



2024–2027

Strategic Plan

australian
community
support
organisation



40 YEARS OF
SUPPORTING
CHANGE

Acknowledgment of Country



ACSO proudly acknowledges Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

ACSO acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's first peoples and as the true custodians of the land, air and water on which we rely. We recognise and value the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Australian life and how this enriches us.

ACSO embraces the spirit of reconciliation, working towards equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have come in contact with the justice system.

Commitment to Inclusion



ACSO recognises the right to a safe and inclusive service without bias. ACSO is committed to the equitable treatment of its participants, employees and partners.

We believe in humanity and celebrating the diverse voices of our community through leadership, practice and policy design, to honour and embrace the diverse traditions, cultures and experiences of those we support and work alongside.

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The Growing Prison System – Time for ‘Smarter Justice’

A safer community is not one with a growing prison population.

In 1910, Winston Churchill developed an agenda for criminal justice reform, stating “the first real principle which should guide anyone trying to establish a good system of prisons should be to prevent as many people as possible getting there at all.” It’s crucial to acknowledge that 99% of prisoners return to the community at some point.

Even 114 years after Winston Churchill’s wisdom, our governments across Australia are caught up in the ‘tough on crime’ rhetoric, resulting in over 40% of the prison population sentenced for nonviolent crimes, as youth and adult prison populations increase. Tragically, these impacts continue to be felt in Aboriginal communities and people experiencing high rates of social vulnerability such as homelessness, substance addiction, disability and mental health conditions. In 2024, this surge is unprecedented, unsustainable and unnecessary.

ACSO’s new 2024 – 27 Strategic Plan sets the direction for the organisation to push ahead to influence, design and deliver bespoke programs and services that have genuine social impact by safely reducing rates of incarceration. ACSO is a trusted and proven collaborator, capable of developing tailored programs and services to address the unique challenges faced by justice clients with complex needs. For over 40 years we have built, and continue to build, our forensic practice, as evidenced by our role in supporting new initiatives such as the NSW AOD Hub, the Assertive Outreach Service (AOS) in Victoria and

our contributions to international conferences. Government agencies often seek collaboration with ACSO to create and deliver specialist programs and interventions such as the new Reintegration Pathways Program (RPP) for people with complex needs released from immigration detention centres, funded by the Commonwealth Government.

The ACSO legacy was created through Lived Experience expertise, the organisation was founded by Stan McCormack after he was granted parole for armed robbery. Stan’s vision for community solutions rather than prison, friendly charisma, ability to build authentic relationships and creating services with real individual and social outcomes is enshrined in ACSO’s culture and strategic plan for the future. We embed lived experience in everything we do.

History plays a critical role in shaping our future and the future of how the criminal justice system in Australia can be transformed. ACSO has evolved to meet changing demands, from a small non-government agency operating a ‘halfway house’ in the 1980’s, to broadening our capacity as a leading organisation in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland delivering services to people at-risk of being impacted by the justice system.

After 40 years of dedicated service to the Australian community, ACSO continues to tackle persistent challenges in justice policy. These obstacles drive ACSO’s Board and employees to innovate solutions that divert people with complex needs from the criminal justice system, fostering pathways to better lives and safer communities.

This is the core focus of ACSO’s 2024-27 Strategic Plan.



Karen Corry
ACSO Chair



Vaughan Winther
ACSO CEO

ACSO Legacy

Founded in 1984, the Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO) was inspired by the lived experience of Stan McCormack and established to help break the cycle of individuals repeatedly entering the justice system due to a lack of support for meaningful change.

From humble beginnings, leasing a house on Napier Street in Fitzroy to support people transitioning out of prison under the name The Epistle Centre, and powered by a dedicated team of volunteers, we have grown into a robust organisation. By 2024, we have expanded to over 450 team members, delivering 27 programs across three states, continuing our mission to support individuals impacted by the justice system, and create lasting change in our communities.

Humble Beginnings

The Epistle Centre was established in 1983, but became an incorporated association and was registered as a charity in 1984. This was a pivotal moment in our journey towards becoming the organisation we are today. The early atmosphere was inspiring and often seemed divinely supported. Moved by Stan's example, volunteers dedicated much of their time and energy to the Centre. As one volunteer noted: "...we felt we were protected. Bills would arrive, and we had no money. Everyone worried, then, amazingly, a donation would arrive to cover the bill—this seemed to happen all the time."

Although ACSO is a secular organisation, Stan's faith was central to his work, and early reintegration programs included Bible studies. As the organisation grew, it began to welcome people from all backgrounds and faiths, with the core values of belief in humanity and integrity continuing to serve as the foundation for ACSO's work.

In 1985, positive news stories about the Centre prompted Justice Nicholson, who had been involved since its establishment, to approach the Minister for Community Services. As a result, the organisation received its first government funding of \$3,000. We also received donations from institutions such as the Felton Bequest Trust, the Builders Labourers Federation, and the Painters & Dockers Federation. Through ANZ Trustees

and the Felton Bequest, we were able to purchase the Napier Street property.

Building a Strong Foundation Through People and Passion

Stan had a remarkable ability to attract passionate, dedicated people who volunteered, joined the board, and later became staff as funding stabilised. Chris Cappello was one of the first to be inspired by Stan's vision and later took on the role of managing our second property in Carlton.

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE LIVING HISTORY VIDEO WITH STAN MCCORMACK AND CHRIS CAPPELLO.](#)

When Stan left The Epistle Centre in 1986, he recommended Tony Calabro as the new administrator. Around the same time, Sr Claire McShee, with the approval of her order, the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, left Bendigo to work full-time for the Centre.

This core team laid strong foundations and established the organisation's credibility, allowing volunteers to begin visiting prisons. Sr Claire also launched the Prison Outreach Support Program, further expanding our services.

ACSO continues to attract and retain exceptional people. Our team members are the heart of our work, and their dedication and passion enable us to grow and support



individuals with diverse and complex needs. Their commitment drives ACSO's meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve.

Compassion Meets Complexity

We recognised early on that individuals with complex needs required additional support. In 1988, we secured funding to establish a dedicated house for people with intellectual disabilities who had come into contact with the criminal justice system. This initiative later evolved into Supported Forensic Disability Accommodation (SFDA), and we continue to advocate for this cohort to receive the funding and support necessary to live meaningful lives.

We also saw many individuals cycling through the justice system repeatedly due to unmet needs—such as housing, health, or employment. By focusing on these key areas, we help people break patterns of harmful or destructive behaviour.

As the housing crisis worsens, cost-of-living pressures rise, and mental health awareness grows—alongside increasing political emphasis on community safety—we remain committed to adapting our services to meet the evolving needs of the people we support.

[CLICK HERE TO SEE OUR FULL LIST OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.](#)

Evolution of Names

In 1996, The Epistle Centre was renamed the Victorian Offender Support Agency (VOSA) to better align with the organisation's focus at the time. As the scope of services expanded, the name was changed again in 2000 to the Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO), reflecting our broader mission to support at-risk individuals and divert them from the justice system.

Our vision remains unchanged: to create a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and prison truly is the last resort. We support people at risk of entering or already involved in the justice system, offering services across the justice continuum from prevention to rehabilitation. These include mental health, alcohol and drug treatment, intensive residential support and housing.

[CLICK HERE TO REVIEW THE TIMELINE OF OUR ORGANISATION.](#)

Strengthening Community and Advocating for Change

With over 40 years of experience, ACSO has developed an exceptional understanding of addressing the needs of individuals throughout their lives. This holistic approach enables us to tailor solutions that foster self-determination and break the cycle of disadvantage.

As collaborators, we recognise the interconnectedness of issues and policies, working across government and industry to enhance service delivery, improve access, and strengthen the evidence base to prevent individuals from becoming entrenched in the justice system. Our efforts aim to achieve better outcomes for communities, clients, and government partners across Australia.

We advocate against the unnecessary warehousing of individuals in prisons, highlighting the significant personal, social, and economic costs involved. Australia needs long-term solutions to provide individuals with genuine opportunities to exit the justice system and ensure community safety.

ACSO remains committed to advocating for change, delivering innovative services, and leading efforts to transform the justice system in Australia.

Our Changing World

As ACSO embarked on this strategic planning journey, we recognised the need to respond to the complex and ever-changing landscape that directly impacts the communities and clients we support. External factors are reshaping the social services and support sectors, driving us to innovate and adapt our care and advocacy approaches.



Housing Crisis

Australia's housing crisis, worsened by the pandemic, is marked by rising property prices, high rental costs, and a shortage of affordable housing. This has deepened social inequalities, increasing the pressure on sectors to find sustainable solutions.



Changes to Compliance Requirements

New compliance standards in Australia focus on transparency, accountability, ESG criteria, and workplace safety. ACSO must adapt through training, policy updates, and adopting new technologies to meet these stricter requirements.



Workforce Challenges

Australia's ageing population, immigration changes, and competition from high-paying sectors create difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled staff. Addressing this requires focused recruitment, professional development, and flexible work strategies.



Technological Advancements

Rapid technological change demands staff training and system upgrades. Embracing these technologies will enhance ACSO's service delivery and partnerships, ensuring resilience in a tech-driven world.



Federal Political Focus on Community Safety

The federal government is placing greater emphasis on community safety, particularly through reforms in family violence prevention and immigration policies. This heightened focus on protective measures and prevention aligns with national safety goals and is likely to drive future legislative changes and increased funding for support services.



Australia Federal Election 2025

The 2025 federal election will impact social policy, funding, and legislation. ACSO will need strategic planning and strong partnerships to respond effectively to shifts in priorities and resources.



Shift in Social Enterprises

Social enterprises are evolving, focusing on sustainable funding models and impact investment. Technology is driving scale and efficiency, pushing enterprises to innovate and address social and environmental issues.



Environmental Sustainability, Climate Change, and ESG Factors

Environmental sustainability and ESG considerations are critical to ACSO's strategy. Climate change risks, stakeholder pressure, and regulatory expectations require ACSO to integrate ethical and sustainable practices across all operations.

ACSO Impact Logic Model

By focusing our organisation resources on....



Enabled by...



We achieve clear outcomes...



That have impact.



ACSO Strategic Plan

Our Vision

Our vision is for a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and prison truly is the last resort

Our Values

Our values are passion for our work, belief in humanity, integrity in all we do and innovative spirit

Our Strategic Objective

Our strategic objective is to increase our delivery of high quality, integrated services for people with diverse and complex needs

Outcomes

Influencing Change

ACSO's voice is contributing to building inclusive communities and community justice reform

Impactful Client Services

Our clients inform our practice and experience positive impact from ACSO services

Wellbeing of Our People

Our people are safe, well and engaged with our One ACSO culture

Sustainable Growth

ACSO's resourcing supports financial strength, robust cybersecurity, and strategic growth

Priorities

Maintain a proactive voice in influencing government policy and practice in the community services sector

Implement impactful practice informed by lived experience

Embed an operating model that enables our people to complete their work safely and efficiently

Invest resources in efficient, scalable and secure digital and business solutions

Increase community engagement to "Understand the story. Support the change."

Integrate a connected model of care which improves wellbeing

Continue building an engaged and diverse team, representative of our clients

Ensure services and programs are cost effective and streamlined

Promote compelling propositions for government and partners which strengthen community wellbeing

Provide a positive, culturally safe and inclusive experience for our clients

Lead a culture of continuous learning and development

Effectively leverage new market growth in NSW & QLD

Enablers

Technology and Data; Strong Partnerships; Innovation and Continuous Improvement; Lived Experience

Enablers

To achieve our strategic goals and effectively serve our communities, ACSO relies on key enablers that drive our approach and guide our actions. These enablers are foundational elements that empower us to adapt, innovate, and deliver meaningful outcomes for our clients. They represent the critical capabilities, values, and partnerships that allow us to navigate challenges and seize opportunities in an evolving landscape.

The four enablers—Lived Experience, Technology & Data, Strong Partnerships, and Innovation & Continuous Improvement—form the backbone of our strategy. They ensure ACSO remains responsive and forward-thinking, enabling us to meet the diverse needs of those we support and deliver high-quality services that drive positive change.

Enabler 1: Lived Experience

"Lived Experience" is a core enabler at ACSO, rooted in our founder Stan McCormack's journey. We embed this ethos throughout the organisation, ensuring those with lived experience shape our services. The Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP) provides direct input, and our Peer Worker Framework empowers individuals in support roles. We're committed to representing lived experience at all levels of the organisation, ensuring truly client-centered decision-making.

Enabler 2: Technology & Data

ACSO leverages "Technology & Data" to enhance decision-making, efficiency, and service delivery. We adopt advanced technology to streamline operations and use data analytics to drive strategy and measure impact. We prioritise cybersecurity, ensure data integrity, and use technology to improve accessibility, positioning ACSO as a forward-thinking leader in the social sector.

Enabler 3: Strong Partnerships

"Strong Partnerships" enable ACSO to amplify its impact by collaborating with government, non-profits, businesses, and more. These partnerships focus on shared goals, knowledge exchange, and joint solutions. By aligning with partners who share our vision, we enhance program effectiveness and sustainability while driving systemic change.

Enabler 4: Innovation & Continuous Improvement

"Innovation & Continuous Improvement" drive ACSO's leadership in the social sector. We foster a culture of creative thinking and invest in new ideas, technologies, and research. Collaborating with external partners, we stay at the forefront of emerging trends and continuously improve our services to better meet community needs.



Strategic Objective 1: Influencing Change

ACSO's voice is contributing to building inclusive communities and community justice reform

Priority 1 Maintain a proactive voice in influencing government policy and practice in the community services sector

We will achieve this by maintaining a strong presence at conferences and events to ensure our clients' needs are effectively represented. We will promote ACSO's advocacy position through the increased involvement of our Senior Leadership Team in peak bodies and committees. Additionally, we will continue to advocate for our NDIS clients, providing valuable insights into the complex needs of individuals at the intersection of NDIS and forensic services.

Priority 2 Increase community engagement to "Understand the story. Support the change."

Our ethos underpins everything we do, and we aim to deepen community engagement by sharing the personal stories of our people through *Humans of ACSO*. This initiative offers a human-centered view of our work, helping others understand our impact. We will amplify these stories through events, our website, social media, proactive media outreach, and other channels aligned with our vision to reach and engage a wider audience.

Priority 3 Promote compelling propositions for government and partners which strengthen community wellbeing

We will formalise partnerships and develop new programs with organisations that align with our mission, particularly those focused on youth diversion and supporting clients with complex and diverse needs. These collaborations will strengthen our impact and contribute to better outcomes for the communities we support. We will collaborate with the government to pilot evidence-based solutions that address key priority areas.

Bringing Forensic Expertise to AOD

In August 2024, ACSO celebrated the opening of a new hub in Shellharbour, New South Wales, which will deliver desperately needed alcohol and other drug services, empowering clients to make positive change.

Since 2021, ACSO has been providing specialist counselling and care coordination through its Forensic Treatment Services program in Victoria. These services offer vital treatment and care pathways for clients in high-risk circumstances needing AOD support. Drawing on this expertise, ACSO were one of 12 organisations which received funding in 2024 in response to the urgent need to expand AOD services across New South Wales (NSW).

The links between AOD consumption and incarceration have been well documented within the criminal justice system. In response to growing concerns about amphetamines, the NSW Government launched a Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug Ice in 2018, highlighting the urgent need for better AOD support services. Numerous recommendations were made by the Commissioner, and 86 of these were granted funding of \$500 million. This funding will be used to enhance the AOD workforce in NSW and deliver evidence-based prevention, treatment, support and early intervention services for priority populations, such as people in custody (NSW Health, 2024).

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE WHOLE STORY](#)

Strategic Objective 2: Impactful Client Services

Our clients inform our practice and experience positive impact from ACSO services

Priority 1 Implement impactful practices informed by lived experience

We will increase the involvement of our Lived Experience Advisory Panel at all levels of ACSO, from the Board to the establishment of a peer workforce. Additionally, we will expand the Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP) in New South Wales and Queensland, ensuring the insights and perspectives of those with lived experience shape our services and drive meaningful change. Our LEAP panel will continue to advise on all aspects of work at ACSO from Service Design and Policy advice through to our Strategic Plan.

Priority 2 Integrate a connected model of care which improves wellbeing

We will develop an ACSO best practice model of care that complements our Clinical Practice Framework to support us to achieve our intended impact. Additionally, we will enhance our client outcome measurement and reporting activities to ensure we know client wellbeing improves following their engagement with our services. This will enable us to provide effective, holistic support that truly meets the needs of our clients.

Priority 3 Provide a positive, culturally safe and inclusive experience for our clients

Building on our initial Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which established the foundations for a culturally responsive ACSO, we will enhance accessibility and equity by implementing a range of improvements to address any barriers. This work will also include implementing our accessibility plan, bringing the client voice to the forefront of our work by optimising our client feedback process, and implementing our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to create a culturally safe environment for both clients and employees.

Collaborating for Better Outcomes

In 2023, ACSO successfully launched the Assertive Outreach and Support Service (AOS), an innovative program designed to deliver assertive outreach and case management services to participants with complex needs.

The AOS pilot's mission is to empower and support change in complex lives by reducing risk and fostering connection. The program addresses barriers such as service fatigue, risk management challenges, and service refusal. Through assertive outreach and tailored case management, AOS connects participants with resources to improve mental health, housing, substance use, community connections, work readiness, and relationships.

The Assertive Outreach and Support Service (AOS) pilot exemplifies the transformative power of dedicated support and innovative collaboration between government and service providers. By addressing the unique needs of participants with complex challenges, AOS has significantly improved lives and fostered safer communities. The program's success is a testament to the unwavering commitment of the AOS team and their partners.

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE WHOLE STORY](#)

Complex Needs Conference 2025
In partnership with ermha365 and DFFH, ACSO will be co-hosting the Complex Needs Conference in 2025, which will focus on the challenges and solutions in providing support to clients with complex needs, aiming to bridge gaps in community safety and share inspiring examples of overcoming obstacles. Complex needs often stem from mental health issues, substance abuse, trauma, poverty, homelessness, disability, and social isolation, making service provision both rewarding and demanding. The conference will offer practical solutions, fostering connections among service providers, and exchange innovative ideas to enhance support for participants with complex needs.

Strategic Objective 3: Wellbeing of Our People

**Our people are safe, well and engaged
with our One ACSO culture**

Priority 1 Embed an operating model that enables our people to complete their work safely and efficiently

We will strengthen our employee support initiatives through our Employee Assistance Program, fostering ACSO as a safe space for its people and ensuring we meet all our responsibilities when it comes to Psychosocial Risk. Additionally, we will review our operating model to ensure ACSO is a supportive environment that enhances both safety and efficiency in the workplace.

Priority 2 Continue building an engaged and diverse team, representative of our clients

We will strive to build a diverse workforce by first improving our data collection and reporting to gain a better understanding of our workforce, implementing initiatives designed to attract and retain diverse team members, as well as work toward our HWEI silver accreditation. Additionally, we will review our internal communications to ensure employees receive timely and relevant information. These efforts will foster a more inclusive workplace that values the contributions of all employees.

Priority 3 Lead a culture of continuous learning and development

ACSO has a strong culture of learning, which we will continue to strengthen by reviewing and enhancing our learning and development framework. We will also focus on improving our leadership development program to ensure all team members have access to the opportunities necessary for growth and success. These initiatives will create a supportive environment that promotes both personal and professional development.

Understand the Story. Support the Change.

“ACSO’s ethos deeply resonates with me. It reflects our commitment to listening to the unique experiences of each individual we support while actively working towards positive transformations.”

~ Tanu, Residential Team Leader

“Supporting change involves empowering our clients to rewrite their story and encourage them to take agency of their lives.”

~ Kate, AOD Counsellor

“People exiting prison face enormous challenges and barriers in their daily lives, but with a bit of support and advocacy they can access the resources they need to break away from the justice system. It’s an incredible privilege to hear people’s stories and support them on their journeys.”

~ Julia, Forensic Case Worker

“Everyone has a background that has led them to where they are today, and we need to take the time to understand this journey to learn what support they truly need. It is this genuine understanding that will increase the likelihood of the success of our programs, and the people we work with making positive changes that will affect the rest of their life.”

~ Angela, Program Manager

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HUMANS OF ACSO](#)

Strategic Objective 4: Sustainable Growth

ACSO's resourcing supports financial strength, robust cybersecurity, and strategic growth

Priority 1 Invest resources in efficient, scalable and secure digital and business solutions

We will develop our Enterprise Data Platform, allowing us to leverage better data for reporting and improving client outcomes. We will also ensure the safety of our data while enhancing compliance and supporting efficiencies across the organisation. These initiatives will create a solid foundation for growth and enable us to deliver high-quality services to our clients.

Priority 2 Ensure services and programs are cost effective and streamlined

To strategically enhance our financial management, we will refine our budget processes to ensure comprehensive financial reporting. Furthermore, we will conduct a comprehensive review of our program sustainability to guarantee long-term viability. These initiatives are designed to optimise our resource allocation and safeguard ACSO's future financial health.

Priority 3 Effectively leverage new market growth in NSW & QLD

We will identify potential commercial products that align with our expertise, allowing us to tap into new markets. Additionally, we will consider a merger and acquisition strategy to enhance our impact, improve operational effectiveness, and better meet community needs. These initiatives will position us for growth while ensuring we deliver valuable services to the communities we serve.

Supporting Successful Re-Entry in Queensland

With the wellbeing of clients, their families, and the community at the forefront, CREST engages its network and leans on ACSO's roots to support clients to make meaningful change.

The Community Re-Entry Services Team (CREST) program was established in 2016 by ACSO in partnership with Queensland Corrective Services to support people coming out of custody across Southeast Queensland (SEQ). The program builds upon ACSO's four decades of collaborative and comprehensive services across Australia, proudly working to break the cycle of people re-entering the prison system by providing access to support, treatment, connection, and resources in the community.

On a day-to-day basis, the CREST team engage with people in custody and support them on the day of their release, followed by continued provision of outreach support to promote positive behaviour change. This enables clients to set and achieve realistic and individualised goals, participate in treatment programs, transition to independent living, and ultimately live meaningful, fulfilling, and offence free lives.

CREST is an excellent example of how ACSO have been able to leverage our strong collaborative partnerships to sustainably expand our services. In CREST's eight years of operation, the team have demonstrated their capability and commitment to collaboration by maintaining co-locations with six correctional centres and seventeen probation and parole offices across SEQ.

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL STORY](#)

Reintegration Pathways Program

The Reintegration Pathways Program was developed by ACSO in April 2024 to provide bespoke and desperately needed services for individuals recently released from immigration detention.

Indefinite detention ruled unlawful

In November 2023, the High Court of Australia unanimously agreed that it is unlawful to hold people in immigration detention when there is "no real prospect of removal from Australia becoming practicable in the reasonably foreseeable future". This decision was the outcome of the case *NZYQ v Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs*, which highlighted the predicament of people seeking refuge in Australia without a visa or citizenship of any other country.

"For decades, Australia's system of mandatory and indefinite immigration detention has imposed an enormous burden on thousands of vulnerable people and their families."

Emeritus Professor Rosalind Croucher AM,
president of the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Since the early 1990s, Australian law has required individuals without a valid visa to be held in immigration detention, either whilst waiting for an outcome of their visa application, or to be deported. The *NZYQ* case challenged this law in the context of individuals who met neither of these criteria, unable to obtain a visa due to having previous involvement with the criminal justice system, or be deported to any other country. Essentially, this left a cohort of people facing indefinite detainment.

Release of the NZYQ cohort

Ruling indefinite immigration detention as unlawful required the release of this group, known as cohort *NZYQ*, into the community. The *NZYQ* cohort face distinct and elevated risks, as they are ineligible for many existing support services. Many individuals within this cohort have experienced deep and complex trauma, having fled from their countries due to war, violence, or persecution, spending time in prison, and being held in immigration detention for years without an end in sight.

"Whatever the reason that a person cannot be removed from Australia, indefinite immigration detention can never be the answer. People in detention are deprived of their freedom, separated from their families and communities, and routinely subjected to violence, isolation and deplorable conditions. On top of this, people are faced with the psychological burden of not knowing when, or even if, they will ever get out... The Australian Government should support people to rebuild their lives in freedom and safety."

Sanmati Verma, Legal Director at the Human Rights Law Centre

Addressing urgent needs

Identifying the urgent support cohort *NZYQ* required, and the risks to individual and community safety posed by the gap in existing services for them, Home Affairs approached ACSO to design and implement a bespoke national program specifically targeting the needs of this cohort.

ACSO have a long history of providing community services to individuals who have had contact with the justice system. Since 2012, we have leveraged our forensic expertise to develop fourteen new programs, utilising a nuanced understanding of trauma to break the cycle of individuals entering the prison system. The Reintegration Pathways Program (RPP) builds upon these foundations as ACSO's first program to span across Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, and the only program in Australia specifically designed to deliver offence-specific therapeutic supports to the *NZYQ* cohort.

Collaborate to rehabilitate

Working alongside referral partners Life Without Barriers and Settlement Services International, RPP engages with participants on a voluntary basis to complete forensic needs assessments. These assessments explore the distinct challenges faced by each participant and allow the team of clinicians and practitioners to develop treatment recommendations. The RPP team then works with participants to co-develop an intervention plan, which sets out strategies to reduce behaviours of concern and promote safe engagement with the program and associated services.

While the program is still in its early stages, RPP has clear metrics for success and a team dedicated to achieving positive outcomes. The goal is for participants of the program to attain stabilised or improved physical and mental health and demonstrate an increased capacity to manage behaviours of concern, thereby reducing further contact with the criminal justice system. Ultimately, by supporting cohort *NZYQ* to heal from complex trauma and make meaningful change, RPP endeavours to enable individuals to live fulfilling, offence-free lives harmoniously with their communities.

