for those in need.



Wayne Merritt  
CEO

# What we do

**We listen to, guide and stand up for people in the southeast region facing family violence or homelessness, offering personalised support, places to stay and addressing causes of disadvantage.**

We operate in high-need areas, effectively addressing urgent housing and family violence challenges. Despite rising living costs and a tight rental market, wayss remains committed to support with resilience and innovation. We continue to strengthen community partnerships, fostering trauma-informed and accessible solutions that create meaningful, lasting impacts, with tactics such as:

**Strategic plan:** Focused on expanding safe, affordable housing and wrap-around support services to break cycles of homelessness and family violence.

**Market Street project:** Delivered a tangible solution to the housing crisis by creating safe, sustainable housing in Dandenong.

**Big Housing build:** Constructed five townhouses and secured five additional land blocks to increase affordable housing availability.

**Milestones in housing:** Completed the Tartan Drive project and secured a \$5.7 million grant for 12 family violence homes, providing crucial support to survivors.

**Housing pathways program:** Assisted 77 clients since mid-2024, helping 10 secure long-term housing, including private rentals and social housing.

**Regenerate partnership:** Delivered fully furnished homes for women and children escaping family violence, creating safe and supportive environments.

**The Queen's fund:** Offered essential practical aid to help clients recover and regain independence.

**Corporate partnerships:** Built new collaborations to broaden resource access and improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.

# Who we work with

wayss supports a diverse range of people in the community, including families (36%), individuals (23%), children (17%), young people (15%), women older than 55 (5%), and men older than 55 (4%). Among those they assist, 5% identify as Aboriginal.

Our clients are predominantly women (60%), with men making up 39% of those they help. 36.5% of our clients come from the City of Casey and 29.8% from the City of Greater Dandenong.

## What our clients say

"My experience with wayss was absolutely fantastic... Never once was I made to feel anything but important and cared for.

I am still taken aback at all wayss helped me with... unbelievable. I am now very happy and satisfied with my experience with wayss. I am living not just existing! Thank you so much for everything you have done for me."

Forever grateful. Amina you are an angel on earth. You saved me. You cared."

# Our impact in the community

2024 has been a year of significant progress for the family violence management team, with several key initiatives making a lasting impact on the lives of victim-survivors and strengthening community partnerships.

## **Housing pathways program**

Two years after integration with family violence services, the Housing Pathways program continues to deliver remarkable outcomes. Currently supported by 1.8 FTE, the program assisted 77 clients since July 2024, 10 of whom are now in long-term housing (including private rentals, Office of Housing properties, and ways long-term housing). Documented client stories highlight the program's success in facilitating safe, permanent housing solutions and empowering recovery.

## **Partnership achievements**

*Regenerate:* Fully furnished multiple long-term homes, offering women and children escaping family violence a safe, welcoming environment to rebuild their lives.

*The Queen's Fund:* Provided essential practical assistance, ensuring clients have the resources needed to recover and regain independence.

*Collaborations with RSPCA, Terry White Chemmart, and City of Greater Dandenong:* Enhanced support services and broadened the local resource network for families in crisis.

## **Therapeutic work with children at our SWISS refuge**

Every child staying at the SWISS refuge benefits from a therapeutic case plan tailored to their unique needs. This initiative, introduced by Family Safety Victoria in 2023, recognises children in family violence services as victims in their own right, ensuring they have access to therapeutic interventions to support their recovery from trauma and the disruptions caused by family violence.

Our expert Children's Practice Lead, Veronika S, oversees the delivery of onsite group sessions at SWISS. These sessions, focusing on creativity and intuition, include activities such as music, art, play, and more, providing children with a safe and nurturing environment to heal and grow.

## **Embedded Family Violence Work**

*An Alexis Family Violence Response Practitioner addresses urgent safety needs, while a dedicated practitioner is now embedded within the City of Greater Dandenong's Maternal & Child Health team, ensuring proactive care and early intervention.*





# 2,669

people wayss helped  
get a roof over their head



## What our clients say

“I feel honoured to have had Elizabeth’s support not once but twice, through some of the hardest times of my life. Elizabeth - I honestly can’t thank you enough for everything you did for myself and my daughter, you were a god send. You didn’t just do your job, you went above and beyond every time. I don’t know what I would have done without your kind voice, telling me everything would always be okay and you guys would do your best to help. You never failed me. Thank you so much Elizabeth!”

## Ayan’s story

Ayan’s journey is one of resilience and newfound hope. Moving into transitional housing with her four children, she sought stability after years of hardship. Eighteen months later, she was offered public housing in Noble Park, a home that felt right for her family.

Earlier, Ayan declined a housing offer in Frankston because it was surrounded by bushes. This triggered memories of her traumatic past fleeing civil unrest in Somalia as a child, hiding in bushes to escape violence before reaching safety in Djibouti. Arriving in Australia as a refugee at 18, those early experiences stayed with her.

Housing Pathways advocated for her needs, ensuring a safe, suitable home. Soon, Ayan received an offer near her children’s school, in a location where she felt secure. Grateful and happy, Ayan found more than a house—it was a fresh start for her family, free from fear.



# Our impact in the community

This year, the Renter Services Team has continued to deliver vital property and tenancy management services, supporting vulnerable people experiencing homelessness and family violence. Despite the pressures of a tough housing market, our team remains steadfast in creating pathways to safe, affordable housing for those in need.

ways's housing portfolio spans 34 suburbs and towns across the local government areas (LGAs) of Casey, Cardinia, Dandenong, Frankston, Mornington Peninsula, and Baw Baw. This year, we've added 25 properties to our portfolio, including 8 newly constructed dwellings owned by ways. These homes have significantly strengthened our ability to provide safe housing for women and children impacted by family violence.

We extended our reach into the Baw Baw LGA through an important partnership with Fairview Retirement Village and Quantum Support Services. This initiative involves managing tenancy services for 4 properties dedicated to supporting individuals over 55 experiencing homelessness. Over the last 12 months, 5 individuals from this program have successfully transitioned to long-term affordable housing—a testament to the power of collaboration.

Our housing and support collaborations continue to be at the heart of achieving successful outcomes for vulnerable individuals. This year, we strengthened our commitment to these partnerships, working closely with 20 external agencies and 5 ways support programs. Updated, comprehensive Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) provide a strong framework for delivering person-centred, wraparound housing and support services. These partnerships are focused on assisting individuals with complex needs, ensuring tailored care and a path toward stability.

Over the past 12 months, we've initiated 172 new tenancies, offering a lifeline to vulnerable individuals by providing them with secure homes and a pathway out of homelessness. Each tenancy represents a new beginning and a step closer to a brighter, more secure future for those who need it most. Through dedication and collaboration, we continue to turn challenges into opportunities, making a tangible impact in the lives of those we serve.

## 90%

of our renters were Very or Fairly Satisfied with ways's services

## 83%

of our renters are very and fairly satisfied that ways listens to renters' views and acts on them

# Our impact in the community

## Renter survey

The annual renter survey is an integral part of the Housing Registrar's Key Performance Measure reporting. It also provides ways with valuable insights to guide program design and service delivery. This year, the General Manager of Homelessness Support and Renter Services introduced additional survey questions to better understand the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, as well as LGBTIQ+, communities among our renters.

Out of 140 respondents (representing 37% of renter households), 7% identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and 9% identified as LGBTIQ+. To provide context, according to the 2021 Census, only 1% of Victorians identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Data from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing indicates that 5.7% of Victorians openly identify as LGBTIQ+.

These survey findings reveal that both groups remain overrepresented in homelessness support and renter services, emphasising the need to prioritise these cohorts in future program designs to ensure equitable access and support.

We are also thrilled to report that 59% of renters are aware that ways is a Rainbow Tick Accredited organisation, demonstrating our commitment to inclusivity and safety for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

## Casey IAP Grant

Through a grant from the City of Casey, we've been able to fund a 0.4 equivalent full time (EFT) Immediate Assistance Program (IAP) response in partnership with the Casey North Information and Support Service (CNISS). This initiative is critical in empowering renters and providing timely, accessible support.

## Sustainable Housing Improvements

Collaborating with HTHA (a wholly owned subsidiary of RACV), we've successfully upgraded all units at SWISS without incurring any cost to ways. The project included removing gas cooktops and installing energy efficient reverse cycle air conditioning in every unit. These changes not only create safer and more sustainable living spaces but also help reduce the environmental impact of our housing solutions.

Our ongoing efforts reflect our dedication to fostering inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability for the communities we serve.



# Our community

In 2024, the area in which we operate saw alarming rates of family violence and a deepening homelessness and housing affordability crisis. The southeast region reported the highest number of family violence incidents in Victoria, with a reported 5,417 cases in the year ending March 2023 - a 16.5% increase since 2019. Those aged 25–44 are particularly affected, making up over half of all victims and perpetrators ([source: Casey News](#)). Within this broader context of violence, women are significantly more likely to experience severe physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children.

Homelessness in the region is on the rise, driven by financial insecurity, unaffordable housing, and family violence. Alarming, the rate of 'working homeless' - employed individuals unable to afford stable housing - has escalated, reflecting a broader failure in housing affordability. The southeast region faces significantly unaffordable rental housing. Rental stress is widespread, with rents increasing well beyond wage growth ([source: Dandenong Star Community](#)). Despite the efforts of ways and similar organisations, the growing demand for secure, affordable housing highlights the urgent need for further action to support at-risk families and individuals





# Philanthropic support

Philanthropic generosity has been pivotal in enabling ways to provide essential services and innovative solutions for individuals facing or at risk of family violence and homelessness.

Support and contributions from a range of Philanthropists and donors have made a meaningful impact, particularly in high-need areas like the City of Casey and Greater Dandenong, helping us create safer, brighter futures for those who need it most.

Thank you for standing with us.

## Angel's story

Angel's journey in transitional housing was marked by resilience and immense challenges. Caring for three young children, including Diego—a micro-prem born at 27 weeks—life was a delicate balance. Diego required frequent hospital visits, which Angel managed while looking after her other children, aged 4 and 1. Tragically, Diego passed away at just five months old, leaving Angel grieving deeply.

Throughout this difficult time, her Housing Pathways case manager, Tegan, became a vital source of support. Tegan provided a safe space for Angel to express her grief, something she felt others avoided. She also advocated on Angel's behalf, ensuring she had the time needed to secure permanent housing.

Angel's perseverance ultimately paid off when she moved into public housing. Grateful for the support she received, she told Tegan, "My family is forever stable due to the work you do." For Angel, it marked the beginning of a new chapter filled with stability and hope.

# Thanks to the team

At ways, we are incredibly proud of our diverse and inclusive team, which is the heart of everything we do. Our workforce comprises 208 people with different perspectives and experiences that drive our success. We are honoured to have achieved the Rainbow Tick Accreditation, a testament to our commitment to fostering a workplace that celebrates and supports the LGBTQI+ community.

Together, our team represents a vibrant and supportive culture that thrives on collaboration, compassion, and respect, allowing us to make a meaningful impact every day.



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