

2022-2026

ALLAWAH HOUSE

CENTRAL COAST, NSW



A meanwhile use housing initiative that provided safety and stability for older women experiencing homelessness.

WOMEN'S
COMMUNITY
SHELTERS

 **Pacific Link**
HOUSING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Women's Community Shelters and Pacific Link Housing acknowledge the Darkinjung people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Allawah House offered safety and support.

We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples.

We honour their strength, resilience, and enduring wisdom, recognising the deep and sacred connections to land, waters, and community that have existed for tens of thousands of years and continue to be unbroken.



JAN'S STORY

Jan is a former resident of Allawah House, East Gosford. Jan worked for 49 years as a primary school teacher, she had a secure home and single-handedly raised four children.

But at 79 years of age, Jan became homeless as a result of a family breakdown.

There were no affordable rental options for Jan and her stay at Allawah House was the lifeline she needed. Women's Community Shelters case managers were able to help Jan secure long-term safe housing, and she is now happily living in her 'forever home'.



Jan - Photographed by Eva

"It was a real unknown, I didn't know where I was going to be, it was a very, very difficult time. We all want to be respected and have dignity and I think you lose a lot of that when you're about to lose your house. Once I was at Allawah House I met the other residents. They're all very different, from all walks of life, all different ages. We all had our stories ... and it's the same thing, all totally unexpected."

**Jan - Former Resident of
Allawah House**

FOREWORD

For a growing number of older women, **homelessness is not a lifelong experience but a crisis that arrives unexpectedly** after decades of work, caregiving and community connection. Relationship breakdown, family violence, ill health and financial hardship are leaving more women without a safe place to call home, often for the first time later in life.

In 2021, a vacant aged care facility on the Central Coast was transformed from an empty building into **a lifeline for older women experiencing homelessness**. Made available by property owner BEA Projects, and brought to life through a partnership with Pacific Link Housing, Women's Community Shelters and the NSW Government, **'Allawah House' became a safe haven where 45 women aged 55+ found security, support and hope for the future.**

Allawah House was designed to be temporary. **That constraint was part of its strength.** It demonstrated that underutilised buildings can be mobilised quickly and effectively, creating pathways to safety without limiting future development.

Allawah House was a partnership in practice, not principle.

We are proud of what was achieved and grateful to the partners, donors, supporters, and frontline teams who helped make it possible. Most importantly, we acknowledge the **45 women who found safety and stability at Allawah House** during a stressful period of homelessness and uncertainty. Their experience demonstrates **what is possible when practical action meets urgent need**, and why we must continue to work together to create more places of safety for women facing homelessness.



Annabelle Daniel OAM
CEO, Women's
Community Shelters



Ian Lynch
CEO, Pacific Link
Housing



Laurie Elliss
Property Owner -
BEA Projects

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND PARTNERSHIP



Allawah House communal living space.
Furniture provided by Temple & Webster.

Location

Central Coast, NSW

Clients

Women aged 55+ including First Nations women aged 45+, at risk of homelessness or escaping domestic and family violence

Years of Operation

2022–2026

Model

Meanwhile use housing - 14 ensuite studio units, multiple large communal living areas (inside and outside), shared kitchens and dining areas, walking distance to local shops, transport and services.

THE PARTNERSHIP

- ▶ **BEA Projects**, the property owner, purchased the former aged care property in 2021 and made it available at low cost.
- ▶ **Pacific Link Housing** managed the property, residential tenancies, and helped residents find long-term housing.
- ▶ **Women's Community Shelters** delivered trauma-informed services, including case management and onsite support.
- ▶ **The NSW Department of Communities and Justice** helped fund the program with renovation works and operational costs.
- ▶ **Temple & Webster**, furniture and homewares retailer, provided high-quality furniture and furnishings for all 14 rooms and the communal living areas.
- ▶ **Generous philanthropic and community donors** provided additional support that helped sustain service delivery, and the provision of consumables and kitchen equipment, across the four years.

WHY ALLAWAH HOUSE WAS NEEDED

Across Australia, empty and underused buildings exist alongside unmet housing need.

Every night, more than 120,000 people experience homelessness, with older women among the fastest growing cohorts affected. Housing insecurity is often compounded by domestic and family violence, limited income, and a lack of suitable alternatives. The current housing affordability and supply crisis is exacerbating the situation. **While long-term housing solutions are essential, thousands of people need safety and stability now.**

Allawah House provided an important stabilisation response on the Central Coast, preventing homelessness by combining safe, affordable accommodation with professional wraparound support, helping older women address housing barriers before homelessness became entrenched.

On average, residents stayed 57 weeks, with outreach support continuing for a further 19 weeks after they moved into their permanent, affordable ‘forever home’.

Women’s Community Shelters helped women navigate a complex and difficult housing system: understanding eligibility, completing applications, attending inspections, and communicating with providers. **This kind of practical, hands-on support was frequently what made the difference for a successful housing outcome.**

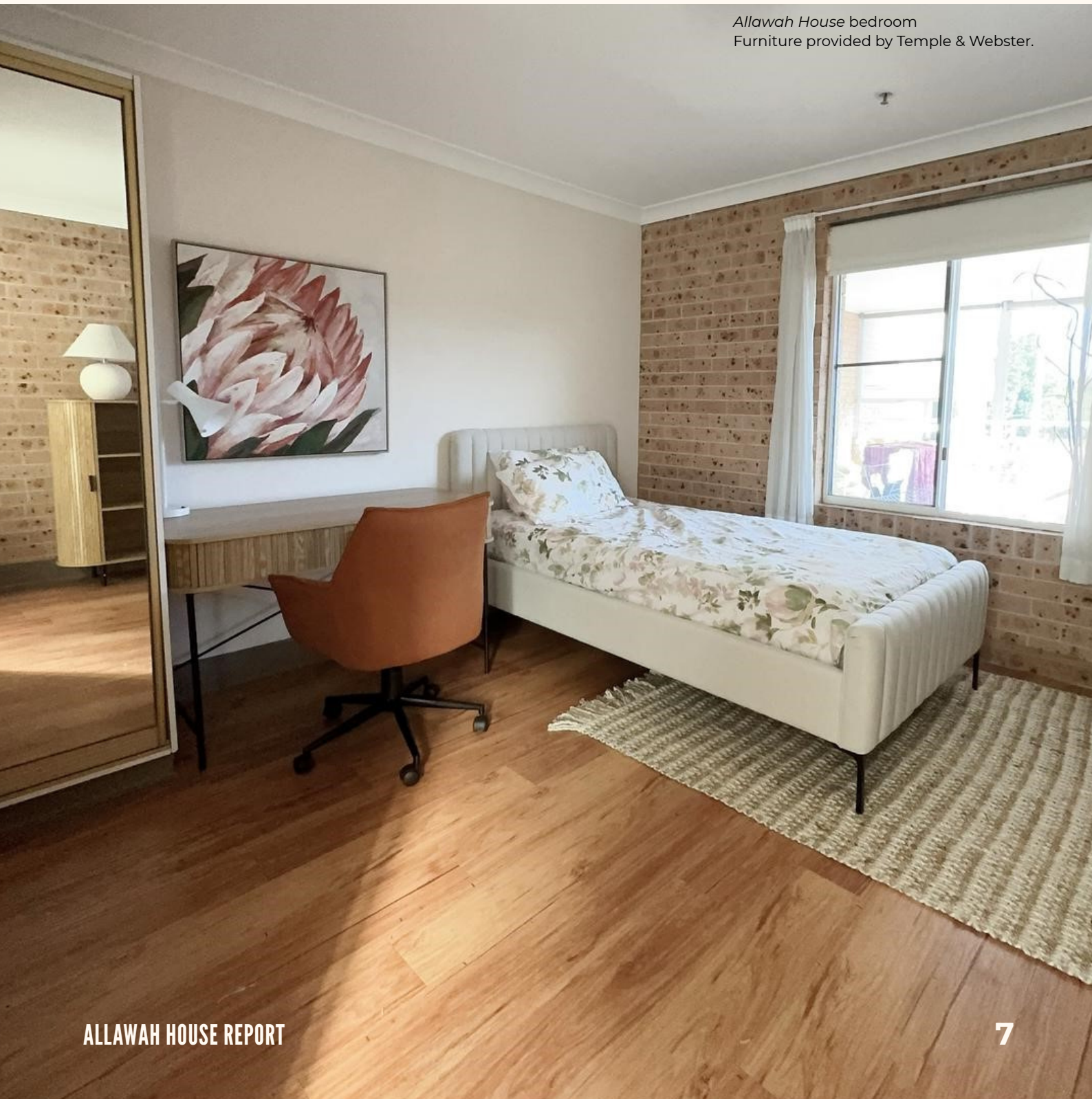
The onsite support extended well beyond housing: emotional support, crisis response, advocacy, tenancy support, and practical assistance across health, finances, education/employment, justice, immigration and daily living.

Support was available through both structured meetings and informal, everyday interactions.

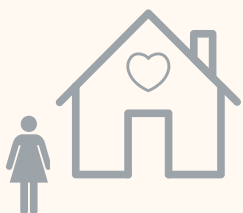
“ I arrived at Allawah broken and unsure of myself. I went through every different emotion possible, but when I did finally accept the past and be ready and willing to ask for help and support, the door was open. ”

– **Former Allawah House Client**

Allawah House bedroom
Furniture provided by Temple & Webster.



IMPACT & ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT



82% of Allawah House clients exited into safe, secure housing, compared with a sector average of around 60%.*

Source: Australian Personal Wellbeing Index



45

Women were supported at Allawah House over four years.



14,777

Approximately 14,777 safe bed nights provided at Allawah House

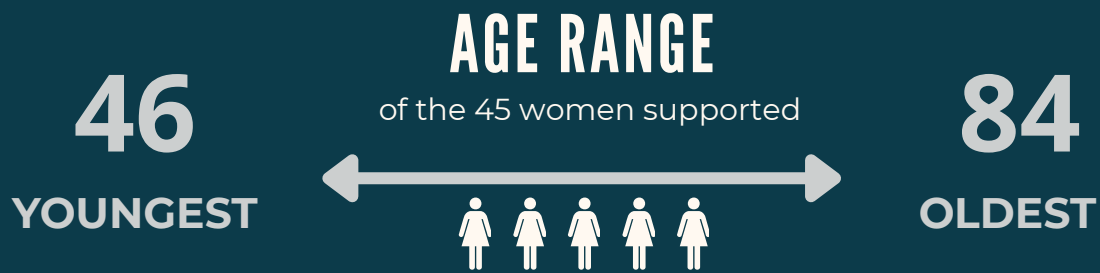
57 weeks average length of stay.
19 weeks average outreach support after exit.

Beyond housing outcomes, women reported improved wellbeing, stronger connections to support services and community, and increased confidence navigating complex housing systems.

"Nothing but support and guidance through those tough times as tough times don't last BUT tough people do ... I now have my own place which I am so honoured and forever grateful for."

– Former Allawah House Client

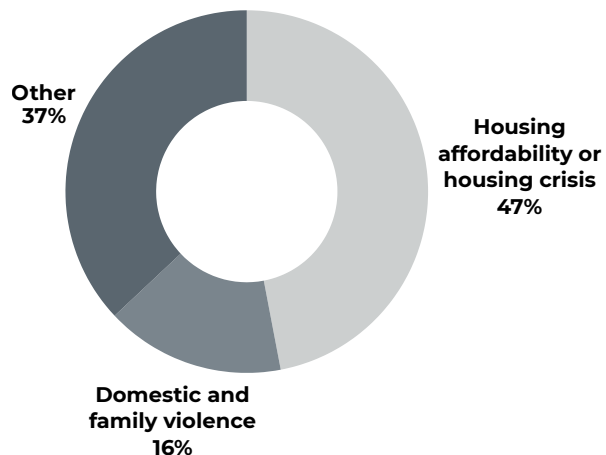
DEMOGRAPHICS



20% of residents identified as First Nations
18% were born overseas

Women arrived at Allawah House from a range of insecure living situations, including couch surfing, crisis accommodation, institutional settings and unstable housing arrangements.

Residents presented for a range of reasons, most commonly:



ECONOMICS

- **\$75.76 cost per bed night (\$530.31/week)**; 72% average occupancy (impacted at times by client-related issues, resulting in periods of reduced utilisation).
- **At full occupancy, cost per bed night would fall to \$54.92 (\$384.44/week)** – well below the average NSW 2025 crisis shelter bed night cost of **\$130** and temporary accommodation cost of **\$165.***
- **Residents contributed an average of \$210.67 per week towards their stay**, with contributions set in line with their ability to pay, reflecting social housing principles of affordability and access.
- **Demonstrated systems-level savings through cost avoidance** through (likely) reduced hospital bed nights, emergency service interaction and reliance on high-cost crisis accommodation.

Source: NSW Government Department of Communities & Justice - cost per night, emergency accommodation.

LEARNINGS FROM THE PROJECT

WHAT WORKED

- ▶ A relationship-based, values-aligned, partnership between a property owner, a community housing provider and a specialist service
- ▶ Trauma-informed service delivery, paired with housing stability
- ▶ Consistent, trusted relationships with Pacific Link Housing and the WCS team members were central to women feeling safe enough to ask for help and stay supported.
- ▶ Empowering women to set goals and plan for long-term success.
- ▶ Developing partnerships within the local community to enhance the support available to women, to promote their wellbeing and independence.

THE CHALLENGES

- ▶ Many residents experienced complex and intersecting challenges, including the impacts of trauma, health issues, social isolation, and prolonged housing insecurity. Specialist support is essential.
- ▶ The housing system itself remains complex to navigate, even with support. Delays, unclear processes and limited housing availability meant successful outcomes often relied on sustained advocacy and persistence from WCS and Pacific Link Housing team members.
- ▶ The Central Coast faces a significant shortage of private, social, and affordable housing, which is a long-term challenge that cannot be resolved quickly.

WHAT THIS MEANS

- ▶ The meanwhile use housing model is effective in supporting older women, a cohort often overlooked in homelessness responses.
- ▶ Meanwhile use housing needs to be resourced realistically: staffing, therapeutic support and community development must match the complexity of the cohort, beyond the cost of the bed.

BENEFITS OF MEANWHILE USE

WHAT WE LEARNED



Meanwhile use housing works and benefits all parties involved



Vacancy can become an opportunity



Transitional housing solutions can drive long-term housing outcomes



Housing responses can be humane, practical and scalable

These learnings strengthen the future application of meanwhile use housing models across NSW.

INSIGHTS FROM CLIENTS' EXPERIENCES

Connection and Community

were critical to success: Relationships built within Allawah House and the surrounding community helped strengthen and build client confidence and a sense of belonging.

Social Connection

outlasted the program itself: Many former residents remain in contact, reflecting the enduring impact of stable, shared accommodation.

Allawah House demonstrated what can be achieved when a vacant property, strong partnerships and trauma-informed service delivery come together in response to urgent need.

Over four years, 45 women found safety, stability and a pathway towards long-term housing.

This report invites housing and homelessness sector partners, property owners, developers and government to consider where the meanwhile use housing approach could be applied again - thoughtfully, collaboratively and at scale - creating more opportunities to respond to urgent housing need while longer-term solutions continue to progress.

If you would like to learn more about Allawah House or further explore how the meanwhile use housing model could work in other contexts, please get in touch.

**WOMEN'S
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Allawah House communal living space.

