



FASSTT

The Forum of Australian Services
for Survivors of Torture and Trauma



A Promise of Care

**Rebuilding Lives, Renewing Hope: 30 Years of
Refugee Trauma Recovery in Australia**

Honouring the Courage of Survivors and Australia's
National Commitment to Specialist Trauma-focused Care

November 2025



This publication commemorates thirty years of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) and the broader work of the agencies of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT). It brings together insights and learnings that reflect the strength, resilience and transformative potential of trauma recovery, while also acknowledging the challenges that persist in a world marked by continuing conflict and displacement.

The reflections shared within these pages are a powerful reminder that while torture seeks to silence, isolate and erase identity, recovery restores voice, connection and purpose. FASSTT has always stood alongside survivors. This legacy has been built through the expertise of clinicians, community and lived experience practitioners and through the courage of those who have shared their experiences, hopes and healing.

As we mark this milestone, we do so with pride in the past, clarity in the present and commitment to the future. FASSTT's work is far from finished. The need for a trauma-focussed, rights-based response to torture and forced displacement is greater than ever.

We offer this publication as an honouring, a record and an invitation - to deepen our partnerships, strengthen our collective voice and ensure that the legacy of the PASTT program endures as a lasting promise of care to every survivor of torture and trauma.



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This publication was developed by the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) and its member agencies, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing under the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma.



Indigenous Acknowledgement


The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We pay our deepest respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations people across this continent.

We honour the enduring strength, knowledge and resilience of First Nations peoples, whose histories, cultures and identities have withstood more than two centuries of colonisation, dispossession and systemic injustice.

As a national network dedicated to trauma recovery, we acknowledge the deep and ongoing trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We recognise that healing from intergenerational harm is a matter of justice as well as care.

FASSTT is committed to walking alongside First Nations communities in solidarity. We strive to ensure that our work is shaped by cultural safety, truth-telling and the wisdom of those with lived experience. We recognise that healing is both individual and collective - and that true recovery for all who call this land home must include the rights, voices and leadership of its First Peoples.

Foreword from the CEOs of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT)



As the national network of specialist services supporting survivors of torture and refugee-related trauma, we are honoured to present this publication marking thirty years of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT).

This milestone reflects not only the resilience and strength of the individuals, families and communities we have walked alongside, but also the vision of those who believed that trauma-focused, rights-based care should always form part of Australia's humanitarian response.

Over three decades, the PASTT program has evolved from a pioneering idea into a nationally coordinated and internationally recognised model of trauma recovery. Across the FASSTT network, agencies have developed innovative approaches to clinical care, community healing and systemic advocacy - always grounded in cultural humility and shaped by the voices and leadership of survivors. Through changing humanitarian contexts, policy environments and client needs, our services have remained steadfast in Our Promise of Care: that no survivor should face their recovery journey alone.

This publication is both a record and an invitation. It honours the courage of survivors and the dedication of practitioners and community partners who walk beside them. It also points to what lies ahead - the need to remain responsive and connected, to adapt with courage and creativity, and to hold fast to the shared purpose of recovery in a rapidly changing world.

We extend our deep gratitude to the Australian Government, and particularly to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, for its long-standing partnership in sustaining this national program. That collaboration between government and the community sector has enabled an enduring, evidence-based model of care that continues to be deeply valued by those it serves.

As CEOs of the FASSTT network, we look forward to building on this legacy. Our shared commitment is to ensure that survivors continue to be met with specialist care, meaningful connection and opportunities to heal and thrive - and that the knowledge and compassion developed through three decades of practice continue to shape our network well into the future.

The CEOs of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma:

Paris Aristotle AO

(Foundation House, Victoria)

Jorge Aroche

(STARTTS, New South Wales)

Sally Stewart and Vivienne Braddock

(QPASTT, Queensland)

Robyn Smythe

(STTARS, South Australia)

Liza Beinart

(ASeTTS, Western Australia)

Gillian Long

(Phoenix, Tasmania)

Kathy Ragless AM (Companion House, Australian Capital Territory)

Kwame Selormey (Melaleuca Australia, Northern Territory)

Foreword by the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT).

Australia's humanitarian story is about more than offering refuge, it is making sure that those who arrive on our shores are supported to recover and thrive. For survivors of torture and trauma, safety includes access to specialist care, to culturally responsive services and to communities that nurture belonging and hope.

For three decades, the PASTT program has been at the heart of this work. Through the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), it has delivered trauma-focused mental health and psychosocial support to tens of thousands of individuals and families each year.



Its impact is profound, not only on the lives of people and families it supports, but in the way it has informed Australia's mental health system with approaches that are holistic, rights-based and grounded in lived experience.

This milestone is a testament to survivors, whose courage and leadership remain a guiding light for the program. It is also a recognition of the vision and dedication of practitioners, community leaders and successive governments who have sustained this national commitment.

Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Torture more than three decades ago affirmed our responsibility to protect the rights and dignity of survivors. The PASTT program has given enduring, practical effect to that commitment, giving life to international principles through care, recovery and hope.

As Minister for Health and Ageing and as Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, we reaffirm the Australian Government's commitment to making sure that survivors are met with care and support, and that PASTT continues to evolve to meet people's needs. Together, we will ensure that healing, dignity and opportunity remain at the heart of Australia's humanitarian response.

A blue ink signature of Mark Butler MP, consisting of stylized initials and a surname.

The Hon Mark Butler MP

Minister for Health and Ageing
Minister for Disability and the National
Disability Insurance Scheme

A blue ink signature of Emma McBride MP, written in a cursive style.

The Hon Emma McBride MP

Assistant Minister for Mental Health and
Suicide Prevention
Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional
Health

Foreword by Dr Alice Edwards, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment



As United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, I have the privilege - and the responsibility - to monitor progress towards the abolition of torture worldwide, to report on the experiences of survivors and to remind states of their obligations to prevent, prohibit and remedy this most serious of violations.

The right of survivors to redress and rehabilitation is not aspirational: it is a legal duty under the Convention Against Torture. Too often, this obligation remains unmet. Around the world, countless survivors of torture and persecution are left without the care they need to recover, rebuild their lives and reclaim their dignity.

Australia's Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) stands out as a very positive example. For thirty years, it has translated international commitments into tangible practice. Through its network of specialist agencies, PASTT has delivered not only clinical and psychosocial care, but also community healing, cultural restoration and the leadership of survivors themselves. This breadth is rare; its sustained national reach rarer still.

The significance of this achievement cannot be overstated. PASTT demonstrates that comprehensive, rights-based rehabilitation is possible - when governments, practitioners and communities act with resolve and in harmony.

I commend the courage of the survivors whose voices animate this publication. Their insistence on justice and recovery reminds us that healing is not charity, but it is a right. I also recognise the practitioners, advocates, and policymakers who have sustained this program for three decades. Their work provides a living example that rehabilitation can be delivered at scale, nationally coordinated and deeply embedded in community.

It is up to all of us to help prevent and eradicate torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Where it has occurred, survivors must be met not with neglect or silence, but with care, solidarity and justice. As Special Rapporteur, I congratulate PASTT on their work and thank them for sharing their experiences, triumphs and solutions to a wide audience.

Dr Alice Edwards

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Foreword by Lisa Henry, Secretary-General of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)



As Secretary-General of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), I am honoured to contribute this foreword to commemorate thirty years of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT).

For three decades, Australia's Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) has stood as a beacon of hope, solidarity and care. As the world faces record levels of forced displacement and ongoing reports of torture in more than 140 countries, the sustained national commitment represented by PASTT is both rare and remarkable.

From its beginnings, the PASTT program has embodied the values at the heart of the global torture rehabilitation movement: a belief that recovery is possible; that survivors must be met with dignity and justice; and that healing is a human right, not a privilege.

Few countries have built and sustained such a nationally coordinated, specialist system. Few have done so with the depth of partnership between government, civil society and survivors that defines the FASSTT network. Fewer still have shown such global solidarity by bringing their learnings and resources into action supporting colleagues in the global south through the IRCT global movement and publication of the Torture Journal.

The IRCT is proud to count FASSTT agencies among its members. On behalf of the IRCT, I congratulate the FASSTT network, the Australian Government and the countless practitioners and advocates whose vision has sustained this program. Above all, I honour the survivors whose courage and bravery has guided this work and whose strength continues to inspire us.

PASTT is not only a national achievement; it is part of a global movement to end torture and to ensure that all who endure its harms can reclaim safety, voice and dignity. May the next thirty years build on this legacy, for Australia and for the world.

Lisa Henry

Secretary-General

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims

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Executive Summary: 30 Years of Refugee Trauma Recovery in Australia

“Above all, our commitment remains simple and profound: to carry forward a ‘Promise of Care’ that ensures survivors of torture and trauma are never left to walk their recovery journey alone.”


– FASSTT NETWORK


Established in 1995 after Australia ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture, the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) has supported more than 250,000 people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds - and their families and communities. Delivered through the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT), the program is a cornerstone of Australia’s humanitarian response and a world-leading model of refugee trauma recovery.


Grounded in Australia’s human rights obligations under the Convention Against Torture, PASTT gives enduring, practical effect to the right to rehabilitation for survivors - translating international commitments into care, connection and community rebuilding.


KEY ACHIEVEMENTS


Over three decades, the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) has transformed refugee trauma recovery in Australia by:

 Developing a world-leading model of trauma recovery that integrates clinical, psychosocial, community capacity-building and sector-development interventions.


 Supporting nearly half (46%) of all humanitarian entrants to Australia over a 20-year period - demonstrating extensive national reach and enduring impact.


 Providing specialist counselling and group programs to more than 15,000 people annually across all states and territories.


 Building the capacity and resilience of refugee communities through leadership, wellbeing and collective-healing initiatives that engage over 20,000 people each year.


 Delivering trauma-informed training and secondary consultation to professionals nationwide - including more than 1,500 training sessions for 35,000+ attendees from over 1,400 organisations in the past five years.




 Enabling Australia to activate rapid, coordinated trauma-recovery responses during major humanitarian crises.

 Embedding cultural responsiveness, bicultural practice and lived-experience leadership across program design and delivery.

 Influencing national policy and research across health, education, settlement and community systems.

 Advocating nationally and internationally for survivors' rights, recovery, dignity and belonging.

 Sustaining a cohesive, collaborative national network that directs resources where humanitarian entrants have settled and where need is greatest.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

Today, more than 120 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide - the highest number ever recorded. Those who arrive in Australia often carry layered experiences of persecution, loss and prolonged displacement. Many seek support years after arrival, reflecting that recovery is not a short-term process but a lifelong and intergenerational journey. These realities reinforce the continuing importance of PASTT as a national, trauma-specialist system that supports healing across time, context and community.

LOOKING FORWARD

Thirty years of evidence affirms what survivors and practitioners have always known: recovery is possible. The path ahead for PASTT and the FASSTT network is one of stewardship and renewal - sustaining national coordination, strengthening innovation and responding to the changing humanitarian landscape with the same compassion, skill and integrity that have defined the program since its inception.

This is not about building something new but about preserving and evolving something proven: a national system that ensures that survivors of torture and trauma in Australia can access specialist, culturally grounded, trauma-focused care.

Recognised internationally as a rare and sustained example of national leadership in refugee trauma recovery, PASTT demonstrates how a long-term, rights-based program can uphold dignity, inclusion and hope - not only for individuals, but for the communities and systems in which they rebuild their lives.

By upholding these values, FASSTT will continue to ensure that those who have endured the worst of human cruelty find, in Australia, the care, compassion and solidarity needed to rebuild their lives.

1. A National Commitment to Healing: The Origins and Impact of PASTT

The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) is Australia's only nationally coordinated network dedicated solely to supporting people from refugee backgrounds who have experienced torture or other traumatic experiences.

This section traces how Australia's national response to refugee trauma was formed, the leadership that sustained it, and the global context in which this work continues.

A National Partnership in Refugee Trauma Recovery

The success and enduring impact of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) reflect three decades of principled partnership between the Australian Government and specialist services.

Since its establishment in 1995, Commonwealth funding through the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing has enabled a nationally coordinated system of trauma-recovery care that is globally unique. This investment has allowed FASSTT agencies to deliver services grounded in clinical excellence, cultural responsiveness and human rights.

Also important has been the contribution of state and territory governments, whose resources and partnerships have extended the reach and depth of PASTT services. Together, these investments have ensured survivors receive integrated and comprehensive support where they live, learn and heal.

Through this collaborative framework, PASTT has responded to communities displaced by conflicts across the Balkans, Central and South America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Over time, this partnership has also supported national data systems, service standards and the integration of lived experience into service design and delivery.

Australia remains one of few nations to sustain a comprehensive, long-term torture and trauma rehabilitation program of this scale. This enduring public investment stands as a global example of how governments can act not only as funders but as partners in healing - ensuring that those who have endured the world's deepest harms are met with safety, care and hope.



FASSTT's Founding Vision and Continuing Purpose



In 1992, a group of pioneering services came together to form what became the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT).

Grounded in human rights, social justice and culturally safe healing, their shared purpose was clear: to ensure that people who had survived torture and trauma could recover and rebuild their lives.

“ We needed another kind of approach to trauma recovery than a medical model. One that was community-based, where people were able to take responsibility, to take their own leadership in their recovery, where people were able to take their life back. The philosophy underpinning all of this were the principles of community development, social justice and human rights.”

**– MARCO RAMIREZ,
MEMBER OF THE BRISBANE REFUGEE
TORTURE AND TRAUMA RESEARCH AND
SUPPORT GROUP, 1995**

Founding Vision: Reflections from the Early Years (Paris Aristotle AO, CEO of Foundation House, Victoria.)

“ Our vision remains steadfast: recovery is about restoring dignity, shared humanity and the right to heal and to belong.”

– PARIS ARISTOTLE AO

The conviction - that recovery from torture is possible and that nations have a responsibility under international law to provide that care - shaped the establishment of services across Australia.

When we began this work in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was clear that settlement support alone was not enough. Survivors needed specialist care that addressed the wounds of persecution and displacement, and the chance to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Practice was guided by one principle: it must be informed by evidence and by the lived experience of survivors. The things we have learned from our clients and their communities have informed the character of change that we have tried to achieve.

More than 30 years on, my conviction remains the same: trauma recovery is not simply about services - it is about justice, dignity and the right to heal and to belong.

Survivors at the Heart of the Work



“*The best medicine for healing is compassion. Compassion creates a spiritual space for belonging. Without personalising support – taking time to understand culture and needs – you risk misunderstanding, mistrust and re-traumatisation. Until belonging is created, healing is difficult. Healing and belonging are intertwined; you can’t have one without the other.*”

– SUJAUDDIN KARIMUDDIN,
ROHINGYA COMMUNITY LEADER

FASSTT’s work is possible because survivors trust us with their experiences – and we, in turn, build services that honour that trust. From the earliest days, survivors have been teachers, leaders and collaborators in the development of the network.

By embedding lived experience through bicultural roles, peer programs and co-design, FASSTT ensures that recovery is guided by both professional expertise and survivor wisdom. This approach strengthens trust and reminds us that healing is not something done to people – it is built with them.

“*When I first came here, I could hardly speak. With the support of a bicultural worker and the community, I began to find my voice again. This was the first place I felt safe enough to breathe.*”

– SURVIVOR

Global Responsibility, National Leadership

Australia’s commitment to torture and trauma recovery sits within a broader human-rights framework shaped by international law and advocacy. The *United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* establishes a clear duty: to prevent torture, and to provide redress and rehabilitation for survivors.

Yet, forty years on, torture and state violence remain widespread. Reports of torture have been documented in over 140 countries ¹, spanning armed conflict, detention and political repression.

Today, more than 120 million people ² are displaced globally – many bearing the physical and psychological scars of trauma.

In this context, Australia’s role as a resettlement nation – and as a signatory to both the *Refugee Convention* and the *Convention Against Torture* – carries profound responsibilities. The PASTT program represents one of the strongest expressions of those commitments: a practical, long-term system of healing that translates international law into human care. It shows how nations can lead with principle, ensuring that survivors of the world’s deepest harms find in Australia not just safety, but the opportunity to heal and belong.

¹ Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/torture/>

² United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR): <https://www.unhcr.org/au/who-we-are/figures-glance>

2. FASSTT Agencies: National Specialists in Refugee Trauma Care

Spanning every state and territory, eight FASSTT agencies are embedded within the communities they serve. Together, they reach more than 40,000 children, young people and adults each year through trauma-informed, culturally grounded counselling, family and group interventions and community-based programs.

FASSTT's multidisciplinary workforce includes psychologists, counsellors, social workers, youth workers, community development practitioners, complementary therapy practitioners and bicultural workers, each with expertise in complex trauma, transcultural mental health and trauma recovery. All agencies are accredited under the National Standards for Mental Health Services and maintain partnerships with universities, research centres and international networks such as the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).

Beyond direct service delivery with individuals, families and communities, FASSTT provides national leadership related to refugee-related trauma - training thousands of professionals each year, contributing to government inquiries and advising on refugee mental health, trauma recovery and settlement policy.

Publications such as *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* have shaped practice and policy nationally and internationally, influencing approaches across health, education and community sectors.

FASSTT agencies are not generalist providers. They are specialists in refugee trauma recovery - delivering trauma-focused, culturally responsive and rights-based care that honours the resilience, dignity and potential of survivors.



The Refugee Experience and Its Impact

The success and enduring impact of the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT) reflect three decades of principled partnership between the Australian Government and specialist services.

Since its establishment in 1995, Commonwealth funding through the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing has enabled a nationally coordinated system of trauma-recovery care that is globally unique. This investment has allowed FASSTT agencies to deliver services grounded in clinical excellence, cultural responsiveness and human rights.

The refugee experience can shatter safety, trust and meaning. Although resettlement in Australia restores physical security, it does not erase the emotional, psychological and social effects of trauma. Survivors must navigate unfamiliar systems, language barriers and separation from family as well as other stressors associated with rebuilding life in a new country. Recovery, therefore, is not only about clinical care - it requires restoring safety, belonging and agency in the environments where survivors live, learn and connect.

“ They told me I would never see my family again. That was worse than the beating - believing that I might die without saying goodbye.”

“ I was six years old when my family was murdered... The hardest thing, even now, is that I have never found my father’s body.”

“ Everything that made me who I was - my family, my home, my work - disappeared in a single night.”

“ They used pain and fear to make us obey. It wasn’t only our bodies they wanted to control - it was our minds.”

“ I was kept in a dark room for weeks. I lost my sense of time and became completely disoriented. For a long time afterwards, I couldn’t stand silence.”

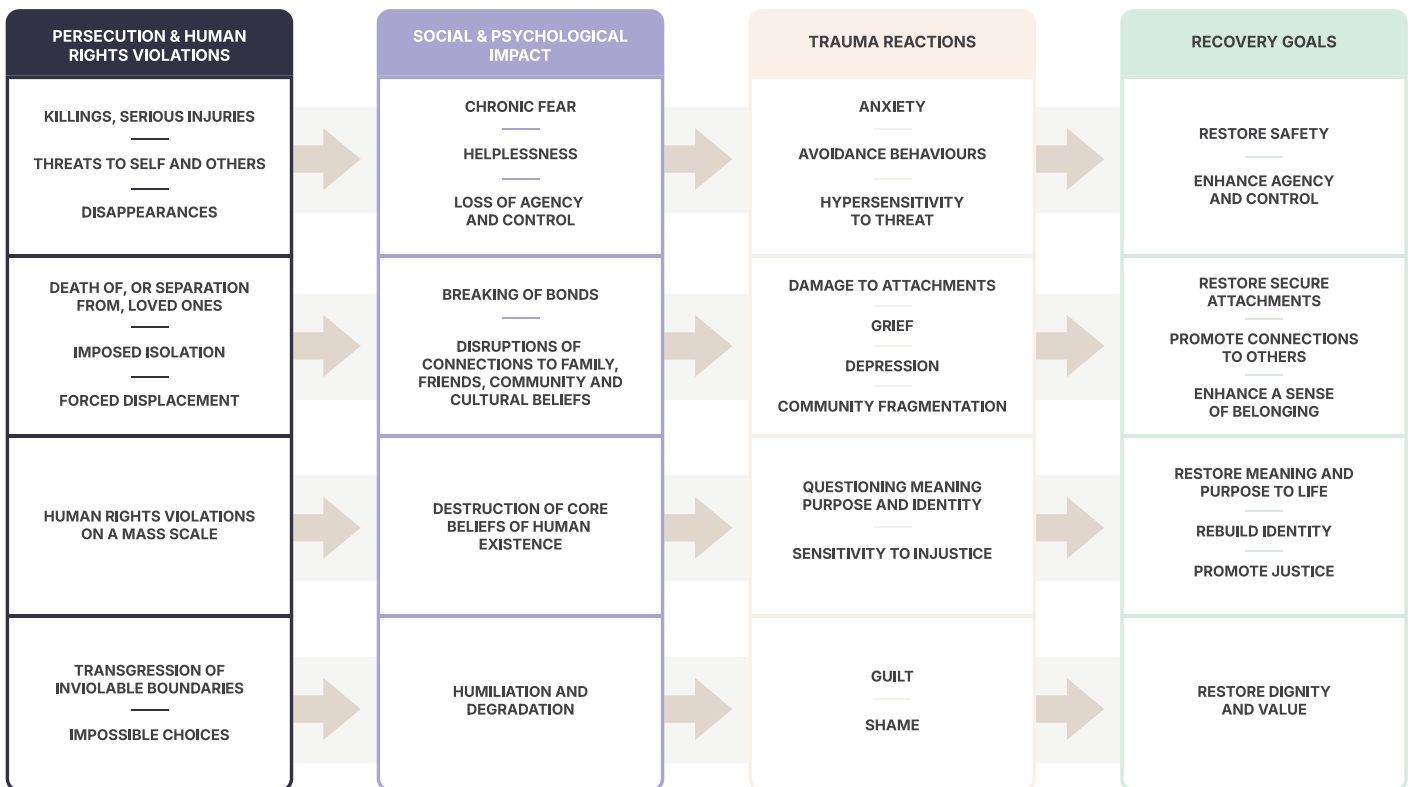
Pathways to Healing: FASSTT's Recovery Goals

Drawing on three decades of practice and research, FASSTT agencies share a national trauma-recovery framework - articulated in *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* (2020)³ - that identifies four interrelated recovery goals guiding PASTT services. These goals are not linear stages but overlapping dimensions of healing that encompass the whole person, family, community and system.



“Warmth, welcome and recognition matter.”

– DR IDA KAPLAN



³ Dr Ida Kaplan and Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) (2020). *Rebuilding Shattered Lives. Integrated Trauma Recovery for People of Refugee Background*

FASSTT Recovery Goals

01 SAFETY, AGENCY AND CONTROL

“*Even though I was safe here, my body didn’t feel it. It took a long time to stop jumping at every sound.*” – SURVIVOR

At the heart of recovery is the restoration of a sense of safety and control. Healing begins when people feel safe in their minds, bodies, relationships and communities. Safety is physical, emotional and relational, cultivated through care that regulates distress and rebuilds trust. As survivors regain a sense of agency - the confidence and capacity to make choices and influence their own lives - they re-establish control over daily life and take meaningful steps toward a self-determined future.

03 MEANING, IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND JUSTICE

“*We’re not just refugees. We are students, friends, brothers, sisters, people who have dreams.*” – SURVIVOR

Trauma often causes an existential rupture – breaking apart life meaning, cultural identity and continuity between past, present and future. Recovery requires reclaiming meaning, confronting injustice, and rediscovering a liveable future. Survivors rebuild identity through roles that bring pride – as parents, workers, artists, advocates – and through truth-telling that affirms their suffering was real, unjust and not their fault.

02 CONNECTION, BELONGING AND ATTACHMENT

“*When we first arrived, I didn’t want to be around people from my country. The conflict had divided us. But little by little, through community activities, we came together again. That gave me hope.*”

– SURVIVOR

Trauma and displacement often sever relationships – within families, across generations, and between people and their cultural or spiritual networks. Recovery involves restoring these bonds and rebuilding the relational fabric of life. Over time, isolation eases, cultural identity is affirmed and the protective power of belonging returns.

04 DIGNITY AND VALUE

“*I want to be seen as a whole person. Not just what I went through.*” – SURVIVOR

The restoration of dignity and value means being believed, respected and included. It means access to housing, healthcare, education and employment, and recognition as contributors and leaders. When survivors move from the margins to the centre – as mentors, organisers and community builders – recovery becomes both personal and collective.

Dimensions of Recovery Practice

These goals underpin every aspect of FASSTT's work. They recognise that recovery is not only about reducing distress but about restoring the conditions for wellbeing - safety, identity, connection, agency and dignity.

Together, they form the foundation for all practice that follows - translated into action through the multi-layered approaches that sustain recovery over time.

Across the network, these goals are enacted through multiple, interconnected dimensions of recovery that recognise the layered nature of trauma and healing. FASSTT agencies work with survivors, families and communities at the individual, social, systemic and collective levels, ensuring that recovery is understood and supported in its full human, cultural and structural context.

A BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL AND CULTURAL APPROACH – HEALING THE WHOLE PERSON

FASSTT agencies adopt a biopsychosocial and cultural model that recognises trauma's impact across all dimensions of life - biological, psychological, social, spiritual and cultural.

Healing is understood as both personal and systemic. Survivors are not defined by what was done to them but recognised as people shaped by injustice and capable of healing. Services respond to immediate distress while also rebuilding the wider conditions necessary for wellbeing - safety, agency, identity, connection and hope.

Counselling may be complemented by group programs, family interventions, complementary therapies, community activities or advocacy specific to the client's needs including mental health, housing, employment, education, immigration or legal issues. This integrated approach ensures that recovery addresses not only symptoms but also the social and structural realities that sustain healing.



HEALING AS A SOCIAL PROCESS – REBUILDING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

“Torture and state-sanctioned violence seek to destroy relationships between individuals and families, groups and networks. ... All such events destroy the essence of a community.”⁴

Healing is not achieved through services alone - it is a profoundly social process. Trauma fragments family, community and identity; recovery restores them. For many survivors, healing begins through small acts of recognition - being listened to, respected and believed.

FASSTT agencies nurture these conditions through peer-led programs, bicultural roles and community capacity-building initiatives that rebuild trust and foster belonging.

“Individuals can begin to recover when the communities they are part of are inclusive, safe, responsive and provide meaningful connections.”⁵

Community is both the context and catalyst for healing. It offers continuity, belonging and cultural grounding. Yet it must be intentionally rebuilt - many communities have been fractured by conflict. FASSTT's community-based work creates spaces where belonging can safely return and collective resilience can be built.

THE SYSTEMIC CONTEXT OF TRAUMA RECOVERY – SYSTEMS CHANGE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

“The experiences of our clients and communities are intensely political. ... We can't only deal with the impacts of trauma; we have a deep responsibility to address injustice and disadvantage in all its forms.” - Paula Peterson, FASSTT National Coordinator (2011–2023)

Refugee trauma is never only personal - it is shaped by political, structural and historical forces. The systems that people encounter after resettlement play a pivotal role in recovery: when responsive and inclusive, they can restore safety, dignity and belonging.

FASSTT agencies therefore work at both therapeutic and systemic levels - addressing trauma through direct care while also contributing to the development of policies and service systems that promote dignity, equity and inclusion.

This dual role - service delivery and systemic advocacy - helps ensure that survivors are supported by systems that continue to evolve in ways that recognise their strengths, uphold their rights and enable healing and participation.

RECOVERY AS A COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOUR – HEALING AS A SHARED PROCESS

Recovery is layered, non-linear and shared. Survivors move between the recovery goals as circumstances change, with healing shaped by personal strengths, relationships, community connection and supportive systems.

Across three decades, FASSTT agencies have shown that trauma recovery is not solely an individual task - it is a collective process of restoration. Healing occurs in relationship: between practitioners and clients, within families and communities and across the systems that provide safety and care.

Every counselling session, community gathering and training workshop contributes to this shared work of recovery. It reflects a commitment to collective wellbeing - ensuring that those who have survived the worst of human cruelty are met with compassion, respect and the possibility of renewal.

⁴ Jenny Mitchell and Ignacio Correa-Velez (2010). *Community development with survivors of torture and trauma: an evaluation framework*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsp003>

⁵ Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) (2016) *Integrated Trauma Recovery Service Model*.

3. Rebuilding Lives, Restoring Rights: How FASSTT Agencies Embody the Recovery Goals

“Healing is a human right; thriving is justice.”

– COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING PRACTITIONER



Across Australia, each FASSTT agency works alongside survivors of torture and trauma to realise the promise of healing, justice and belonging. While each agency responds to the unique needs, cultures and communities of its local context, all are united by a shared commitment to the national trauma-recovery goals.

The four goals introduced earlier - Safety and Agency; Connection and Belonging; Meaning, Purpose and Justice; and Dignity and Value - provide a national framework for practice across the FASSTT network. They describe what recovery asks for and what good care must make possible.

In this section, the framework is expanded into eight expressions that bring the goals to life in greater detail. These eight dimensions - Safety, Agency, Attachment, Connection and Belonging, Purpose, Justice, Dignity and Value - reflect the way

FASSTT agencies experience and apply the recovery goals in day-to-day practice. They reveal the subtle but essential layers within each goal: for example, how Safety is distinct from but interdependent with Agency; how Attachment underpins Connection and Belonging; and how Purpose and Justice together sustain meaning, identity and hope.

Each FASSTT agency is profiled through one of these eight dimensions, demonstrating how recovery principles are translated into practice - through counselling, community engagement, advocacy and sector development. Together, these profiles show how a shared national framework takes on local form and cultural meaning, meeting survivors where they are and walking with them toward safety, dignity and renewal.

ASeTTS

WESTERN AUSTRALIA,
ESTABLISHED 1992



VISION

A just and peaceful world where human rights are recognised, and the dignity of refugees is advanced and protected.

Since 1992, the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) has been a cornerstone of trauma recovery in Western Australia. It supports individuals and communities from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds to reclaim dignity, rebuild identity and shape lives of meaning and contribution.



“*Safety is when someone realises they don't have to prove their pain – that we're here to walk beside them, not define them. That's the beginning of healing.*”

– ASETTS COUNSELLOR

WHY SAFETY MATTERS

At ASeTTS, safety is understood as the essential foundation for healing. For survivors of torture and trauma, it is not simply the absence of harm - it is the presence of trust, stability and compassion. Safety means being received without judgment and knowing that one's pain will be held with care and belief.

Safety is nurtured at every level - through therapeutic relationships, culturally responsive group and community programs, family support and advocacy.

Safety is the ground from which recovery grows.

SAFETY IN PRACTICE

At ASeTTS, safety is cultivated slowly and intentionally. Survivors are welcomed with openness, invited to share at their own pace and never pressured to revisit painful memories.

Safety begins with calm spaces and counsellors who offer warmth and presence. Over time, safety deepens through steady relationships and the quiet reassurance that each person is seen, believed and never defined by what they have endured.

Companion House

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY,
ESTABLISHED 1989



VISION

A community that supports the health, wellbeing and human rights of people who come to Australia seeking protection from persecution, war and torture.

Established in Canberra in 1989, Companion House was created to support survivors of torture, trauma and human rights violations. Initially focused on therapeutic care, it expanded in 1995 with an on-site medical clinic, integrating counselling and physical health in a single trusted setting. Renamed Companion House in 2000, the organisation deepened its commitment to healing, justice and empowerment through trauma-informed, community-connected services.



“ Agency doesn’t mean independence in isolation. It means being supported to make your own choices, with people beside you who believe in your capacity.”

– SURVIVOR

WHY AGENCY MATTERS

For those who have endured persecution and forced displacement, reclaiming agency is central to healing. It’s not just about feeling better - it’s about becoming the author of one’s future.

Agency doesn’t mean independence in isolation. It means being supported to make your own choices, with people beside you who believe in your capacity. That’s what Companion House offers.

By restoring agency, Companion House helps transform harm into renewal, dignity and meaningful connection - with self, family and community.

AGENCY IN PRACTICE

Companion House recognises that trauma can leave survivors feeling powerless and disconnected. Recovery begins with supporting people to make choices, set goals and reclaim control over their lives.

In counselling, clients guide the pace and focus of their healing. In community programs, survivors take on leadership roles, share culture and strengthen belonging. Refugee-led initiatives - from youth programs to cultural events - create spaces where survivors are recognised not only as participants but as contributors shaping a more inclusive ACT.

Foundation House

VICTORIA, ESTABLISHED 1987

VISION

A world without torture and where communities respect, embrace and empower people.



Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Formally known as the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Foundation House was established in Melbourne in 1987 as the first FASSTT agency in Australia. For nearly four decades, it has pioneered integrated trauma recovery services, combining therapeutic, social and systemic interventions. Operating across Melbourne and regional Victoria, its work is grounded in human rights and cultural responsiveness, embedding trauma-informed practice in schools, health services and communities.



“*After everything we’d been through, I didn’t know how to comfort my children anymore. Through the program, I learned how to sit with them again. It feels like we’re slowly coming back to each other.*”

– PARENT

WHY ATTACHMENT MATTERS

For survivors of torture and trauma, the bonds of attachment - between parents and children, siblings, partners, and community - are often disrupted by trauma. The experience of forced migration can sever ties not only with loved ones, but with culture, language and self.

Recovery is relational. Restoring attachment means rebuilding trust, care and belonging in families and communities, rekindling what trauma seeks to sever.

ATTACHMENT IN PRACTICE

Foundation House works with families across generations to nurture reconnection and repair bonds disrupted by trauma and displacement. Parents are supported to strengthen relationships with children in the Australian context, while young people engage in creative therapies that foster safety and emotional expression.

Group programs bring families together through culture, language and shared practices such as play, storytelling and celebration. These carefully paced interventions allow families to rebuild attachment gently and meaningfully, laying the foundation for resilience across generations.

Melaleuca Australia

NORTHERN TERRITORY,
ESTABLISHED 1996



VISION

A world where everyone belongs.



Founded in 1996 in Darwin, Melaleuca brings together a multidisciplinary team - counsellors, social workers, health professionals, bicultural workers, case managers and community practitioners - who walk alongside survivors of torture and trauma as they navigate recovery and resettlement. Within one organisation, we deliver specialist, end-to-end support across humanitarian settlement, trauma-informed counselling, health care and family services.

WHY BELONGING MATTERS

For people rebuilding life after torture, trauma and forced displacement, belonging is more than a feeling - it is a protective factor for wellbeing. When people are seen, safe and connected, they can access services, exercise agency, and participate fully in community. Conversely, when systems are culturally unsafe or hard to navigate, people can feel invisible, excluded or unrecognised in their new environment.

At Melaleuca, belonging is not an outcome that follows recovery - it is the pathway to recovery. By prioritising connection, inclusion and cultural pride, survivors begin to feel at home in themselves, their communities and their futures.

BELONGING IN PRACTICE

Melaleuca fosters belonging through relationships built on trust and cultural humility. Our staff provide integrated, person-centred support across the settlement journey, ensuring continuity of care from first arrival to long-term participation. We convene and collaborate with service providers to strengthen culturally responsive practice, and we support refugee community leaders to shape solutions for their own communities.

We also work with local services and systems to reduce barriers to participation - sharing expertise, building capability and advocating for trauma-informed, culturally safe policies. By backing communities to lead and advising government through a trauma-informed lens, Melaleuca helps create a Northern Territory where every person - regardless of how they arrived - feels they belong.

We create opportunities for the people we serve to teach us, stand at the front, show pride in who they are, and feel supported and celebrated while doing so. Our recovery practices and initiatives are centred on safety, trust and choice - co designed with communities, led by bicultural practitioners and peer leaders, and anchored in strengths, culture and connection. We make space for joy, language, ritual and creativity as part of healing, and we measure progress not only by reduced distress but by increased participation, confidence and belonging.

Phoenix Centre

TASMANIA, ESTABLISHED 1991

VISION

A vibrant and diverse lutruwita/Tasmania where everyone is included and everyone belongs.

Part of Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania, the Phoenix Centre is the state's specialist torture and trauma recovery service. The services of the Phoenix Centre are grounded in cultural safety and the belief that every person deserves dignity and purpose.

WHY PURPOSE MATTERS

Trauma can shatter not only lives but the very sense of direction - leaving people feeling aimless, disconnected or stuck in survival mode. When everything familiar has been lost or stripped away, it can be difficult to imagine a future, let alone shape one. Purpose helps anchor recovery. It offers a reason to wake up, to take action, to connect. When individuals begin setting goals, engaging in study or meaningful work, caring for others, or expressing themselves creatively, something shifts. A new narrative begins to emerge - one grounded in agency, identity, belonging and hope.

Purpose does not erase the past, but it gives shape to the future. Phoenix recognises that even small steps toward purpose can be transformative. Reclaiming purpose helps survivors begin to imagine the future - not only as a place of safety, but as a place where they belong and can contribute.



“*At Phoenix, I stopped feeling like a problem to be solved. I began to feel like a person again - with something to offer.*”

– SURVIVOR

PURPOSE IN PRACTICE

At Phoenix, purpose is cultivated through connection, confidence and choice. In counselling, clients are supported to rediscover their strengths and define what matters to them. Group programs and community activities offer space to explore identity, reconnect with culture, and share skills. Whether it's a young person taking on a leadership role, a parent rebuilding their family life, or a community member starting a support group, each story is one of movement toward meaning.

The Phoenix Centre's bicultural workers and peer-led programs create culturally safe environments where clients feel seen, affirmed and encouraged to step into roles of contribution. It is in these everyday moments - teaching a traditional recipe, mentoring another newcomer, speaking at a community event - that people begin to rebuild not only their lives, but their sense of value.

QPASTT

QUEENSLAND, ESTABLISHED 1995



VISION

For people from refugee backgrounds to live lives liberated from the harms of torture, trauma and human rights injustice.



The Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) works throughout Queensland with offices in Brisbane, Logan, Toowoomba, Townsville and Cairns. Rooted in a human rights framework, QPASTT provides trauma-informed counselling, youth and family support, group work, community development, capacity building and advocacy. Its work recognises that recovery is not just about addressing the wounds of the past - it is about restoring dignity, recognising injustice and creating pathways to agency and belonging.

WHY JUSTICE MATTERS

For many survivors, torture and persecution were not isolated acts of violence – they were part of a system of oppression designed to silence and control. Healing, in this context, requires more than psychological care – it demands justice.

At QPASTT, justice means restoring voice and rights. It is about acknowledging harm, supporting redress and participation and treating survivors as rights holders, not victims.

“*Justice is not always loud. Sometimes, it’s a quiet moment when a survivor realises they deserve more – not just safety, but dignity and respect.*”

– COMMUNITY WORKER

JUSTICE IN PRACTICE

At QPASTT, justice is present in every aspect of care - from how a person is greeted at reception to how they are supported to navigate complex systems. In counselling, it means validating stories that were once silenced. In schools, it means working with young people to feel proud of their heritage and confident in their rights. In communities, it means building spaces where survivors are not just heard but heeded.

Justice also takes the form of prevention and empowerment. QPASTT’s youth and leadership programs support the next generation to not only heal but thrive - advocating for themselves and others. Community-led initiatives build strength from within, fostering pride, purpose and resilience. And through state-wide training and systemic advocacy, QPASTT works to ensure institutions respond with fairness, accountability and cultural humility.

STARTTS

NEW SOUTH WALES,
ESTABLISHED 1988

VISION

A world where survivors of torture and refugee trauma can heal and lead connected and fulfilling lives in dignity and health, and ultimately, the eradication of torture and refugee trauma.

Founded in 1988, the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) has supported tens of thousands of people from more than 170 cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It works across metropolitan, regional and rural NSW, delivering counselling, neurofeedback, group work, youth and family support, and community programs - with dignity at the centre of every service.

WHY DIGNITY MATTERS

Trauma doesn't just harm the mind or body - it can erode identity, worth and connection. For those who have fled violence or persecution, reclaiming dignity is a vital part of healing. It means being treated as a person, not a problem; having culture respected and voice restored.

Dignity gives survivors the strength to reimagine their future and take up space in the world with pride. It isn't something granted - it's an inherent right. Healing helps survivors reconnect with that truth.



STARTTS



DIGNITY IN PRACTICE

For many survivors, trauma is deeply tied to experiences of humiliation, discrimination, displacement and loss of voice. At STARTTS, rebuilding dignity means restoring a sense of control, cultural belonging and recognition.

This begins with relationships where clients feel respected, not reduced. Clients are given space to share their experiences, knowing they will be met with care, not judgment.

Dignity is also upheld through STARTTS' extensive bicultural workforce, who bridge cultural knowledge, language and lived experience to ensure that services reflect - not erase - clients' identities. In this way, healing happens with people, not to them.

“ *Being treated with dignity is what makes you feel human again. It's not about forgetting what happened, but about remembering that you still matter.* **”**

- SURVIVOR

STTARS

SOUTH AUSTRALIA,
ESTABLISHED 1990



VISION

A world where human rights are respected and violations are challenged.

The Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance & Rehabilitation Service (STTARS) began humbly in 1990, operating from a small shed behind the Australian Refugee Association in Adelaide. Staffed by volunteers and two unpaid founding workers, STTARS was born out of community solidarity and a deep commitment to human rights.

From the outset, STTARS adopted a holistic psychosocial model that prioritised relationships over diagnosis - integrating counselling, advocacy, and practical support with cultural humility, confidentiality and ongoing care.



“*Our work is about helping people see themselves again - not through trauma, but through their strength. That moment when someone walks taller, laughs more freely - that's value being restored.***”**

- COUNSELLOR

WHY VALUE MATTERS

Trauma distorts how people see themselves. It tells them they are broken, voiceless or undeserving. For those who have endured torture, trauma and human rights violations, this message is often reinforced by systems prior to arrival that persecute, dehumanise and exclude.

Rebuilding value is essential to healing. It is a powerful process of remembering one's own strength. Of reclaiming joy. Of knowing that you are not defined by violence or loss, but by your humanity, your culture, your experiences and your future.

VALUE IN PRACTICE

At STTARS, value is rebuilt in everyday interactions: being welcomed in one's own language, being heard without judgment, and having cultural identity recognised and respected. These moments accumulate to restore strength and pride.

Through women's groups, peer-led initiatives and leadership programs, survivors move from being supported to leading. Many go on to mentor newcomers, share skills, or join the bicultural workforce - turning lived experience into strength for others.

Together, these agencies form a national network of care, advocacy and hope. Each has its own history and community, yet all share a single truth: healing requires more than treatment - it calls for safety and control, connection and belonging, meaning and justice, and dignity and value. Through these recovery goals, FASSTT not only helps survivors rebuild their lives, but also works to shape a society where dignity, belonging and justice are possible for all.



4. Changing Demographics and Evolving Needs: Responding to a Shifting Humanitarian Landscape

When the PASTT program was established in 1995, its focus was on supporting people resettled through Australia's Humanitarian Program - primarily from regions experiencing widespread conflict and state-sanctioned violence, including Central and South America, Southeast Asia, the Balkans and the Horn of Africa. Many had spent prolonged periods in refugee camps or immigration detention before arrival.

Over three decades, the demographic profile of PASTT clients has diversified significantly. This reflects global shifts in displacement, evolving Australian policy and the increasing complexity of modern migration - characterised by protracted refugee situations, statelessness, intersectional discrimination and transnational repression.



The Global Context: Rising Displacement, Shrinking Protection

As of the end of 2024, the UNHCR estimated that 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide - the highest number ever recorded - driven by conflict, persecution, violence and human rights violations.⁶ Yet global resettlement places have declined, with some high-income countries shifting toward temporary protection rather than permanent refuge.

Most displaced people remain in countries with limited resources, where access to health, education and trauma recovery services is constrained. Against this backdrop, Australia's Humanitarian Program remains one of the few durable protection pathways available to survivors of torture and trauma.

Within this framework, the PASTT program plays a vital role - not only supporting those who reach safety in Australia but also advocating for trauma-informed, inclusive and rights-based protection systems. It ensures that resettlement is not only about safety, but about healing, belonging and dignity.

⁶ United National High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (2025). *Figures at a Glance*. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance>

Diverse Journeys, Shared Rights

Today, FASSTT agencies work with a more complex and diverse client base than ever before, including:

Individuals from over 170 countries, reflecting rich cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

Second-generation families from refugee background, where trauma is experienced intergenerationally.

People from stateless or refugee-like backgrounds including those persecuted for gender, sexuality, political belief or minority identity.

People on temporary protection related visas living with chronic uncertainty.

Survivors of recent and protracted crises - in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Palestine - often arriving through mixed migration pathways.

This evolving cohort reflects the layered, enduring and intersectional realities of forced displacement - requiring a service system that is adaptive, inclusive and equipped for complexity.



Shifting Arrival Patterns

The changing profile of countries of origin over three decades maps a broader story of global conflict, displacement and migration:

- In the early 1990s, many clients arrived from El Salvador, Chile, Vietnam and Cambodia - regions affected by Cold War-era violence.
- By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Balkans wars and Gulf conflicts saw increasing numbers from Bosnia, Iraq, Iran and Kosovo.
- From 2005 onward, displacement from Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as Afghanistan dominated.
- Since 2010, sustained crises in Myanmar, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan have shaped intake patterns.

By 2025, the top five backgrounds remain consistent with the past decade - highlighting the long-term nature of many global crises and the importance of enduring, culturally grounded support.

TOP 5 CLIENT BACKGROUNDS

1990

El Salvador
Chile
Vietnam
Cambodia
East Timor

1995

Former Yugoslavia
Iraq
Timor Leste
Somalia
Sri Lanka

2000

Bosnia
Iraq
Kosovo
Iran
Croatia

2005

South Sudan
Iraq
Ethiopia
Afghanistan
Liberia

2010

Iraq
South Sudan
Myanmar
Afghanistan
Ethiopia

2015

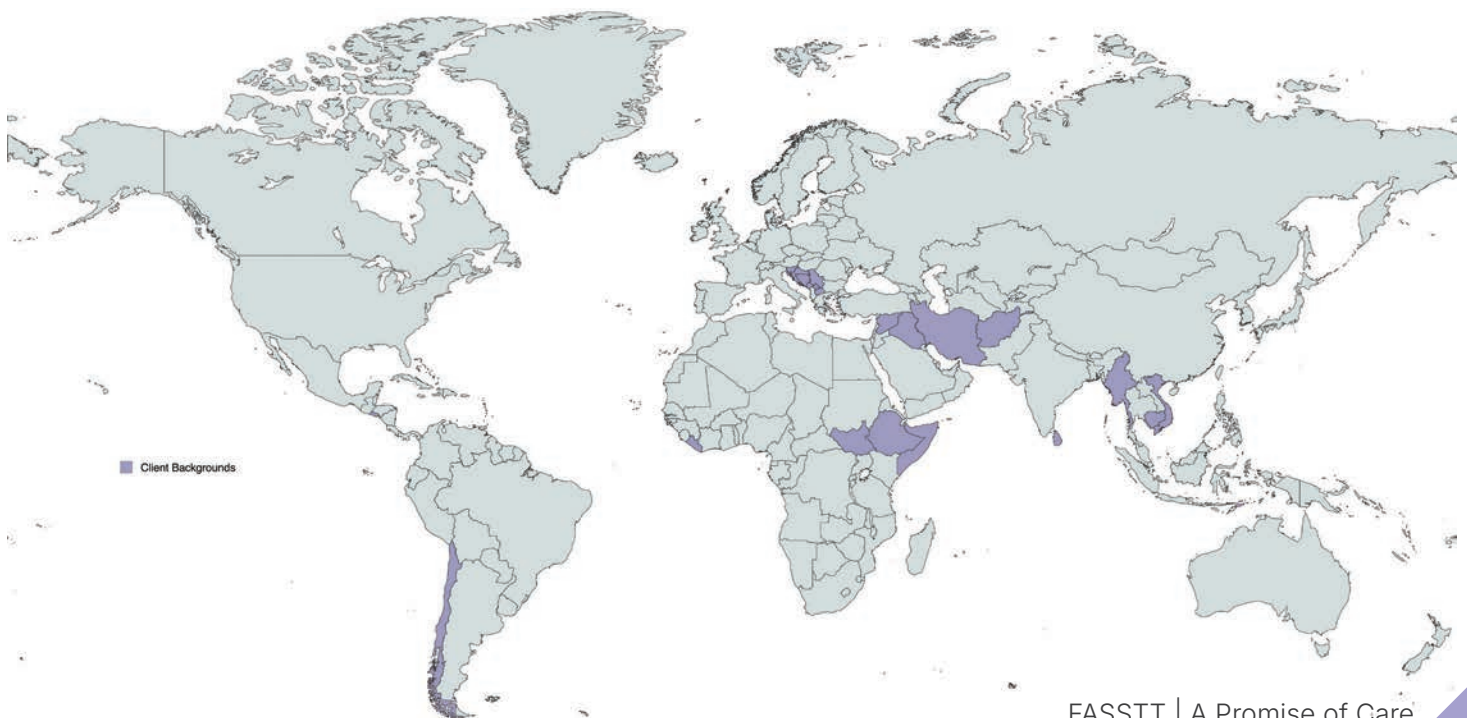
Iraq
Iran
Afghanistan
Sri Lanka
Myanmar

2020

Iraq
Afghanistan
Syria
Iran
Myanmar

2025

Afghanistan
Iraq
Syria
Iran
Myanmar



Individual, Family and Group Support – Client Reach Over the Past Decade

Between 2015 and 2025, FASSTT agencies supported over 160,000 individuals and their families nationwide – demonstrating consistent reach and impact across a decade of service.

Client numbers over the past ten years reflect the PASTT program’s sustained reach, responsiveness and adaptability across changing humanitarian contexts.

- **Stepped-Up Response (2015-2018):** Client numbers increased steadily, reaching almost 19,000 in 2017-18, as Australia expanded its humanitarian intake in response to global crises including Syria and Iraq.

- **Continuity Through COVID Disruption (2019-2022):** Despite reduced migration and service restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, FASSTT agencies continued to support more than 14,000 individuals and families each year – maintaining care under exceptionally challenging conditions.
- **Renewed Growth and Stability (2022-2025):** Annual reach has now returned to more than 15,000 people, reflecting both new humanitarian arrivals and ongoing support for those affected by protracted displacement and complex settlement pressures.

Behind each figure is a person rebuilding life – a reminder of the enduring need for trauma-informed, rights-based care, and of the national system that stands ready to respond.

Collective Healing and Community Reach

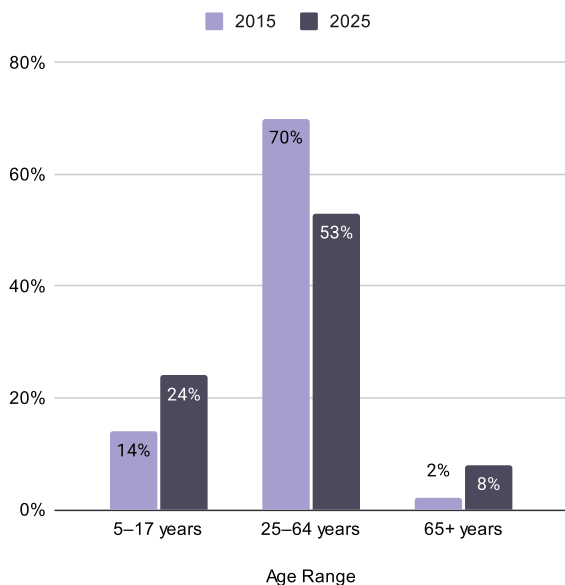
Beyond individual and family support, FASSTT agencies strengthen community wellbeing through programs that foster connection, belonging and resilience. Each year, more than 20,000 children, young people and adults participate in community-based activities – from leadership and wellbeing programs to cultural, creative and educational initiatives that promote recovery and inclusion.



These initiatives support collective healing by creating safe spaces where communities can rebuild trust, share strength and support one another. In doing so, they help prevent isolation, reduce stigma, and lay the foundations for recovery that extends beyond the individual to families and neighbourhoods.

Changing Gender and Age Trends

Over the past decade, client demographics have shifted, reflecting both global displacement trends and improved outreach to under-represented groups.



GENDER:

From 2015 to 2025, the proportion of female clients rose from 47% to 57%, with men decreasing from 53% to 42%. Since 2020, FASSTT agencies have also recorded non-binary and transgender clients (1%), reflecting a more inclusive and responsive approach to data and practice.

AGE:

Adults aged 25-64 remain the largest cohort (53%), but proportions of both children and adolescents (5-17 years) and older clients (65+) have grown significantly - from 14% to 24%, and from 2% to 8%, respectively. This highlights the need for age-responsive, intergenerational and lifespan-oriented trauma recovery approaches.

Trauma Recovery Beyond Initial Settlement



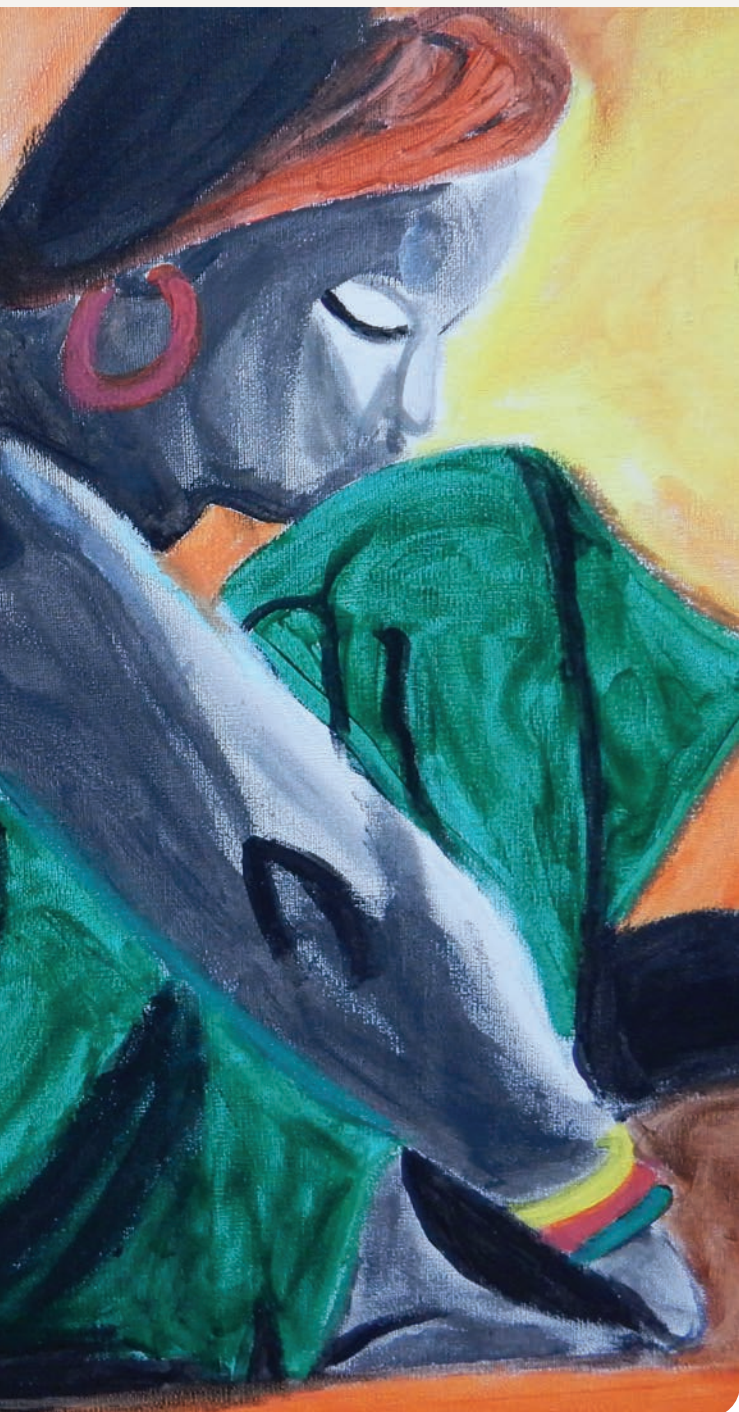
Increasingly, survivors seek support years after arrival. In 2015, nearly half of all clients (47%) accessed services within their first year in Australia. By 2025, that figure had fallen to 16%, while 43% of clients had lived in Australia for more than five years - including 28% for over a decade.

This shift reflects both COVID-19 disruptions to migration and the long-term, layered nature of trauma. Many survivors are re-exposed to distress through news of renewed conflict, separation from loved ones or unresolved grief. These realities underscore that healing is a long-term process, requiring services that remain accessible whenever survivors are ready to seek support.

The Enduring Psychological and Social Impacts of Trauma

“Grief is not only about who is gone. It is about what was taken – our homes, our language, our sense of safety.”

– SURVIVOR



Client data continues to reflect the profound emotional, physical and social consequences of torture and trauma.

Among adults assessed in 2025:

Anxiety (72%), depression (65%), and traumatic stress (70%) remain the most common psychological effects.

Social isolation (49%) continues to hinder recovery, as does pain and other somatic symptoms (41%) which are often direct consequences of torture.


Traumatic grief (66%) – the unresolved loss of family, homeland and culture – remains a defining feature of refugee trauma, often overlooked in mainstream mental health systems.

This evolving data tells a powerful story: of people arriving from across the world, often carrying invisible scars, and of a service system that continues to evolve in step with global change.

It shows that healing cannot be confined to the first months of settlement but must be supported across years, while giving survivors the choice of when to seek care.

It is also a story of adaptation, strength and hope. Through changing times, shifting policies and growing needs, FASSTT agencies have remained steadfast in their commitment to human rights, dignity and the lifelong journey of recovery.

5. Foundations for the Future: What We've Learned from Three Decades of PASTT



Thirty years of specialist service delivery through the PASTT program have generated a rich body of practice knowledge. These lessons are not abstract – they come from the lived experience of survivors, the insights of practitioners and the partnerships with communities, governments and allied services that have sustained the work.

While not reflecting the entirety of everything that has been learned over the past seven years, the following key lessons provide a strong foundation for future policy, practice and investment. They reflect what we believe makes recovery possible and what we need to continue to uphold if services are to remain responsive and relevant to the needs of refugee survivors in an increasingly complex humanitarian landscape.

Lesson 1: Cultural Responsiveness is Foundational—Healing Must Honour Identity and Belonging

“Safety and trust come first – but culture brings meaning. We don’t just help people recover – we help them return to who they are.”

From its inception, the PASTT program recognised that refugee trauma cannot be separated from culture. The ways people express distress, make meaning of suffering, and seek healing are embedded in cultural, spiritual and relational contexts. A Western clinical lens alone cannot address this complexity. Cultural responsiveness, therefore, is not an additional layer applied to recovery – it is the foundation that makes healing possible.

For survivors who have experienced betrayal by governments, persecution by institutions or violence by authorities, trust cannot be assumed. It must be rebuilt slowly and deliberately through respect, consistency and cultural humility.

FASSTT practitioners understand that often a first step in healing is the creation of a space where survivors feel secure enough to begin imagining recovery. Sometimes this safety is fostered through the presence of cultural or community leaders.

One man from South Sudan only began to engage in counselling when accompanied by a respected elder, who opened sessions with a blessing and storytelling. As his counsellor reflected: “When culture entered the room, healing became possible.”

This process demands transparency, collaboration and deep listening. Clients are never pushed to speak before they are ready, and non-verbal cues are treated as important indicators of readiness. Services are adapted to match cultural expectations of healing, whether through group-based support, spiritual practices or the presence of bicultural workers who act as trusted cultural bridges or skilled interpreters who ensure that survivors can express themselves and be fully understood in their own language.



Lesson 2: Recovery Requires Integrative Care Across the Lifespan

“Recovery isn’t just clinical. It’s individual, family, community and systemic. Survivors need more than one doorway into healing.”

A defining strength of the FASSTT model is that survivors can access care that transcends traditional service boundaries. Counselling may only be one part of the recovery journey. Survivors may also need family interventions, group programs, community-based healing or systemic advocacy to address the practical and social realities of trauma and displacement. Sometimes these interventions may be integrated in a way that complement one another. Other times they may be strategically selected in terms of their potential benefit versus cost, taking into account factors like culture and age appropriateness.

This is captured in what FASSTT calls a Hierarchy of Integrated Care. Just as needs differ across individuals and communities, so too does the type and intensity of support required. By strategically providing individual, group and community-focused interventions, FASSTT agencies balance treatment, prevention and capacity building, ensuring that resources are directed where they can have the greatest impact and most efficient cost. This is crucial to fulfilling FASSTT’s mandate to look after a vulnerable population.

The breadth of care extends across the lifespan. Children may need developmental and school-based supports, adults often carry the burden of torture, grief and family responsibility, while older refugees may face cultural dislocation or the re-emergence of earlier trauma.

Services adapt to each life stage, ensuring that whenever survivors seek help, support is available that meets their needs and context.

Crucially, this integration means survivors can move between counselling, family work, community activities and advocacy as their needs evolve - without having to retell their story across multiple disconnected services. This stands in contrast to models such as private practice counselling, where individual therapy may be offered but the broader community and systemic supports are absent.

The FASSTT model also acknowledges that the context in which people heal is a key factor in the quality of the recovery journey, contributing to the healing process where positive, or detracting from it where negative. This is why, in addition to assisting individuals, families and groups directly, FASSTT also invests in strategies to influence the quality of the context around refugees, whether this be at schools, places of work, neighbourhoods or the community at large.

Over 30 years, FASSTT’s layered, lifespan-wide approach has proven essential. By investing in a system that is both comprehensive and cost-effective, the FASSTT program ensures that recovery is accessible, sustainable and responsive across generations and needs.

Lesson 3: Specialist Biopsychosocial Support Enables Recovery that Lasts

Refugee trauma is complex and enduring. It affects not just the mind but the body, family, spirit, relationships and social world. Recovery requires approaches that are clinically rigorous, culturally resonant and adaptable to each person's circumstances. The FASSTT model of care is holistic and biopsychosocial - integrating clinical, relational, somatic and community-based methods. This ensures that recovery is not imposed but shaped together with survivors, affirming cultural identity and supporting long-term healing.

The FASSTT biopsychosocial model integrates a wide range of therapeutic modalities, including but not limited to:

Relational and narrative approaches

(psychodynamic, attachment-based, narrative therapy, and Narrative Exposure Therapy) rebuild trust, connection and meaning through stories, metaphors and oral traditions.

Somatic and creative approaches

(body-based therapies, movement practices, trauma-sensitive yoga, art, play, music and storytelling) help survivors express and regulate emotions when words are too painful or unfamiliar.

Cognitive and neurological approaches

(trauma-focused CBT, EMDR, neurofeedback, biofeedback, mindfulness and complementary therapies) provide practical tools for managing stress and restoring calm in the body and brain.

Collective approaches

(programs like Families in Cultural Transition and healing circles) strengthen resilience by enabling recovery within families and communities.

“Healing must engage the body, mind and relationships. One size never fits all – so we meet people where they are.”

The biopsychosocial model can be seen in Samira's journey, a 14-year-old newly arrived female from Syria who had withdrawn from school after losing family members in conflict. Words felt overwhelming, but she began to reconnect through art therapy, using colour and symbols to share her grief. Later, movement and breathing practices helped her regulate anxiety. Over time, Samira returned to school and described feeling *“lighter in my body and stronger in my heart.”*

This breadth of practice ensures real choice. Recovery is not imposed – it is shaped together. This flexibility allows practitioners to meet clients where they are, affirm cultural identity, and support long-term healing that extends beyond symptom management to empowerment and reconnection with self and others.

Such specialist practice demands equally strong supports for the workforce. FASSTT agencies embed reflective supervision, trauma-informed team processes and ongoing professional development to sustain ethical, safe, culturally appropriate and resilient practice. Clinicians are required to hold stories of torture, grief and injustice while continuing to offer hope, patience and compassion. By investing in staff wellbeing and critical reflection, the PASTT program has ensured that the workforce remains effective, sustainable and deeply committed over the long term.

Lesson 4: Healing Happens in Community – Collective Recovery Rebuilds Belonging, Leadership and Cultural Strength



“People heal in community – not in isolation. Connection is not just an outcome; it’s a treatment.”

Torture and forced displacement aim to destroy more than the individual. They rupture the bonds of families, silence traditions, erode trust and dismantle the social fabric that sustains identity and belonging.

As Mitchell and Correa-Velez observe, state-sanctioned violence *“seeks to destroy relationships between individuals and within families, groups and networks ... All such events destroy the essence of a community.”*⁷

For thirty years, PASTT agencies have learned that recovery needs to be collective as well as personal. Survivors often describe healing as the moment they feel connection again – with others, with culture, with a sense of belonging. FASSTT has responded by co-designing initiatives with communities: intergenerational programs, peer-led groups, cultural ceremonies, faith-based healing practices and community arts.

These are not peripheral activities; they are recognised as therapeutic engagements that restore dignity, strengthen identity and foster intergenerational resilience.

Community-based healing also shifts the role of leadership. Survivors often turn first to elders, cultural leaders or faith figures rather than services. FASSTT works alongside these leaders, offering reflective practice spaces, trauma literacy training and resources that strengthen cultural safety. Leaders are supported as partners, not burdened as sole carriers of community pain.

This work reflects FASSTT’s Community Capacity Building Framework, which positions communities as active agents of recovery. Healing is shared, leadership is collective, and communities themselves become sites of resilience and strength.

⁷ Jenny Mitchell and Ignacio Correa-Velez (2010). Community development with survivors of torture and trauma: an evaluation framework. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsp003>

Lesson 5: Lived Experience Transforms Services – Embedding Peer and Bicultural Expertise Builds Trust and Access



“Lived experience doesn’t sit at the edges. It leads. That’s how we shift power, build trust and deliver real healing.”

Perhaps the most transformative development of the past three decades has been the structural integration of lived experience into the heart of services. Bicultural practitioners, peer workers and lived experience advisors bring cultural fluency, relational credibility and insights grounded in survival. Their presence makes services safer and more trusted.

Survivors often describe the relief of “not having to explain everything” when supported by someone who has walked a similar path. Peer-led programs in schools, parenting groups and community settings provide connection, recognition and hope.

Beyond service delivery, lived experience shapes systems. FASSTT agencies draw on lived experience to inform strategy, co-design evaluation tools, prepare policy submissions and deliver training to other sectors.

By embedding lived experience at every level – from frontline practice to leadership and governance – FASSTT demonstrates a model that mainstream services are only beginning to imagine. It is not simply a matter of inclusion but of shifting power and reshaping services through humility, partnership and mutual respect.

One peer worker, herself a former client, explained: “They don’t need to tell me why English is hard, or why sirens make them anxious. I’ve been there. I understand.” In her school program, students who had withdrawn from class began to participate once they recognised that someone “like them” was leading the group.

Lesson 6: Complex Needs Require Collaboration and Advocacy – System–Level Change is Essential for Refugee Recovery

“Thirty years of PASTT have taught us one thing clearly: no single agency can meet all the needs of torture and trauma survivors. Recovery is only possible when systems stand together, side by side.”

Refugee trauma intersects with every dimension of life – housing, health, education, employment, legal status and community connection. A single client may be seeking family reunion, recovering from untreated injuries, supporting children in crisis and reliving trauma triggered by systemic stressors. When services operate in silos, survivors are left to navigate fragmented systems that can delay recovery, deepen mistrust and even retraumatise.

For this reason, collaboration is not optional – it is essential. FASSTT agencies act as connectors and advocates, working alongside health, education, settlement and social services to ensure that survivors receive joined-up support.

Advocacy in this context operates at two levels:

Individual advocacy, where clinicians and community workers step beyond the therapy room to liaise with schools, write psychosocial reports or challenge unfair service responses.

System advocacy, where agencies use their evidence, expertise and lived experience partnerships to influence policy, highlight service gaps and push for reforms that make systems more responsive and equitable.



This advocacy is not an ‘add-on’ to therapy – it is integral to recovery. It ensures that survivors are not only supported in their healing, but also defended against systemic harms that can undermine that healing.

At the same time, FASSTT agencies strengthen collaboration across sectors by sharing their expertise in refugee trauma. They provide training, reflective supervision and consultation to allied workers, enabling mainstream systems to respond with greater cultural safety and trauma-awareness. This ensures that responsibility for recovery is shared, and that survivors encounter consistent, compassionate care wherever they turn.

Through this collaborative and advocacy-driven approach, PASTT has shown that recovery becomes possible not just within specialist services, but across the systems that shape survivors’ daily lives.

Lesson 7: Strength in Collaboration – The Value of a National Network

The PASTT program is more than a set of services. Its success rests on the collaboration of eight agencies through the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT). This network has grown into something far deeper than a consortium: a rare form of collective impact consolidated over decades of cooperation, trust and shared purpose.

FASSTT has pooled knowledge, aligned standards and spoken with one voice to governments and communities. This has enabled innovation to spread nationally, strengthened the evidence base for recovery and ensured survivors in every state and territory have access to comparable levels of specialist care.

The collaborative model has also amplified advocacy, embedding refugee trauma recovery as a recognised pillar of Australia's humanitarian response. Internationally, FASSTT is regarded as a unique example of how national networks can sustain specialised, rights-based care over time.

The success of PASTT depends not only on the work of individual services, but on the national network that binds us together and makes FASSTT more than the sum of its parts. Together we strive to provide consistency, collective learning and coordinated advocacy, and to be a backbone of Australia's healing infrastructure for people from refugee backgrounds.

“No single service could have built this alone. It is the strength of working together that has made PASTT endure.”

SHARED LEARNING ACROSS THE NETWORK – BUILDING NATIONAL PRACTICE

One of the hallmarks of the FASSTT network is its commitment to sharing knowledge and building capability across agencies.

For example, in 1998, Foundation House developed the first iteration of the *Refugee Trauma Recovery Goals framework*, which has become foundational to how FASSTT agencies articulate and structure their therapeutic work. The framework has influenced practice nationally and informed international conversations about refugee trauma recovery.

Similarly, STARTTS pioneered the *Families in Cultural Transition (FiCT)* program, which has since been adapted by other agencies across Australia, helping thousands of newly arrived families navigate settlement while recognising the ongoing impacts of trauma.

By pooling these innovations and embedding them across the network, FASSTT ensures that no matter where a survivor arrives in Australia, they benefit from three decades of shared expertise. This collaborative approach avoids duplication, maximises impact, and provides consistency of care across states and territories.

SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE – FASSTT'S NATIONAL ADVOCACY

Alongside direct services, FASSTT agencies advocate together for changes to the systems that shape refugee recovery. Speaking with one voice, the network amplifies local experience into national influence, ensuring that the needs of survivors are recognised not as a specialist niche, but as a national responsibility requiring a whole-of-system response.

Over three decades, this collective advocacy has built credibility and impact. FASSTT engages with governments, inquiries, commissions and the wider community to highlight systemic gaps and propose solutions. By combining evidence from practice with survivor perspectives, the network demonstrates both the urgency and the possibility of change.

Systemic advocacy is integral to recovery. By acting collectively, FASSTT ensures that the voices of survivors, practitioners and communities are heard at the highest levels. This unity gives strength and consistency to the message: that recovery must be embedded across the systems that shape daily life, and that every survivor has the right to safety, dignity and belonging.

Key areas of advocacy include:

Recognition of people from refugee backgrounds as priority populations in health and social policy.

Development of trauma-informed and culturally safe standards across health, education and settlement systems.

Access to equitable social and community services.

Ensuring respectful public discourse that affirms the dignity and contributions of refugees.



Lesson 8: Evidence Grown from Experience

Over three decades, FASSTT agencies have supported more than 250,000 survivors - and their families and communities - across Australia. That longevity - combined with the scale of people assisted - has produced a distinctive, practice-informed evidence base for refugee trauma recovery: knowledge born at the frontline, refined through research and usable across systems.

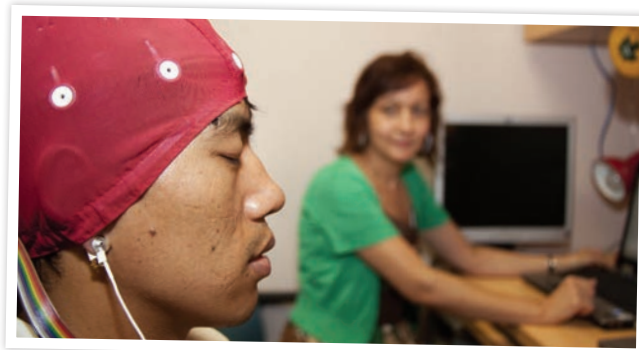
What has emerged is both the cumulative impact of thousands of individual recovery journeys and a body of practice knowledge developed through consistent service delivery in every state and territory. This knowledge provides valuable lenses on trauma recovery that have widespread applicability, extending beyond specialist services to influence mental health, education, settlement and community systems.

Shared outcome measures allow services to demonstrate impact in ways that are both rigorous and compassionate, supporting policy and continuous improvement without losing sight of survivors' experiences.

Current priorities reflect this maturity. Across the network, agencies are:

- Advancing neuroscience-informed understandings of how torture and trauma affect the brain, body and nervous system.
- Examining how impacts are carried across generations - within families and communities.
- Developing culturally sensitive outcomes tools that honour survivor voice while meeting accountability needs.

“Evidence that lasts is grown at the frontline. When learning is built from practice, care becomes safer, smarter and more humane.”



One recent example is ScoRE-SR (Standardised Client Outcomes in Refugee Trauma - Self Report) ⁸, developed and trialled by STARTTS with national and international collaborators. Designed for counselling and psychosocial contexts, ScoRE-SR enables clients to reflect on their wellbeing across multiple domains - mental health, safety, agency, social connection and quality of life. Multilingual formats and bicultural input ensure accessibility and validity. For practitioners and services, the tool supports collaborative care planning and generates reliable data for service planning, quality improvement and reporting.

ScoRE-SR shows how practice can become a shared language of recovery. It respects the individuality of healing while making collective impact visible to policymakers and partners. The pathway ahead is to complete validation across languages and contexts, embed routine outcomes measurement across the network, and use aggregated insights to drive improvement and strengthen national advocacy.

In short, practice-generated evidence has become a national asset for PASTT - improving care today and shaping how Australia understands and delivers refugee trauma recovery tomorrow.

⁸ Cardaña, E. *et al.* (2025) 'Development and validation of a new measure for forced migrants/refugees: the Screening of Refugees Self-Report (ScoRE-SR)', *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 79(3), pp. 211-217. DOI: 10.1080/08039488.2025.2475940.

Lessons in Action: Examples from Across the Network

The lessons outlined in the previous section are not just principles on paper – they are lived and tested through three decades of daily work with survivors, families and communities.

Each PASTT agency has contributed to a national body of practice knowledge by developing approaches that respond to unique local contexts while staying true to shared values of cultural responsiveness, holistic care and collective healing.

The following stories of recovery illustrate these lessons in action. Each one illustrates, in practice, how the principles of cultural responsiveness, integrative care, biopsychosocial support, community healing, lived experience leadership, systemic advocacy, and national collaboration are expressed in daily work with survivors and communities.



INTERPRETER USE IN HEALTH SYSTEMS – COMPANION HOUSE, ACT

Language access is a cornerstone of safe and ethical healthcare. Yet in the ACT, barriers to interpreter use in public health settings left many patients vulnerable.

In 2015, Companion House partnered with the ANU Medical School on a case analysis of interpreter failures in health services. A clinical audit of 471 patients found multiple instances in both ACT and NSW where medical procedures had been performed without informed consent, due to the absence of an interpreter.

The study was used to inform public health policy across sectors, drawing urgent attention to systemic gaps. In response, Companion House embarked on regular training with hospital staff, allied health professionals and medical students. Over ten years, this training built awareness and accountability across the health system.

By combining research, training and policy advocacy, Companion House has helped embed interpreter use as an essential safeguard in healthcare, ensuring that the rights and dignity of non-English-speaking patients are upheld.

Z'S STORY – STARTTS, NEW SOUTH WALES

Walk On Walk Strong supports a diverse range of experiences. While all participants have refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds and identify as LGBTIQA+, there are many ways of being within that. People come from across the globe and across faiths, cultures, abilities, languages, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. A transgender woman from Iran, for example, does not share the same experiences as a gay man from Sierra Leone.

What many do share is discrimination - in home countries, in transit and in Australia - and the lasting impact this has on mental health.⁹

Z is a young transgender woman from West Asia who joined the group after a long and dangerous journey that included years of unsafety and uncertainty in a transit country. Within the group, she found people she could finally relax with - where she was witnessed, listened to and accepted for who she is and who she wants to be.

From the group, Z was referred to casework, one-on-one therapy and, at her request, to the STARTTS psychiatrist. Her engagement has spanned a long period, supported by the *Walk On Walk Strong* team - including a lived-experience peer worker, caseworker and therapist providing practical, clinical and psychosocial support.

Case support has included coordinating her various needs and helping her navigate complex systems - making a police report after a hate-related assault, securing Centrelink extensions and accessing legal services specialising in sexuality- and gender-related protection claims.



The team also responded to her unsafe housing situation. In her first accommodation, Z was harassed and afraid to leave the house. Through referral and follow-up, the team helped her relocate to a place where she now feels safe.

Support for her mental health has been holistic. Z has experienced depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. The team has accompanied her to gender-affirming health services and other appointments and helped her find a trusted interpreter who makes her feel safe as a transgender woman of colour. These supports have created stability and a sense of belonging.

Walk On Walk Strong's work is not rapid - it takes time over many sessions, teamwork and commitment. The program's foundations are love, generosity, service, compassion and being led by those it supports.

When asked about her experience, Z said: *"For the first time I felt like I can be myself, without any mask and without any judgement."*

⁹ 'Inhabiting Two Worlds at Once' Report. (2022). Forcibly Displaced People Network. <https://www.fdpn.org.au/lgbtiqa-settlement-report/>

BUILDING LEADERS FOR CHANGE – ASETT'S CIVIL PROGRAM

For over a decade, the Community Innovators, Volunteers and Leaders (CIVAL) Program has been shaping refugee and multicultural leadership in Western Australia. Originally developed through PASTT, CIVAL has supported 238 graduates from 49 language groups, many of whom come from communities deeply affected by war, displacement and trauma.

The program creates a space where current and emerging leaders can deepen their knowledge, grow their confidence, and develop practical skills to serve their communities with compassion and resilience. Training covers leadership, conflict resolution, project management, and community engagement – always underpinned by trauma awareness and self-care.

“ Learning skills while trying to get the community off the ground helped us apply it all straight into the community in real time.”

– CIVIL GRADUATE

“ Communication and networking are the most beneficial things I learnt. Before, I hesitated to talk, now I know not to hesitate.”

– CIVIL GRADUATE

“ I am more confident in connecting and contributing to my community... I'm eager to put out my skills and be of value to someone else's life.”

– CIVIL GRADUATE

Independent evaluation confirmed the program's impact: participants' knowledge increased by an average of 44.5%, moving from “poor” to “very good” ratings across all areas.

CIVAL not only builds individual confidence but also strengthens bonding and bridging social capital – fostering cohesion within cultural groups and building bridges across cultures, ages, genders and service systems. In this way, CIVAL demonstrates how building leadership is itself a form of collective healing – restoring trust, belonging and agency where trauma once caused fracture.



HEALING IN CONNECTION – GROUP WORK AT STTARS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA



At STTARS, group programs have become a cornerstone of refugee trauma recovery and settlement. Survivors often describe feeling isolated in their experiences, yet group settings create spaces where people can find solidarity, share strategies and rebuild trust.

Over recent years, STTARS has co-designed a wide range of groups in partnership with refugee communities. These include women's wellbeing circles, sewing and gardening groups, stress management workshops, social connection activities and programs run in collaboration with schools and TAFE. Many groups blend practical settlement skills with opportunities for recovery, creating safe spaces to reduce isolation, build confidence and nurture a sense of belonging.

Participants consistently report both healing and settlement benefits. Group activities strengthen coping and self-care skills, but they also provide concrete pathways into community life: learning English through everyday practice, gaining vocational skills like sewing and food safety, exploring local cultural traditions or simply building friendships that make a new country feel like home. One participant explained, *"When we are together, we can show all that we are capable of. We want to feel valued in this new country."*

For more newly arrived refugees, groups provide an immediate entry point into connection, countering loneliness and giving people the tools to navigate unfamiliar systems. For those further along in their settlement journey, groups foster leadership, mutual support and community participation, enabling people to give back and strengthen collective identity.

Through group work, STTARS demonstrates that recovery is not only an individual process but also a collective one. These programs honour culture, nurture resilience and strengthen communities as integral partners in both healing and settlement.

COMMUNITIES HEALING TO THRIVE – QPASTT

Communities Healing to Thrive (CHT) is a trauma-informed leadership program co-designed with community and co-funded by Brisbane South PHN. It was created to respond to the intersecting needs of cultural identity, leadership, trauma and mental health for refugee and multicultural community leaders.

The program builds the capacity of community leaders to:

- Develop a shared language around mental health and healing,
- Recognise and integrate cultural and community-based healing practices,
- Support the emotional needs of their communities, and
- Sustain their own wellbeing as leaders.

Workshops are co-designed with participants and have addressed themes such as intergenerational trauma, cultural expectations, parenting, managing burnout, and skills for community support. By combining cultural practices like storytelling, dance and collective rituals with Western mental health frameworks, CHT creates a shared understanding of recovery that resonates deeply with communities.

“ In CHT workshops exploring how people respond to the impacts of trauma on communities, so much richness has emerged. People have had ‘aha’ moments and been excited to take what they’ve learnt from each other back to their communities. It is a privilege to work with and learn from people with so much skill and experience in fostering healing.”

– CHT FACILITATOR

The program’s impact is clear in participants’ reflections:

“ Over the last 12 months, our community has gained a better understanding of emotional wellbeing. We’ve learned practical strategies to manage stress and trauma, and the culturally safe approach made a big difference in helping women open up and participate fully.”

“ QPASTT’s work has fostered more open conversations about emotional wellbeing, reduced stigma, and encouraged more people to access support.”

Through CHT, QPASTT has shown how trauma-informed, culturally grounded leadership can ripple through entire communities, reducing stigma and strengthening resilience.



COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUPS – BUILDING BRIDGES, STRENGTHENING VOICE – FOUNDATION HOUSE, VICTORIA

VISION IN ACTION

At the heart of Foundation House's work is the belief that healing is not only individual but also collective, and that communities themselves hold vital knowledge for shaping recovery systems. To give that knowledge a platform, Foundation House established Community Advisory Groups (CAGs) – a model that brings refugee-background community representatives into direct dialogue with services and policymakers.

HOW IT WORKS

Community advisers are drawn from diverse cultural groups, many with lived experience of displacement and trauma. They are supported with orientation and training to build skills in advocacy, mental health literacy and system navigation. Advisory groups meet regularly, co-design discussion topics, and work alongside service providers to problem-solve issues such as stigma, interpreter use, cultural safety, and equitable access.

This model is deliberately reciprocal: advisers gain skills, confidence and influence, while services gain insight into community realities. By resourcing participation with interpreters, flexible meeting times and honorariums, the groups ensure that voices are not only heard but also valued.



IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Community advisers report stronger confidence to speak up, represent their communities and influence change. Mental health literacy has improved, helping advisers share knowledge within their own networks. Services, in turn, have adapted policies and practices in response to community insights.

The advisory groups have also fed directly into broader reform. For example, insights from Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan advisory groups informed Victoria's *Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Project*, shaping statewide engagement strategies.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE WORK

One facilitator described the process:

“*When communities share their experiences of trauma, stigma and resilience, it shifts how systems listen. These conversations don't just raise awareness – they create solutions.*”

Community members echoed the value of being involved:

“*I used to feel we had no voice in these systems. Now I feel confident to represent my community and know our concerns are taken seriously.*”

Why It Matters

The Community Advisory Group model demonstrates how trauma-informed engagement can restore agency to communities while strengthening the responsiveness of services. By recognising that healing requires voice, influence and trust, Foundation House has built a platform where refugee communities are not only recipients of care but active partners in shaping it.

CONFRONTING RACISM THROUGH COLLECTIVE DIALOGUE – PHOENIX CENTRE, TASMANIA

The Phoenix Centre hosts the Tasmanian Transcultural Mental Health Network (TTMHN), a state-funded initiative with over 300 members committed to strengthening cultural responsiveness in mental health. While TTMHN itself is funded by the Tasmanian Government, Phoenix's role as host ensures that the perspectives of refugee survivors and the practice wisdom of the PASTT program remain central to its work. Over the years, PASTT has also contributed to TTMHN forums, sometimes bringing in other FASSTT agencies to share national expertise and strengthen the dialogue.

In June 2025, the TTMHN Forum focused on *"The Impact of Racism on Mental Health."* The theme was chosen in response to increasing incidents of racism raised by individuals and communities in Tasmania, many of which had surfaced through the PASTT program.

Over 40 participants gathered in Launceston to hear from a diverse panel of speakers. A First Nations man spoke movingly about the intergenerational impacts of racism, describing how he lost his language after his father was required to raise his family in a white community – a powerful reminder of how exclusion and assimilation leave lasting scars.

Participants described the day as both powerful and challenging. A strong message that resonated throughout was that addressing racism and creating inclusive, culturally safe systems is the responsibility of all of society, not just multicultural communities themselves.

The forum also marked the *International Day in Support of Victims of Torture* with a Hope Bracelet Workshop, reinforcing resilience, connection and healing.



This event forms part of the broader work of the TTMHN, which holds bi-monthly sessions on topics ranging from working with LGBTQI+ CALD communities to the therapeutic role of art. By fostering collaboration, dialogue and practice-sharing, the Network is helping to build a mental health system in Tasmania that is better equipped to respond to racism, trauma and cultural diversity.

This case study highlights how Phoenix, as both a PASTT agency and the host of the TTMHN, bridges specialist refugee trauma recovery with broader system reform. By tackling racism as a determinant of trauma and mental health, Phoenix demonstrates that recovery is not only about individual healing, but also about reshaping the systems survivors must navigate.



HEALING THROUGH BELONGING – M'S STORY, MELALEUCA AUSTRALIA, NORTHERN TERRITORY

'M' lived through the trauma of civil war in Sri Lanka, where safety was shattered and family ties were broken. Years of uncertainty and separation compounded the effects of loss and displacement, leaving him with deep scars and ongoing distress.

Through PASTT, 'M' was supported to process his experiences, regain stability, and hold onto hope. **His journey illustrates the core goals of trauma recovery:**

- Safety and Control – Counsellors worked alongside 'M' to restore a sense of security after years of danger and uncertainty.
- Connection and Belonging – Support helped him maintain ties to community and culture.
- Dignity and Value – Being listened to, believed and respected allowed 'M' to reclaim his identity and self-worth."
- Meaning and Purpose – Rebuilding his future with his partner brought renewed hope and the chance to live the life that war and displacement had interrupted.

As 'M' reflected: *"Through my determination and resilience and never giving up – despite the challenges – I realised my dreams."*

These eight core learnings reflect what refugee communities, practitioners and partners have taught over three decades: recovery is possible when support is grounded in culture, connection and care that honours the whole person.

The PASTT model endures because it listens deeply, adapts meaningfully and walks alongside people through the long journey of healing. At the same time, these lessons remind us that refugee trauma recovery does not occur in isolation. It is shaped by broader systems, by long-term disadvantage, and by intergenerational impacts that no single service can resolve alone.

The next section turns to this bigger picture – examining how PASTT responds to complex and intersecting needs and challenges.



6. Built for the Long Term: PASTT's Response to Complex and Intersecting Challenges



Refugee trauma recovery does not occur in a vacuum. It unfolds within a landscape marked by what policy makers call “wicked problems” - entrenched, intergenerational and systemically complex needs and challenges that defy quick or linear solutions. These include the transmission of intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, barriers to mainstream services, precarious housing and employment, and the cumulative impact of disadvantage. Left unaddressed, these challenges compound over time: what begins as a temporary struggle becomes entrenched exclusion, often transmitted across generations.

The PASTT program was designed to meet this reality. It is not a short-term or narrowly clinical intervention, but a long-term, adaptive model that addresses trauma in its full social, cultural and structural context. Over thirty years, FASSTT agencies have demonstrated that trauma recovery and equity are inseparable - and that sustained, culturally safe, trauma-specialist support is not only transformative for individuals but essential for strengthening the systems and communities in which they live.

The following themes illustrate how PASTT responds to these intersecting challenges while building the foundations for long-term recovery.

The Ability to Stand Up Services Immediately to Respond to Humanitarian Crises

Through the PASTT program, Australia has built one of the most ready and agile systems in the world for responding to humanitarian crises. When the Australian Government decides to offer protection to people fleeing conflict or persecution, the FASSTT network can activate trauma-recovery services almost immediately, drawing on national coordination, established infrastructure and deep community connections.

This capacity is the product of three decades of sustained partnership between government and specialist agencies. Because the PASTT system is embedded in every state and territory - with multilingual, culturally responsive workforces already in place - it can expand or adapt rapidly to meet surges in need.

This readiness has been repeatedly demonstrated: from the resettlement of people displaced by the Balkans conflicts in the 1990s, to those fleeing Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan in the 2000s and 2010s, and most recently in responses to crises in Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and Palestine. Each time, FASSTT agencies have trained new staff, developed culturally tailored resources, and coordinated local responses with settlement, health and community partners.

This capacity ensures that Australia's humanitarian responses are not only logistically effective but recovery-focused. People arriving from crisis situations are met not with delay or fragmentation, but with safety, continuity and care. It reflects a national infrastructure of compassion - one built over decades - that turns commitment into coordinated action when required.

Anti-Racism: Confronting Injustice as Part of Recovery

Healing from torture and trauma is inseparable from confronting racism. For some survivors, the pain of persecution is compounded by new experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion after arrival in Australia. These encounters can re-activate trauma, erode trust in institutions and undermine the sense of safety essential for recovery.

FASSTT agencies understand that anti-racism is not simply a social value - it is a therapeutic necessity. Racism denies dignity; recovery restores it. Through counselling, community programs and advocacy, agencies help survivors name and process the harms of racism while rebuilding confidence and belonging.

Across the network, anti-racism is embedded at every level of practice - in workforce training, organisational culture and public policy engagement.



Agencies create safe spaces for survivors and communities to talk openly about racism and its effects, support community leadership that challenges prejudice and model inclusive practice through partnerships built on respect and reciprocity.

At a systemic level, FASSTT advocates for equitable access to health, education and social services. The network's collective voice also contributes to national anti-racism strategies, helping to shape public understanding of the link between racism, mental health and social cohesion.

In this way, PASTT's commitment to trauma recovery is also a commitment to justice. Confronting racism is part of healing; it ensures that the oppression survivors fled is not replicated in their new home. By standing against racism, FASSTT helps transform fear into belonging and exclusion into shared humanity - advancing both recovery and the moral fabric of Australia itself.



Advancing Refugee Health Equity

Refugees and humanitarian entrants carry disproportionately high levels of mental health vulnerability. Many arrive with histories of persecution, torture and displacement; despite extraordinary resilience, they encounter multiple barriers to accessing care - limited health literacy, stigma, linguistic and cultural gaps and systems that often lack refugee-specific trauma awareness or cultural safety. These barriers are compounded by socioeconomic disadvantage such as insecure housing or employment.

The Australian Government has recognised refugees as a priority population within national mental health and suicide prevention frameworks. Through PASTT, this recognition becomes practice. FASSTT agencies provide long-term, embedded care in communities - offering continuity that mainstream systems cannot. They operate from a health-justice perspective: viewing mental health as inseparable from equity, access and human rights.

In doing so, PASTT plays a dual role - delivering direct care while also advocating for systemic reform. Agencies identify gaps such as service exclusions for temporary visa holders and push for more inclusive models of care. The result is twofold: improved outcomes for individual survivors and a stronger, fairer mental health system for all.

Addressing the Social Determinants of Recovery

“*We don’t just sit in counselling rooms – we sit in meetings with schools, hospitals and services. Our advocacy is as important as our therapy.*”

– COUNSELLOR

“*When I finally had a safe home, my heart became quiet enough to talk about the past. Before that, every day felt like survival.*” – SURVIVOR

Recovery from trauma does not begin in the therapy room; it begins with safety and stability – a roof overhead, secure income, safe schooling for children and connection to community. Without these foundations, therapy alone cannot produce lasting change.

The PASTT model integrates clinical, psychosocial and structural support. FASSTT practitioners work as Counsellor Advocates, recognising that survivors’ needs cannot be neatly divided into “mental health” and “practical issues.” They assist families to meet basic needs, liaise with schools to re-engage children and advocate with government agencies to ensure access to entitlements. Addressing these barriers is often the precondition for therapy to succeed.

Partnerships are central. FASSTT agencies collaborate with settlement services, education providers, GPs, housing and community organisations to ensure survivors are not left to navigate complex systems alone. The result is an integrated model of trauma recovery embedded in the conditions of daily life.



THE COUNSELLOR ADVOCATE MODEL

For survivors, recovery requires more than therapy. Many arrive in Australia carrying unresolved trauma while also confronting urgent settlement challenges. To meet this reality, FASSTT pioneered the Counsellor Advocate Model in the 1990s, first developed by Foundation House and later adopted nationally.

The model integrates therapeutic counselling with practical advocacy, recognising that safety, dignity and agency depend on both psychological care and access to rights and resources.

In practice:

- As counsellors, practitioners provide trauma-informed therapy to regulate distress and rebuild identity.
- As advocates, they liaise with settlement agencies, schools, housing, legal and health systems to reduce barriers and secure essential supports.

Unlike mainstream mental health models, which separate counselling from advocacy, FASSTT embeds both within one role.

“*You can’t ask someone to talk about their trauma if they don’t know where they’ll sleep tonight. Advocacy is therapy. Safety is healing.*”

– FASSTT COUNSELLOR ADVOCATE

Strengthening Australia's Mental Health System Through Prevention and Partnership

Australia's mental health system is operating under increasing pressure, with rising demand and growing complexity in community needs. For people from refugee backgrounds, accessing mental health support can be more complex, with language, cultural and systemic factors affecting how and when care is sought.

The PASTT program provides a critical alternative pathway. By offering continuity where episodic models fail, it reduces reliance on crisis interventions and prevent unnecessary escalation into tertiary care.

Equally vital is PASTT's bridging role. FASSTT clinicians provide secondary consultation to GPs, psychiatrists, mental health teams and allied health professionals, helping them respond safely and effectively to refugee trauma.

This dual function - direct care and system capacity-building - makes PASTT a cornerstone of national mental health sustainability.

At the same time, FASSTT agencies focus on early intervention and prevention, engaging survivors before distress becomes crisis. Agencies reach out early in the resettlement journey - when trauma may not yet be acute but when timely, relational support can prevent long-term harm. Through trust-building, outreach and gentle persistence, they connect with people who are isolated, fearful or uncertain about seeking help.

This proactive approach not only reduces emergency presentations and hospitalisations but also promotes recovery-oriented lives grounded in connection, confidence and hope. It strengthens both the individual and the system - ensuring that survivors are supported across the full continuum of care, from prevention to recovery, and that mainstream services are better equipped to respond to the realities of refugee trauma.



Promoting Intergenerational Healing

Refugee trauma rarely ends with one generation. Its effects ripple through families - carried in silence, disrupted attachment, and inherited grief. Children may absorb their parents' distress; young people may struggle to reconcile fractured identities; elders may grieve cultural loss as traditions fade. Even within families where love and care are strong, unspoken pain can shape relationships, communication and belonging.

FASSTT agencies recognise that healing must reach beyond individuals to the networks of family, kinship and culture that hold people together. Their work interrupts the transmission of trauma by restoring connection, meaning and mutual understanding. This is achieved through family-centred and youth-focused approaches that nurture safety, cultural continuity and hope across generations.

BRIDGING GENERATIONS THROUGH CULTURAL RESTORATION

Intergenerational healing also requires spaces where family members can safely share experiences and reimagine their collective story. FASSTT agencies help to facilitate cultural restoration through community projects, including creative arts, that bring together elders, parents and children.

Elders share songs, poems and memories from their homelands; young people respond through art, performance and digital storytelling. In these exchanges,

STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

For young people from refugee backgrounds, the journey to belonging is layered and complex. Many carry memories of violence or displacement, while others inherit their parents' unspoken experiences of loss. Adjusting to new languages, schools and social norms can heighten this sense of dislocation.

FASSTT youth programs respond to these intersecting pressures through trauma-informed counselling, peer mentoring, leadership initiatives and creative, culturally affirming activities in schools and community settings. By fostering identity, agency and belonging, these programs help young people transform inherited trauma into strength and purpose.

They also serve as early intervention spaces - building emotional literacy, reducing stigma around mental health, and helping young people navigate both their heritage and their new context with pride. In these programs, healing becomes a process of reclaiming story: not only what happened, but who they can become.

heritage and new identity meet - helping to rebuild continuity between past, present and future. Families often describe these experiences as transformative: restoring pride, easing silence and renewing connection across generations.

Bicultural practitioners often act as cultural translators in these spaces, bridging worldviews and ensuring that conversations honour both tradition and contemporary realities. By viewing the family as a system, not just the individual survivor, FASSTT agencies foster protective environments that reduce vulnerability, rebuild attachment and strengthen resilience across generations.



EMPOWERING PARENTS IN RECOVERY

Parents from refugee backgrounds carry a dual burden: managing their own recovery while providing safety and stability for their children. Many have endured separation, loss and resettlement stress, all while trying to parent in unfamiliar systems with different expectations and limited support networks.

FASSTT agencies recognise that supporting parents is central to breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Across the network, parenting programs provide culturally safe spaces to reflect, learn and rebuild confidence. Through group discussions, guided psychoeducation and shared storytelling, parents come to understand how trauma may influence their responses to stress, discipline or communication. This awareness often brings relief rather than guilt, allowing space for compassion and reconnection.

“When parents begin to understand their own trauma, they stop blaming themselves for their children’s struggles. That shift opens space for connection and hope.”

– FASSTT COUNSELLOR

“In FiCT, I realised I was not the only one who felt lost. We shared stories, and I saw my children differently. I became more patient.”

– PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

A leading example is Families in Cultural Transition (FiCT), developed by STARTTS in New South Wales and adapted by other FASSTT agencies across Australia. FiCT is a group-based program designed to strengthen parenting confidence, connection and wellbeing among families from refugee backgrounds.

It helps parents navigate the complexities of raising children in a new country - balancing cultural values, expectations of Australian systems, and the impacts of trauma and displacement.

FiCT has become a cornerstone of FASSTT’s family-focused practice, demonstrating how culturally grounded, trauma-informed education can restore confidence, improve family relationships and promote intergenerational healing. When parents heal, families stabilise. When families stabilise, children thrive. In this way, each act of understanding between parent and child becomes an act of recovery that strengthens both generations - and the community around them.

Embedding Trauma Recovery into the Settlement Journey

“
We focus on getting families settled. FASSTT helps us understand how trauma sits underneath these needs – and together we can respond in ways that don’t overwhelm families.”

– SETTLEMENT CASE MANAGER

For many survivors, recovery is inseparable from settlement. Trauma recovery is deeply connected to the practical realities of settlement. Everyday challenges – finding stable housing, securing work, supporting children in school, and adjusting to a new culture – can interact with past trauma and shape wellbeing. These challenges are not peripheral – they are central to mental health and recovery.

FASSTT agencies complement settlement services by addressing the psychological dimensions of these challenges. Through co-location in service delivery areas, secondary consultation and coordinated casework, they ensure that emotional needs are recognised alongside practical ones. This integration means settlement and recovery are treated as one journey – anchored in both history and hope.



Global Shifts: Emerging Challenges

The future of refugee trauma recovery cannot be separated from its global context. Rising nationalism, polarisation and shrinking international protection systems are eroding the solidarity that once underpinned humanitarian responses. Too often, refugees are met with suspicion rather than welcome. Within this environment, survivors must navigate not only the scars of persecution but the barriers of exclusion and political backlash in their new homes.

Global disruptors such as climate change and artificial intelligence (AI) are also reshaping displacement and protection. Climate-related instability will likely intensify persecution and migration, while emerging technologies – including surveillance and AI-enabled warfare – are changing both the nature of torture and the risks faced by diaspora communities.

Yet technology also holds promise when used ethically: improving access to care, data insights and community engagement. By adapting models of care while safeguarding values, FASSTT can continue to lead nationally and internationally – ensuring that responses to torture and trauma remain effective, rights-based and survivor-centred in an era of profound change.

From Principles to Impact: Examples from Across the Network

The themes above demonstrate how PASTT addresses entrenched and intersecting challenges - equity gaps, social determinants, system strain, intergenerational harm and the settlement-recovery nexus.

The following practice snapshots show these principles in motion. They translate policy and program architecture into the everyday work that restores safety, identity and belonging - one person, one family, one community at a time.



HEALTH EQUITY: FOUNDATION HOUSE AND THE VICTORIAN REFUGEE HEALTH NETWORK

BACKGROUND

Since 2007, Foundation House has auspiced the Victorian Refugee Health Network (VRHN), a state-wide collaboration that brings together health, settlement and community sectors to improve health outcomes for people from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds.

WHAT THE PROGRAM DOES

VRHN provides a platform for coordination, training, resource development and policy advocacy. Under Foundation House's leadership, it has produced resources such as the Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide, supported community advisory groups, and worked with government and health services to improve access, interpreter use and cultural safety.

IMPACT

The Network has:

- Increased collaboration between health and community services.
- Strengthened cultural responsiveness and mental health literacy across the system.
- Brought refugee voices into policy reform through community advisory groups.
- Informed practical improvements, from better referral pathways to reducing stigma around mental health.

WHY IT MATTERS

By auspicing VRHN, Foundation House has ensured that cultural responsiveness and community voice are embedded in the health system. The Network demonstrates how specialist trauma services can extend their influence beyond individual care, helping to reshape systems so they are more equitable, inclusive and responsive to refugee communities.

RESPONDING TO SOCIAL DETERMINANTS: 'COOK LIKE A CHEF' – MEN4MEN'S GROUP, ASETTS

Men from refugee backgrounds often face significant mental health challenges and social isolation during resettlement, yet traditional support models can be difficult for them to engage with. To respond to this need, ASeTTS developed "Cook Like a Chef", a six-week program that uses cooking as a therapeutic and non-stigmatising space for connection, skill-building and healing.

As the cornerstone of ASeTTS' MEN4Men program (Meaningful Engagement & Networking for Men), the initiative brings men from diverse refugee and cultural backgrounds together in structured workshops that combine practical cooking skills with teamwork and shared meals. Sessions cover knife skills, preparing multicultural dishes, and kitchen collaboration – all while intentionally reframing cooking as both a valuable life skill and a potential vocational pathway.

The program's strength lies in its community-building approach. In its second year, a past participant returned as a peer mentor, enhancing learning and demonstrating the power of leadership within the group.

Measured outcomes show a clear impact. Using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index, participants reported significant improvements in wellbeing, with average scores rising from 58.35 at the start of the group to 77.00 at the end. Qualitative feedback revealed reduced social isolation, increased confidence, stronger peer support networks, and a renewed sense of belonging.

"I came for cooking lessons but found a joy that had been missing for a long time."

– PARTICIPANT

Cook Like a Chef demonstrates how trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and creative programming can break down barriers to men's engagement, reduce stigma, and foster connection, belonging and hope.





EMBEDDING TRAUMA RECOVERY INTO THE SETTLEMENT JOURNEY: MANY DOORWAYS TO HEALING – STTARS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

When Maria arrived in Adelaide as a young mother with two children in Australia and one whom she had been separated from still overseas, she was referred to STTARS after disclosing past experiences of torture and severe trauma during her refugee flight. Her recovery needs unfolded at several levels.

Individually, she began counselling to address nightmares, anxiety and the ongoing grief of separation from her daughter, who remained overseas. At the same time, her children were linked into STTARS' child counselling program, where staff worked closely with teachers to support their learning and social adjustment. The family was also supported by STTARS family counselling program, where she was supported to find safe housing, learn skills to navigate systems in Australia and build stronger family connections through activities combining play, peer support and cultural connection. As her confidence grew, Maria was able to find employment and will soon be reunited with her daughter.

“ You have supported me during the hardest moments of my journey. When I had no home, you gave me the help I needed. You walked with me as my children adapted to a new life in this country. You connected me with other organizations, encouraged me, and helped me build stability in this new land.

It has not been easy learning a new language, living in a new culture, and being far from my family. At times it felt overwhelming, but with STTARS beside me, the weight was much lighter. I will be forever grateful to you – not just as an organization, but as people who truly care. You do an incredible job supporting those of us who come here seeking peace and stability after so much hardship.

I hope soon I can celebrate with you the arrival of my daughter from Venezuela. You have been part of this journey, and although it has been hard, together we are almost there.”

This case illustrates the strength of the FASSTT model: survivors do not need to fit into a single service type. Care is offered across multiple levels – individual, family, group and community – and adapted over time. For Maria, healing was not only about counselling sessions, but about rebuilding identity, belonging and purpose during the settlement transition alongside her children and community.

STRENGTHENING AND RELIEVING THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM: BUILDING SUICIDE PREVENTION PATHWAYS WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITIES – STARTTS, NEW SOUTH WALES

CONTEXT

Refugee communities often carry the compounded risks of pre-migration trauma, resettlement stress and social isolation. Over recent years, STARTTS has identified growing concern about suicide risk across a number of refugee and emerging communities, reflecting both the cumulative impact of displacement and the barriers many face in accessing culturally appropriate mental health support.

THE INTERVENTION

With support from four Primary Health Networks (South Western Sydney, WentWest, Nepean Blue Mountains and Sydney North) and Embrace Multicultural Mental Health, STARTTS implemented a Mental Health Literacy and Suicide Prevention Program tailored for refugee communities. The initiative combined multiple strategies to build capacity, reduce stigma and strengthen help-seeking pathways.



Peer and Faith Leader Training:

Adapted Accidental Counsellor and suicide prevention workshops were delivered to community leaders, youth mentors and faith leaders from Mandaean, Ezidi, Afghan, Arabic-speaking, Myanmar, Tibetan, Ukrainian, Tamil, South Sudanese, Iranian, African and Cambodian communities. The training equipped participants to recognise distress, ask directly about suicide and refer people safely for support.

Community Consultations and Safe Spaces:

Consultations were held with Mandaean young people, women, elders and religious leaders to better understand community-specific concerns. This led to initiatives such as the Mandaean Youth Drop-In Space, developed in partnership with the Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre and the Sabian Mandaean Association.

Culturally Specific Wellbeing Groups:

STARTTS established a range of group programs combining physical activity, culture and psychosocial support - such as yoga groups, nature-based interventions, Assyrian women's aqua aerobics, men's lifestyle sessions, and Yalikhateh (crocheting circles) where women shared stories while creating traditional handkerchiefs. These spaces reduced isolation and strengthened social connection.



Training Evaluation and Learning:

Independent evaluations of suicide prevention workshops for Ezidi and Mandaean communities reported satisfaction rates of 96–100%, alongside increased knowledge of suicide risk factors and confidence in having conversations about suicide. Evaluations also identified the need for further experiential training to deepen intervention confidence.

Crisis Response and Postvention:

Following a community suicide in 2024, STARTTS coordinated with schools, religious leaders and health services to deliver urgent crisis support, psychoeducation and culturally tailored social media resources. The outreach reached thousands online while linking with mainstream suicide prevention and postvention services to strengthen their capacity for culturally safe, trauma-informed responses.

SIGNIFICANCE

This initiative illustrates that cultural responsiveness is foundational to suicide prevention. By embedding capacity-building within community leadership, grounding wellbeing programs in cultural and spiritual practice, and responding rapidly and collaboratively in times of crisis, STARTTS has demonstrated that refugee communities themselves are central to creating protective environments.

Through these partnerships, stigma is reduced, trust is restored, and pathways to care are widened - showing that when suicide prevention is culturally anchored, it not only saves lives but rebuilds hope, connection and belonging.



PROMOTING INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING: YOUTH VOICE – QPASTT, QUEENSLAND

Since 2011, Youth Voice has been a platform for young leaders from refugee and migrant backgrounds to advocate for healing, belonging, and justice. Established by QPASTT, the group engages young people in systemic advocacy, community projects, storytelling, peer mentoring, and lived-experience leadership.

Originally Brisbane-based, Youth Voice expanded to Townsville in 2021 and now organises leadership workshops, wellbeing and suicide prevention initiatives, and school outreach programs. Members also present at state and national conferences, bringing youth-led refugee perspectives to the forefront of policy and practice.

For its members, Youth Voice has been transformative:

“*I’ve seen powerful transformations through this group. It supported me during the most difficult times of my life.*”

“*What I’ve valued most is having a platform where young people’s opinions are truly heard and respected. It’s helped me build confidence and learn from diverse perspectives.*”

“*Networking has been one of the most important outcomes. Youth Voice has connected me not only with peers but also with professionals across many fields.*”

Youth Voice demonstrates how creating safe, supportive spaces for young leaders builds confidence, resilience, and agency. It highlights the importance of youth-led advocacy in shaping both personal growth and community change.



STRENGTHENING AND RELIEVING THE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM: COLLABORATION WITH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES – COMPANION HOUSE, ACT

Recognising the complex needs of survivors of torture and trauma, Companion House has long prioritised collaboration with mental health systems.

In 2003, it established a formal partnership with the ACT Government Health Directorate’s mental health services. The agreement established joint referral processes, case management practices and coordinated support for people with severe mental illness, including suicide prevention outside regular hours.

Although the partnership was disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has since been renewed with a stronger focus on integration. Current plans include regular joint case reviews, shared training, and more streamlined communication between teams.

This renewed collaboration ensures that people with severe and complex needs receive more coordinated, responsive care, reflecting Companion House’s commitment to bridging specialist trauma services and mainstream health systems.

PROMOTING INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING: SUPPORTING FATHERS – PHOENIX CENTRE, TASMANIA

In 2025, the Phoenix team hosted a Men's Wellbeing Picnic, where fathers spoke openly about the pressures of cultural and generational expectations. Many described the impact on their mental health and relationships and expressed a desire to connect and support each other.

From this, the Phoenix Fathers' Group was established with fathers from Farsi, Bhutanese and Punjabi backgrounds. Six workshops explored wellbeing, parenting and family relationships, with training on shifting between roles – from provider and protector to nurturing and interactive dad.

Fathers reported powerful changes: one recognised the need to care for himself to model wellbeing for his children; another shifted from controlling mobile phone use to building trust and encouraging healthy habits; a third committed to learning English to better connect with his children.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

“*This group changed our perspectives and helped our family solve problems together.*”

“*I'd forgotten how important my role was. It reminded me to care for my children.*”

The Phoenix Fathers' Group shows how culturally responsive, peer-supported initiatives can strengthen men's wellbeing, transform parenting and build stronger intergenerational healing.



EMBEDDING TRAUMA RECOVERY INTO THE SETTLEMENT JOURNEY: A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE, GRIT AND HOPE – MELALEUCA AUSTRALIA, NORTHERN TERRITORY

In 2017, amid political unrest and food shortages in Venezuela, Carolina fled to the Caribbean. When her one-month visa expired, she spent three months in immigration detention and then lived for years without the right to work while her passport was held.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, survival became even harder. Determined to build a life, she created income through jewellery-making, eventually running a small pop-up shop.

After eight years in Trinidad, she was granted a visa to Australia. Soon after her settlement journey began in Darwin, she accessed counselling through PASTT, alongside health and community supports that enabled her to finally receive the care she needed.

Carolina has embraced her new life with determination, establishing her own jewellery business and learning about opportunities to contribute to her community. Grateful for the freedom and equality she has found, she now dreams of supporting other migrant women to build new beginnings.

Her story is a testament to strength, perseverance and the power of hope.

FASSTT agencies are not only responding to individual trauma – they are addressing some of the most persistent challenges in Australia’s health and social systems. PASTT shows how long-term, culturally responsive, specialist care can stabilise lives, prevent system overload and foster inclusive communities.

This effectiveness relies on strong partnerships with government, settlement providers, health systems and communities, supported by sustained investment. Refugee trauma recovery is therefore not just a mental health issue – it is a public health priority, a social justice imperative and a nation-building investment.



7. The Road Ahead: Envisioning the Future



Three decades of the PASTT program have demonstrated what is possible when care, evidence and partnership align. FASSTT's pathway ahead is one of continuity and renewal - strengthening what works, deepening innovation and ensuring that its nationally coordinated model remains at the forefront of trauma recovery practice. The focus is not simply on doing more, but on doing what matters most: sustaining excellence in care, leadership and advocacy for the future.

FASSTT's strategic direction for the next decade is grounded in evidence, shaped by lived experience and aligned with Australia's mental health and humanitarian policy frameworks. The aim is to preserve the integrity of specialist care while expanding its reach, influence and sustainability.

“Survivors have taught us that recovery is not a moment, but a journey. As the next generation of humanitarian entrants arrives in Australia, we recommit to walking that path with compassion, humility and hope.”

- FASSTT NETWORK



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING DECADE

Grounded in thirty years of learning from survivors, FASSTT's priorities for the next decade reflect both enduring commitments and emerging challenges. These directions are designed to ensure measurable improvements in survivor outcomes, workforce capability and network coordination - maintaining the program's demonstrated record of clinical effectiveness, social inclusion and national impact.

Strategic Priorities for the Coming Decade

01 REACH, RESPONSIVENESS AND EQUITY

FASSTT has consistently adapted to support survivors from new and emerging conflicts. In the decade ahead, we will expand our reach to ensure equitable access for survivors, while adapting care models to the realities of global displacement and technological change. Working in collaboration with government and settlement partners, we will continue to stand ready in times of humanitarian crisis. Our commitment is to remain responsive, values-driven, and inclusive of all who need support.

02 ANTI-RACISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

Recovery occurs within the broader social environment. FASSTT agencies will continue to work alongside communities to strengthen belonging and inclusion, while explicitly addressing racism, discrimination and social division. Our goal is to foster environments - in communities, services and systems - where recovery is supported by respect, safety and mutual understanding.

03 LIVED EXPERIENCE AT THE CENTRE

FASSTT has long pioneered the inclusion of bicultural practitioners, peer workers and lived experience advisors in refugee trauma recovery, setting benchmarks nationally and internationally.

In the decade ahead, we will continue to strengthen and deepen this leadership by:

- Consolidating and growing our bicultural and peer workforce, building on the extensive expertise already embedded across the network.
- Embedding and refining co-design practices across service delivery, governance and policy to ensure lived experience continues to guide every level of decision-making.
- Expanding opportunities for survivor-led research, storytelling and evaluation, amplifying survivor voices as central sources of knowledge and evidence.

Survivors will remain at the heart of FASSTT's work - shaping the systems that affect their lives and ensuring that care continues to be grounded in dignity, partnership and accountability.



04 BUILDING SYSTEM CAPABILITY

FASSTT agencies have long partnered with health, education, settlement and community services to embed refugee trauma-informed practice across sectors. In the decade ahead, we will deepen and extend this work by consolidating training pathways, reflective practice frameworks and cross-sector learning communities. Through these efforts, an increasing proportion of the national workforce will be equipped to respond effectively, safely and sustainably to the distinct needs of refugee survivors.

06 NATIONAL STEWARDSHIP AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

FASSTT will continue to strengthen national coordination structures to sustain the effectiveness of the national network. At the same time, we will continue to share our expertise globally through partnerships with international bodies such as UNHCR and the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). Through these efforts, FASSTT reaffirms its commitment to the Convention Against Torture and to the global movement for survivor rehabilitation and justice.

CLOSING REFLECTION

In an era of deepening displacement, division and disruption, the PASTT program stands as a testament to what enduring solidarity can achieve. Australia's commitment to survivors of torture and trauma is both a national responsibility and a vital act of global solidarity. The road ahead demands resilience, vision and courage - but also hope.

By holding fast to principles of dignity, equity and inclusion, FASSTT and its partners can help build a future where healing is possible not only for individuals, but for communities and societies seeking to recover their shared humanity.

05 EVIDENCE, INNOVATION AND ADVOCACY

FASSTT will continue to strengthen the national evidence base for refugee trauma recovery through improved datasets, participatory research and practice-led evaluation. This knowledge will inform service delivery and drive systemic advocacy - influencing policy and service design to ensure responses are effective, culturally safe and sustainable.

We will also invest in digital innovation and ethical data governance — exploring how technology can enhance access and insight while safeguarding privacy, rights and dignity.



8. Conclusion: Honouring the Past, Investing in the Future



“We honour the past by learning from it. We invest in the future by acting now. And together, we carry this work forward with clarity, compassion and an unshakeable belief that healing is possible.”

– FASSTT NETWORK

This publication marks more than a history of services – it is a story of persistence, courage and solidarity. It honours the survivors who entrusted their experiences to counsellors, advocates and communities, and the workers and leaders who stood beside them with care and conviction.

Yet this work is not finished. As conflicts re-intensify, displacement grows and global resettlement contracts, the demand for specialist trauma recovery continues to rise. New challenges are already shaping the landscape: the mental health impacts of long-term trauma, the realities of visa insecurity, the intensification of climate-driven conflict, and the emergence of artificial intelligence as both a tool of harm and a potential tool of care.

Meeting these challenges requires more than clinical expertise – it requires a system that supports healing at every level: individuals, families, groups, communities and services. It requires strong partnerships across government and civil society, stable investment, and the continued embedding of cultural responsiveness and lived experience into the heart of practice.

The PASTT program is both a legacy and a future. It is a proven model, a necessary investment in the present and vital infrastructure for what lies ahead. Its success rests not only on the work of individual agencies, but on the long-term collaboration of the FASSTT network – an enduring example of collective impact.

The pledge Australia made in 1995 – to never turn away a survivor of torture or trauma – is as relevant now as it was then. As we mark 30 years, we do so not only with pride, but with conviction and a continuing promise of care: that survivors of torture and trauma in Australia will be met with safety, dignity and the possibility of rebuilding their lives.

In a world where refugee resettlement is shrinking, Australia's commitment through PASTT stands as both a rare act of solidarity and a proven model – a future where recovery is possible, dignity is upheld, and hope is never out of reach.



FASSTT Statement Against Torture

Torture is a profound violation of human rights. It deliberately inflicts severe physical or psychological pain to punish, intimidate and control. It is never justified – under any circumstances – and is explicitly prohibited under international law.

Under Article 1 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), torture is any act where severe physical or mental pain is deliberately inflicted for purposes such as extracting information, punishment, intimidation, or discrimination, when done by or with the involvement of a public official.

This definition has been adopted by more than 140 countries, including Australia.

Torture knows no boundaries. It is used against people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, religions, sexualities and political backgrounds. Its effects are long-lasting and far-reaching – extending well beyond the moment of harm. Survivors may experience post-traumatic stress, depression, chronic pain, anxiety, sleep disorders, grief, social withdrawal, disrupted family relationships and diminished trust in others.

Discussion about the existence and effects of torture is confronting – even more so when we acknowledge that many of our fellow Australians who are refugees, people seeking asylum and recent arrivals who have had refugee-like experiences, have endured the tragedy that is torture.

FASSTT encourages all Australians to reflect deeply on this reality. We must not become complacent about the continued existence of torture in the world. And we must always uphold the importance of respect, safety, care and compassion in the healing journey of those who have survived it.

While the impacts of torture are devastating, healing is possible. We stand with survivors – advocating for dignity, healing and justice. But healing takes more than treatment. It requires communities and systems that welcome, protect and empower.

In reaffirming our stance, FASSTT also upholds Australia's obligations under international instruments such as the UN Convention Against Torture and the Refugee Convention. At a time of deepening polarisation and shrinking global consensus on human rights, these commitments matter more than ever. They remind us that protecting survivors of torture is not simply an act of compassion, but a legal and moral duty shared across nations.

FASSTT reaffirms its commitment to a world without torture and to ensuring that survivors are met not with silence, disbelief or indifference – but with justice, solidarity and hope.



FASSTT

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