



# Creative Art Therapy Program Evaluation

Youth + LGBTIQ Specialist Family Violence Therapeutic Arts  
Practitioner  
Final Report

# Taking action today to create a better future.

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Caz McLean acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters.

This report was written on the land of the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nation. Caz McLean pays respect to their elders, past, present, and emerging and acknowledges that sovereignty has never been ceded.

Caz McLean recognises intersectionality and celebrates the diverse identities in the LGBTIQ+ community. Caz McLean is committed to supporting, encouraging, and ensuring all those she works with feel safe to be seen and treated as they are.

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## Language matters.

Whilst the author remains committed to using inclusive language and describing people in the way they describe themselves, for the purpose of communication and accessibility of this evaluation, the LGBTIQ+ acronym is used as a collective term to describe the unique young people and stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and experiences who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, people with innate variations of sex characteristics, trans and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, queer, other sexualities, and gender bodily diverse people who are connected to the CAT program and who contributed to the evaluation.

## Thank you

Thank you to the FAN team, young people and sector partners who contributed their valuable time and perspectives to the evaluation process.

Name	Pronouns	Organisation
1. Michelle Thompson CEO	She/Her	FAN
2. Jess Innes-Irons Creative Arts Therapist (LGBTIQA+, Youth & Family Violence)	She/Her	FAN
3. Clae Mazzolini Arts Therapy Placement Student	She/He/They	FAN
4. Aaron Ong, Youth Support Worker		FAN
5. Reta A, Senior Practitioner - Family Violence Homelessness Services – Intake and Prevention	She/Her	Uniting
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8. Ross Evans, Team Leader - Integrated Therapeutic Community (ITC) Youth Mental Health		Each

# Executive Summary

## Background

The CAT Program is an expansion of FAN's current services and was developed in response to the need for a therapeutic service response for LGBTIQ+ young people impacted by family violence and homelessness. The program aimed to:

1. Decrease wait times for young people impacted by Domestic and Family Violence to access therapeutic support.
2. Provide access to an LGBTIQ+ lived experience worker.
3. Provide no cost therapeutic support to people experiencing severe financial distress who would not have otherwise been able to afford support.

In 2023, FAN was selected as a recipient of the 2023 Paul Ramsay Foundation's Specialist Domestic Family Violence Programs Grant. As a result, with the support of Australian Communities Foundation in partnership with Paul Ramsay Foundation, FAN was able to develop and deliver a therapeutic services program by appointment of an Art Therapist at 0.9 EFT which was combined with the Family Safety Victoria Pathways to Resilience funding to create a 1.0 EFT role. This role provides specialist healing and recovery support to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Domestic Family Violence.

The funding period commenced on 1 July 2023 and ends on 30 June 2025.

Caz McLean, an independent consultant, was engaged to work in partnership with FAN to undertake an evaluation of the CAT Program between August and December 2024 to:

- assess the overall effectiveness of the CAT Program in achieving positive outcomes for young people impacted by family violence and homelessness; and
- identify opportunities for improvement to help to evolve the Program to better meet the needs of young people impacted by family violence and homelessness.

The **CAT Program Evaluation** methodology included:

1. **Promotion and Information Sharing** to ensure stakeholders had the information required to enable them to make an informed choice about participation and to prepare for the interviews.
2. **Consultation and Engagement** to seek feedback from the CAT Program team, Program participants and external stakeholders about the effectiveness of the Program and to identify opportunities for Program development including:
  - CAT Program Team Workshop with 3 FAN team members
  - 6 Program Participant Interviews
  - 4 Key Stakeholder Interviews
3. **Quantitative Data and Program Documentation** including the review of quantitative service use data to inform the development of a client profile and other relevant Program documentation.

A collaborative approach was used for the evaluation informed by the principles of co-design.

## The CAT Program Model

The CAT Program is an expansion of FAN's current operations through the creation of a new staff role of a Domestic Family Violence Creative Arts Therapist. This role provides specialist healing and recovery support to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Domestic Family Violence.

The staff role of Domestic Family Violence Creative Arts Therapist encompasses:

- Onsite and outreach LGBTIQ+ affirmative creative arts therapy services to LGBTIQ+ people, and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence
- Inclusive assessments of risk and protective factors including comprehensive risk assessments as appropriate
- Development and facilitation of group interventions related to family and intimate partner violence and well-being for a diverse range of young people
- Primary and secondary consultations for workers supporting LGBTIQ+ people
- Sector capacity building training in recognising and responding to LGBTIQ+ experiences of family violence
- Assisting with the design and implementation of evaluation activities, data collection, analysis and report writing as required.

The funding also supports:

- Employment of a specialist Creative Arts Therapist at a 0.9 appointment for 2 years plus staffing on costs
- Supervision costs for appointed staff member and support Domestic Family Violence professional development costs for fan team
- Travel expenses to deliver and access training
- Program materials including clinical texts and art supplies
- A portion of overhead costs to support co-location of staff role onsite.

Registered Creative Arts Therapists are university-trained in both creative and psychotherapeutic methods to help clients express themselves and improve wellbeing. Creative Arts Therapists are mental health professionals who use art, media, and creative processes (visual arts, writing, sculpting, drama, clay, sand, dance, music, and movement) to facilitate emotional expression, self-awareness, and self-regulation. Creative arts therapists are inherently focused on the affective outcomes for the people they encounter in professional settings.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gray, Deanne, 2022, *The Proven Efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies: What the Literature Tells Us*, ANZACATA Co. Ltd.

## Summary of Key Findings

The evaluation identified seven key themes that were critical in determining the CAT Program's effectiveness in providing healing and recovery support through FAN's Creative Arts Therapy Program to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Family Violence. A summary of these themes is outlined on the following pages of the report.

### 1. Effective in engaging with highly vulnerable young people

Commencing on 1 July 2023, 44 clients were engaged at the end of year one exceeding the annual CAT Program target of 40, the evaluation showed that the CAT Program was effective in engaging with highly vulnerable young people.

The CAT Program achieved high levels of engagement with the identified target populations with 82% of clients identifying as LGBTIQ+, 82% having experienced family violence and 71% of the clients had experienced homelessness. 38% of participants reported living with a disability or chronic health condition and 70% identified as neurodivergent. One client was a first nations young person, and two were young mums, young parents or pregnant.

Rich diversity was found within the client group, which the research shows<sup>2</sup> is also evident within the LGBTIQ+ community, demonstrating the importance of recognising the distinct groups that make up the LGBTIQ+ community, each with their own unique experiences, needs, and identities, a key strength of the CAT Program.

The evaluation revealed that the effectiveness of the CAT Program in engaging with LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Family Violence was due to:

- As an intersectional program it is important to note that clients do not fit into discreet categories with clients presenting which multiple and intersecting aspects of their identities and experiences.
- The wide range of techniques available to support clients to process and overcome traumatic events.
- The safe environment created where clients can communicate and process their experiences indirectly using artistic methods of their choosing rather than asking clients directly to talk about what is going on in their lives.
- The choice given to clients about the methods and subject of their artist expression and the ability to reclaim a level of power and control over their lives.
- Catering to a wide range of individuals with distinct needs, experiences and interests as there is no requirement for clients to be artistic or to have prior artistic experience.
- Using the therapeutic space to create and foster stability where this was absent in clients lives thus increasing access to Family Violence therapeutic options that would otherwise be available to them.
- The high degree of flexibility and responsiveness and a willingness to work through each client's unique experience on a case-by-case basis, accepting that family violence does not appear in a person's life as a single issue.

The high number of clients (25%) attending a single creative arts therapy session suggested that a single session model may be an important modification to create a no-failure approach for clients and to better align with the overall patterns of program attendance.

<sup>2</sup> Lay, Y., Leonard, W., Horsley, P., Parsons., *Summary Report: Primary Prevention of Domestic Family Violence against people from LGBTI Communities*, Our Watch, available at [Primary prevention of Domestic Family Violence against people from LGBTI communities \(apo.org.au\)](https://www.ourwatch.org.au/primary-prevention-of-domestic-family-violence-against-people-from-lgbti-communities)

## 2. Clients felt seen and respected

The evaluation revealed that 100% of clients felt seen and respected by the CAT Program due to:

- The relational and non-directive approach of the CAT Program which began at the point of intake, with 100% of clients interviewed reporting that the CAT Program was easy to access.
- The effort taken by the Creative Arts Therapist to ensure the successful uptake of a place.
- The trauma informed, Family Violence expertise and LGBTIQ+ inclusive practice.
- The correct use of pronouns and describing clients in the way they describe themselves
- The opportunity to be around others with similar lived experience.
- The non-clinical nature of the CAT Program, and the accepting, non-judgmental and inclusive environment where clients felt free to be themselves.
- The client led approach, with clients able to choose what they focused on in a session and gain support to express their emotions and experience through art.

Creative arts therapy was acknowledged by clients as supporting identity formation and being particularly impactful for young people working to uncover and define their identities. Importantly, the creation of their identity as an artist and an individual enables them to become more than their experience of family violence.

## 3. An effective, evidence-based alternative to talk-based therapy

There is a growing evidence base that demonstrates the efficacy of Creative Arts Therapy to improve both mental and physical health with the research highlighting the positive outcomes for people experiencing stress, trauma, depression, and anxiety<sup>3</sup>. This evidence was validated by stakeholders and clients with feedback demonstrating the positive outcomes achieved by creative arts therapy as an alternative to talk therapy due to the opportunity provided for non-verbal expression particularly when articulating experiences was difficult for clients<sup>4</sup>.

Specifically the CAT Program was seen to be an effective, evidence-based alternative to talk-based therapy for the following reasons:

- The CAT Program was less confronting for clients who find talk-therapy intimidating, particularly those with trauma and associated mental health issues, as it provides a method for them to process their experiences in their own way and to express their feelings through art
- The arts aspect of the CAT Program was appealing to those clients who described themselves as artists as well as those who might not, all preferring the indirect approach, which gave them something tangible to focus on while processing the impacts of trauma.
- The CAT Program provided clients with a safe space to process emotions and experiences that could be difficult to articulate with words providing a vehicle for clients to explore things they might not feel comfortable discussing directly. Clients could channel internalised experiences and emotions into a representation of the unspeakable that was external to themselves.
- The CAT Program provided clients with a much-needed outlet to process their emotions and allowed them to tap into emotions they were unaware of.

<sup>3</sup> Gray, Deanne, 2022, *The Proven Efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies: What the Literature Tells Us*, ANZACATA Co. Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> Hu, J., Zhang, J., Hu, L., Yu, H., & Xu J., 2021, *Art therapy: A complementary treatment for mental disorders*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 686005, viewed at <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.686005>

## 4. Successful in affecting positive change

The most commonly reported barriers preventing clients from achieving their goals included mental health and trauma. Clients also mentioned financial, housing, health, and family issues. The evaluation demonstrated that the CAT Program was successful in addressing these barriers with 100% of clients interviewed indicating that the CAT Program had helped them to achieve their goals.

All clients (100%) also reported that things had changed for the better for them since being part of the CAT Program, that they were in a better position to seek support if they needed it and that their wellbeing was better at the time of the interview compared to before the CAT Program.

Clients reported that being part of the CAT Program had helped them to bring about positive change to their lives and circumstances with greater levels of empowerment reported, improved mental health, progress towards identity formation, increased self-esteem, safer and more connected to others, and enhanced wellbeing.

Clients suggested a dedicated fit for purpose arts studio, with access to their choice of art materials and equipment, and a wider variety of the arts-based approaches as opportunities to improve the CAT Program

## 5. Increased service access

The evaluation showed that the CAT Program increased access to a safe and affordable therapeutic service for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence and/or homelessness, who otherwise may not have been able to access services as follows:

- High number (18) of referral sources in place demonstrating wide reach.
- Despite high levels of demand, the lack of a wait list and ability to hold clients allowing them to commence in the CAT Program avoiding attrition caused by delayed service commencement.
- Ability to access the CAT Program free of charge.
- Ability for LGBTIQ+ young people from diverse locations across Melbourne and regionally to access the Program.
- Age range which is inclusive of young people aged 12-25 years, with flexibility demonstrated as required in response to need.

## 6. A key role in building sector capacity

The evaluation demonstrated the key role of the CAT Program in building sector capacity due to:

- FAN's leadership role in the sector, their established reputation for providing LGBTIQ+ inclusive and intersectional services and the impact of this unique service for LGBTIQ+ young people.
- Addressing a critical service gap for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence.
- The ability of the CAT Program team to work collaboratively with their sector partners to achieve positive outcomes for clients.
- FAN's active involvement in the Regional Family Violence Partnership working groups and the Eastern Homelessness Service System Alliance.
- Provision of secondary consults in LGBTIQ+ family violence to sector partners.

## 7. Demand and scalability

FAN was engaged in creative arts therapy prior to receiving the Paul Ramsay Grant and consistently delivered above their annually funded targets in response to sector needs exceeding their annual service target by 242% in 2023-24. While the CAT Program has increased FAN's capacity to respond to the recent rises in service demand, client numbers exceeded the annual target of 40 for the CAT Program with a total of 44 clients engaged at the time of the evaluation.

In recognising the value of the CAT Program and the demand for services, the potential to expand the program with the addition of another creative arts therapist to enable greater reach and flexibility was suggested by stakeholders.

## Recommendations

1. In response to high levels of demand and the lack of specialist services for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced domestic family violence and homelessness expand the program capacity and reach through funding for an additional creative arts therapeutic practitioner and the continued delivery of sessions on site at referring organisations.
2. Implement a single session approach as an important modification for the program to create a no-failure approach for clients.
3. Explore the potential for a dedicated fit for purpose arts space, with resources to support a wide range of arts-based approaches, materials, and artistic expressions.
4. Continue to advocate for young people including LGBTIQ+ and pregnant and parenting young people to ensure their experiences of family violence are recognised as Family Violence, including supporting the development of new MARAM tools to include an adolescent assessment.
5. Increase program promotion including regular program updates for referral partners about program progress, key learning, and good news stories to build program awareness and sector knowledge of the benefits of creative arts therapy for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced domestic family violence and homelessness.

## Background

Family Access Network (FAN) is a youth homelessness organisation that supports young people aged 15-25 experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and most young people who present to FAN are homeless due to family violence. FAN is a prescribed Risk Assessment Entity under Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and the Child Information Sharing Scheme. FAN facilitates a LGBTIQ+ Family Violence Therapeutic Recovery group and offers 1:1 creative arts therapy to young people who have experienced family violence. FAN is an active member of the Regional Family Violence Partnership and Eastern Homeless Services System Alliance working groups including Access and Equity, Children's and Young People and the Family Violence Therapeutic Working Group. FAN also offers sector capacity building and secondary consults in LGBTIQ+ family violence to upskill practitioners working in Melbourne's Outer Eastern Region.

In 2023, FAN was selected as a recipient of the 2023 Paul Ramsay Foundation's Specialist Domestic Family Violence Programs Grant. As a result, with the support of Australian Communities Foundation in partnership with Paul Ramsay Foundation, FAN was able to develop and deliver a therapeutic services program by appointing an art therapist.

### Lived Experience of Domestic and Family Violence

FAN engages people with Domestic Family Violence lived experience by:

- Employing paid staff with Domestic Family Violence lived experience
- Offering safe and non-judgemental individual and group therapeutic supports for under supported groups
- Participates in the Family Violence Information Sharing Schemes to reduce impact on clients of repeating their stories to multiple services
- Seeks feedback from people with lived experience on our services to inform quality improvement initiatives
- Engages with and listens to paid lived experience consultants via the Domestic Family Violence Children's and Young People's Working Group
- Advocates for young people including pregnant and parenting young people and LGBTIQ+ young people to ensure their experiences of family violence are recognised as Domestic Family Violence including reviewing development of new MARAM tools.

The CAT Program is an expansion of FAN's current services and was developed in response to the need for a therapeutic service response for LGBTIQ+ young people impacted by family violence and homelessness.

## Introduction

The CAT Program (CAT Program) involved the appointment of an Art Therapist at 0.9 EFT which was combined with the Family Safety Victoria Pathways to Resilience funding to create a 1.0 EFT role. This role provides specialist healing and recovery support to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Domestic Family Violence.

Under the umbrella of "Creative Arts Therapy," the FAN Art Therapist facilitates the group Talking with Pride and provides one on one CAT support to young people impacted by family violence and homelessness.

The funding period commenced on 1 July 2023 and ends on 30 June 2025.

Caz McLean, an independent consultant, was engaged to work in partnership with FAN to undertake an evaluation of the CAT Program between August and December 2024.

## Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the overall effectiveness of the CAT Program in achieving positive outcomes for young people impacted by family violence and homelessness including an assessment of the impact of the following changes:

4. Decreased wait times for young people impacted by Domestic and Family Violence to access therapeutic support.
5. Providing access to an LGBTIQ+ lived experience worker.
6. Providing no cost therapeutic support to people experiencing severe financial distress who would not have otherwise been able to afford support.

The evaluation also focused on identifying opportunities for improvement to help to evolve the CAT Program to better meet the needs of young people impacted by family violence and homelessness.

## Methodology

The **CAT Program Evaluation** methodology included:

4. **Promotion and Information Sharing** to ensure stakeholders had the information required to enable them to make an informed choice about participation and to prepare for the interviews.
5. **Consultation and Engagement** to seek feedback from the CAT Program team, Program participants and external stakeholders about the effectiveness of the Program and to identify opportunities for Program development including:
  - CAT Program Team Workshop with 3 FAN team members
  - 6 Program Participant Interviews
  - 4 Key Stakeholder Interviews
6. **Quantitative Data and Program Documentation** including the review of quantitative service use data to inform the development of a client profile and other relevant Program documentation.

## Approach

A collaborative approach was used for the evaluation informed by the principles of co-design as shown in Figure 1 below.

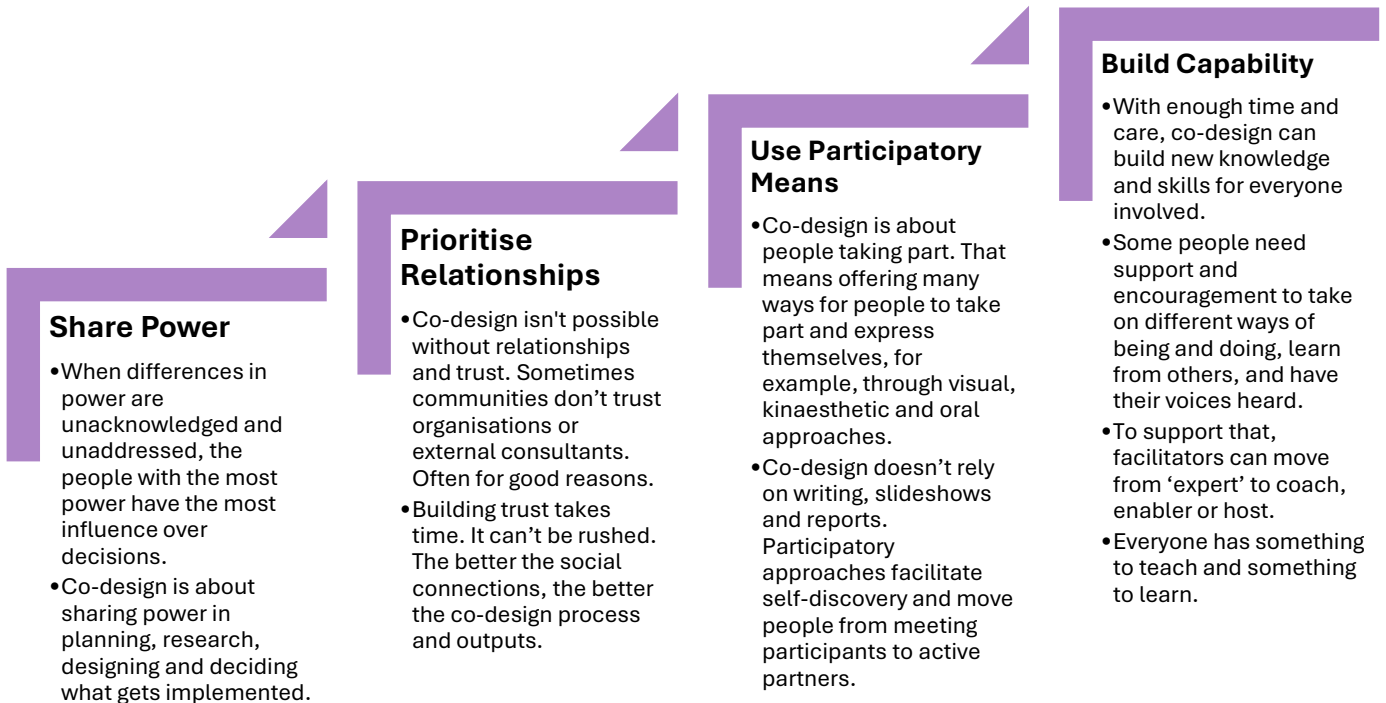


Figure 1 Evaluation Approach and the Principles of Co-Design

## Ethical Guidelines

In designing and conducting the **CAT Program Evaluation** the protection of participants' rights and wellbeing was at the forefront of decision making informed by the following ethical guidelines:

### Voluntary participation

Program clients were given the choice to participate in an interview as part of the evaluation process with the ability to opt out at any time. This was reiterated at the time of the interview when it was explained that the client may exit the interview at any time, with no reason needed.

### Informed consent

A consent form was provided for clients to sign along with information about the evaluation process to ensure they had a full understanding of what they were agreeing to. Included with the consent form was:

- A brief description of the evaluation and methods of engagement.
- The purpose of the interview.
- The types of questions to be asked.
- The location and length of the interview.
- How feedback would be used.
- How confidentiality would be maintained.

- Contact information for the FAN team as the sponsor.
- Support available to participate in the interview.
- Payment arrangements via a gift card.
- Reiteration of the participant's right to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty or reason.

## Anonymity

Anonymity means that clients are not identifiable in any way. To ensure anonymity feedback will only be used for the purpose of the evaluation to inform key findings and recommendations.

## Confidentiality

All information gathered during the evaluation will be kept confidential to protect the privacy of participants and to ensure their information is not disclosed to unauthorised individuals. To ensure confidentiality the following was undertaken:

- Identifying information was removed from the results.
- The results will be used for the purpose of the evaluation only and the details of participants will not be shared or discussed in public forums.
- Data will be deleted by the consultant on acceptance of the final report.

Participants were informed that confidentiality may be broken where it was considered necessary to protect those being interviewed from harm and to ensure the interviewer could fulfil their duty of care.

## Potential for harm

The potential for harm was a crucial factor in deciding whether clients should participate in an interview for the evaluation process. FAN undertook an ethical assessment of clients to identify the risk of harm and recommended clients for participation as appropriate. Supports were in place to mitigate the risk of harm including a contact number for clients and the interviewer to use to address any concerns raised through the interview.

## Fair payment

A gift voucher was provided as fair compensation for the clients' time (interviews were no longer than 20 mins) and contribution. Interviewees were provided with a PTV voucher to cover the cost of transport to in person interviews.

## The CAT Program Model

The CAT Program is an expansion of FAN's current operations through the creation of a new staff role of a Domestic Family Violence Creative Arts Therapist. This role provides specialist healing and recovery support to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Domestic Family Violence. Since being selected as a recipient of the Paul Ramsay Foundation grant, FAN has been able to expand service delivery for 1:1 therapeutic support to include LGBTIQ+ people statewide.

The staff role of Domestic Family Violence Creative Arts Therapist encompasses:

- Onsite and outreach LGBTIQ+ affirmative creative arts therapy services to LGBTIQ+ people, and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence
- Inclusive assessments of risk and protective factors including comprehensive risk assessments as appropriate
- Development and facilitation of group interventions related to family and intimate partner violence and well-being for a diverse range of young people
- Primary and secondary consultations for workers supporting LGBTIQ+ people
- Sector capacity building training in recognising and responding to LGBTIQ+ experiences of family violence
- Assisting with the design and implementation of evaluation activities, data collection, analysis and report writing as required.

The funding also supports:

- Employment of a specialist Creative Arts Therapist at a 0.9 appointment for 2 years plus staffing on costs
- Supervision costs for appointed staff member and support Domestic Family Violence professional development costs for fan team
- Travel expenses to deliver and access training
- Program materials including clinical texts and art supplies
- A portion of overhead costs to support co-location of staff role onsite.

## What is a Creative Arts Therapist?

Registered Creative Arts Therapists are university-trained in both creative and psychotherapeutic methods to help clients express themselves and improve wellbeing. Creative Arts Therapists are mental health professionals who use art, media, and creative processes (visual arts, writing, sculpting, drama, clay, sand, dance, music, and movement) to facilitate emotional expression, self-awareness, and self-regulation. Creative arts therapists are inherently focused on the affective outcomes for the people they encounter in professional settings.<sup>5</sup>

## Key Findings

The evaluation identified seven key themes that were critical in determining the CAT Program's effectiveness in providing healing and recovery support through FAN's Creative Arts Therapy Program to LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced Family Violence and demonstrated the achievement of the following changes:

1. Decreased wait times for young people impacted by Domestic and Family Violence to access therapeutic support.
2. Providing access to an LGBTIQ+ lived experience worker.
3. Providing no cost therapeutic support to people experiencing severe financial distress who would not have otherwise been able to afford support.

The seven key themes are discussed in this section of the report with the results demonstrating that the CAT Program:

4. Was effective in engaging with highly vulnerable young people.

<sup>5</sup> Gray, Deanne, 2022, *The Proven Efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies: What the Literature Tells Us*, ANZACATA Co. Ltd.

5. Young People felt seen and respected in the CAT Program.
6. Is an effective, evidence-based alternative to talk-based therapy.
7. Was successful in affecting positive change in the clients' lives.
8. Increased service access.
9. Plays a key role in building sector capacity.
10. Is responding to high levels of demand, thus providing the case for scalability.

### 8. Effective in engaging with highly vulnerable young people

The CAT Program commenced on 1 July 2023 and began client engagement in September 2023. At the end of the first year 44 clients were engaged exceeding the annual target of 40 for the CAT program.

Figure 2 shows the high level of engagement the CAT Program was able to achieve with the identified target populations with 82% of clients identifying as LGBTIQ+, 82% having experienced family violence and 71% of the clients having experienced homelessness. 38% of participants reported living with a disability or chronic health condition and 70% identified as neurodivergent. One client was a first nations young person, and two were young mums, young parents or pregnant. As an intersectional program it is important to note that clients do not fit into discreet categories with clients presenting which multiple and intersecting aspects of their identities and experiences.

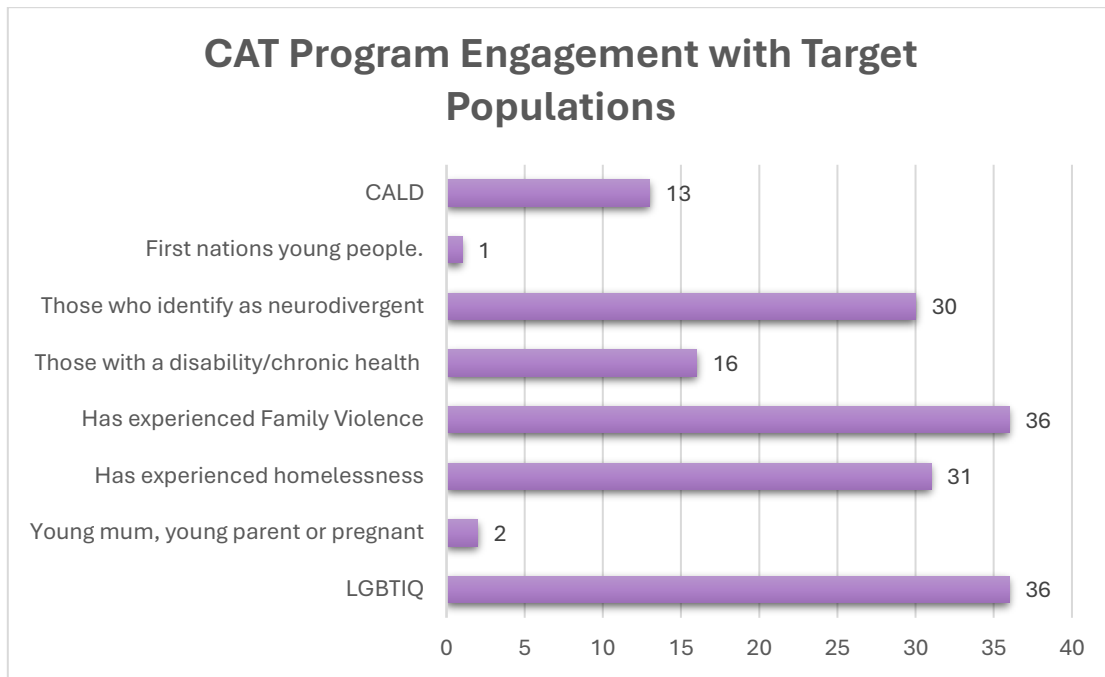


Figure 2 Engagement with Target Populations

Most clients identified as queer (11), with five clients identifying as pansexual, four identified as lesbian, two as bisexual and three as ace or asexual. One young person identified as gay and one as pansexual/demisexual. Six young people identified as LGBTIQ+ but had not specified their preferred identity descriptors. For seven clients their sexuality was unknown, one was working it out, and one preferred not to say. While the majority of clients identified as being part of the LGBTIQ+ community, five young people who accessed the program identified as heterosexual.

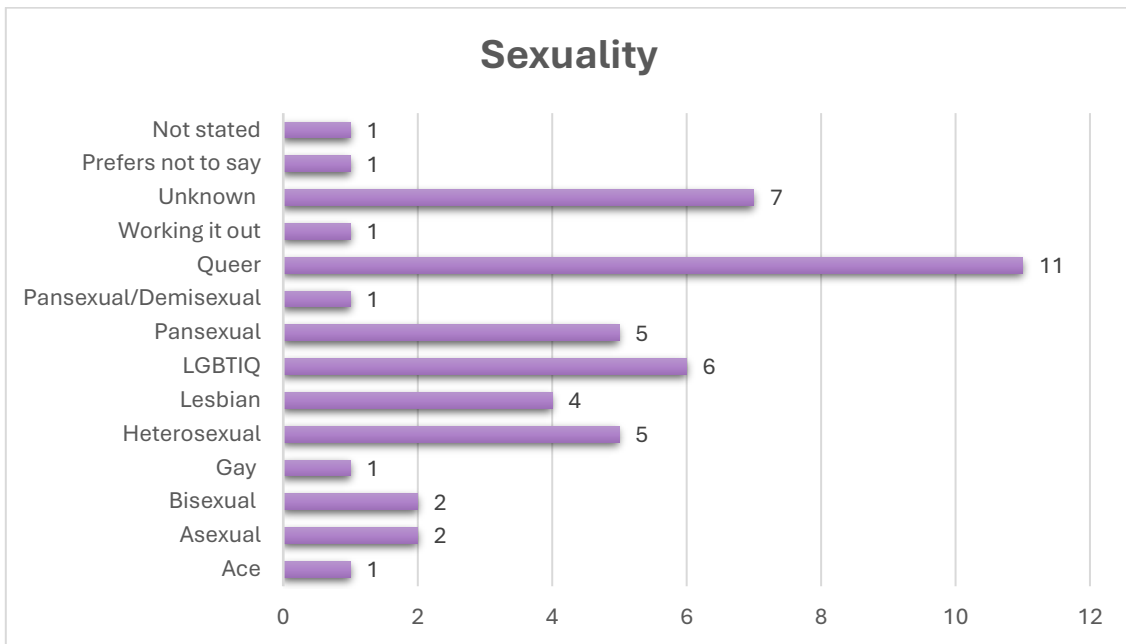


Figure 3 Clients Sexuality

Most clients identified as cis female (17), followed by seven TGD with identities not specified, five who identified as non-binary or trans men, and three gender fluid. One individual described their gender as “alien” and one individual as a Therianthrope.

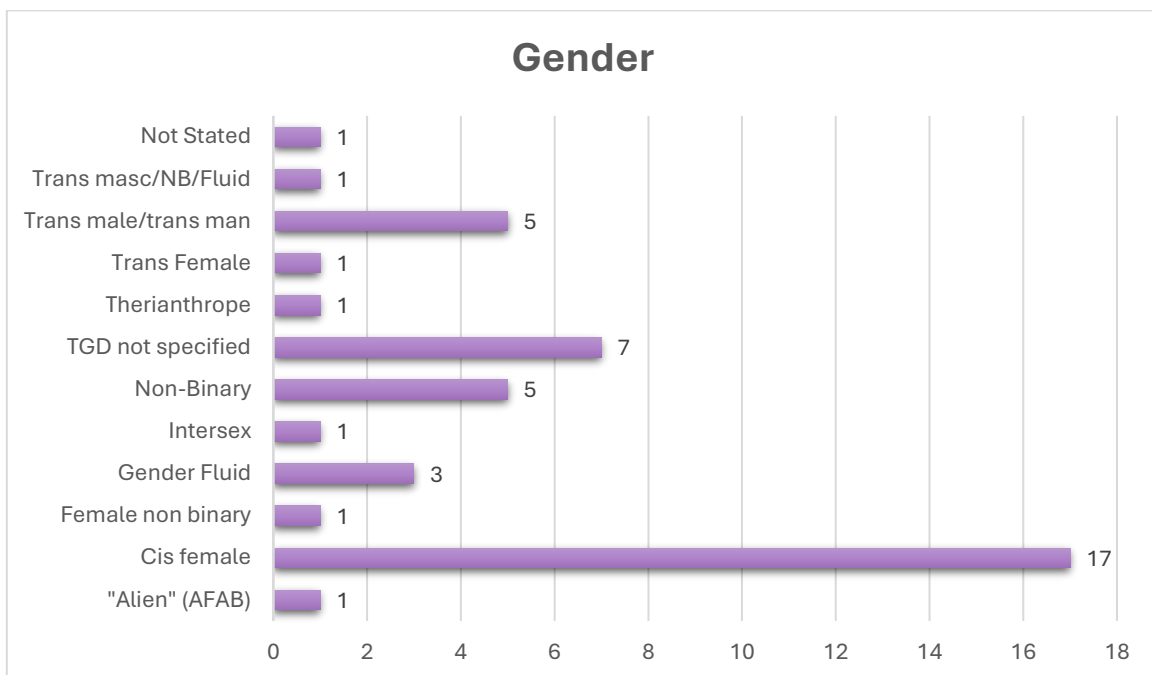


Figure 4 Clients Gender

Figures two, three and four above highlight the rich diversity found within the client group, which the research shows<sup>6</sup> is also evident within the LGBTIQ+ community. This diversity demonstrates the importance of recognising the distinct groups that make up the LGBTIQ+ community, each with their own unique

<sup>6</sup> Lay, Y., Leonard, W., Horsley, P., Parsons., *Summary Report: Primary Prevention of Domestic Family Violence against people from LGBTI Communities*, Our Watch, available at [Primary prevention of Domestic Family Violence against people from LGBTI communities \(apo.org.au\)](https://www.apo.org.au/primary-prevention-of-domestic-family-violence-against-people-from-lgbti-communities)

experiences, needs, and identities, which, as reported by all stakeholders, was a key strength of the CAT Program.

Complex presentations including a combination of mental health, alcohol and drug misuse, disability, neurodiversity, and trauma were reported as common amongst clients. Creative arts therapy was acknowledged by all stakeholders for its benefit for clients with complex presentations who are highly vulnerable. The wide range of techniques available to support clients to process and overcome traumatic events was seen to be highly effective in engaging with this vulnerable group, and where more traditional therapies had often failed to engage, the CAT Program was seen to be highly effective in engaging with this client cohort.

Importantly, creative arts therapy does not ask clients directly to talk about what is going on in their lives, but rather creates a safe environment where clients can communicate and process their experiences indirectly using artistic methods of their choosing. By giving clients the choice about the methods and subject of their artist expression clients were able to reclaim a level of power and control over their lives.

The program was also acknowledged by stakeholders as playing an important role in removing barriers and reconnecting clients with the people around them.

While the techniques are creative, there is no requirement for clients to be artistic or to have prior artistic experience, which stakeholders indicated was appealing to clients. As a result the CAT Program was able to cater to a wide range of individuals with distinct needs, experiences and interests.

Stakeholders acknowledged that the CAT Program was unique in its ability to engage vulnerable clients who often had little stability in their lives. As reported, stability is often a condition for accessing services, that require clients to have housing and minimal chaos in their lives, standard characteristics for these types of vulnerable clients. In response to the potential for harm amongst these highly vulnerable clients, the therapeutic space within the CAT Program was used to create and foster stability where this was absent in their lives. This meant that referring organisations were able to offer the program to clients who otherwise would have limited or no suitable Family Violence therapeutic options available to them.

The CAT Program's willingness to address the gap in the provision of services for young people who have experienced family violence and homelessness through a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness was acknowledged by stakeholders.

Accepting that family violence does not appear in a person's life as a single issue and combining this understanding with a willingness to work through each client's experience on a case-by-case basis was seen as an important strength and evidence of the CAT Programs effectiveness in both engaging with this cohort and supporting positive change in their lives.

The CAT Program is designed around attendance at ten sessions however as Figure 5 shows, client attendance at a single session was the highest (25% of clients) with only two clients attending ten or more sessions at the time of the evaluation. The greatest number of sessions attended by a single client was 14, followed by 11 and 9 sessions attended by a one client each respectively, with a total of 14 clients attending more than one session, but less than 10.

The high number of clients (25%) attending a single session suggests that a single session model may be an important modification to create a no-failure approach for clients and to better align with the overall patterns of program attendance. A single session model would allow for a planned exit in the first session, rather than expecting clients to return for multiple sessions in order to complete their service plan.

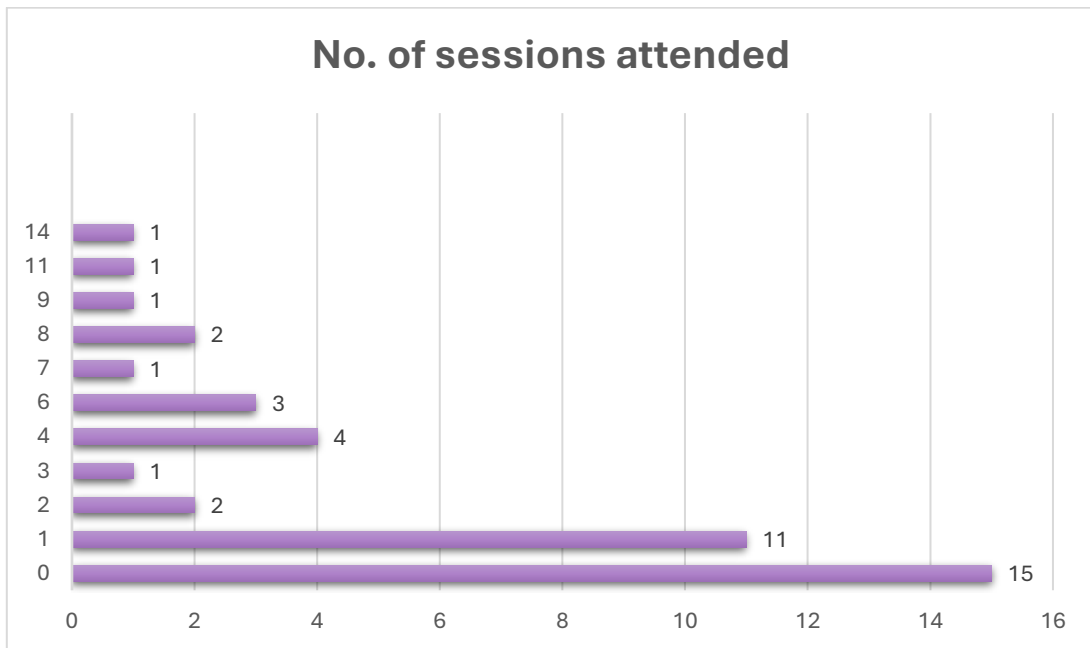


Figure 5 Number of Sessions Attended by Clients

Multiple cancellations can be common and are anticipated due to the complexity clients are living with, as is a lack of timeliness, which stakeholders indicated were accepted without question and/or judgement by the CAT Program. The high-level of flexibility used by the CAT Program was seen by stakeholders as both necessary and effective for this client group.

Figure 6 shows the point of closure for clients in the CAT Program with 20 clients (45%) still active at the time of the evaluation with their service plans in progress, with nine clients (20%) exiting the program on completion of their service plan. In other words the CAT program was successful in maintaining engagement with 65% of clients at the time of the evaluation. Five clients (11%) had exited the program before completion of their service plan.

For eight client's intake was attempted, but they either withdrew (4), ceased contact with the Program (2), did not engage (1) or were referred to an alternative program (1).

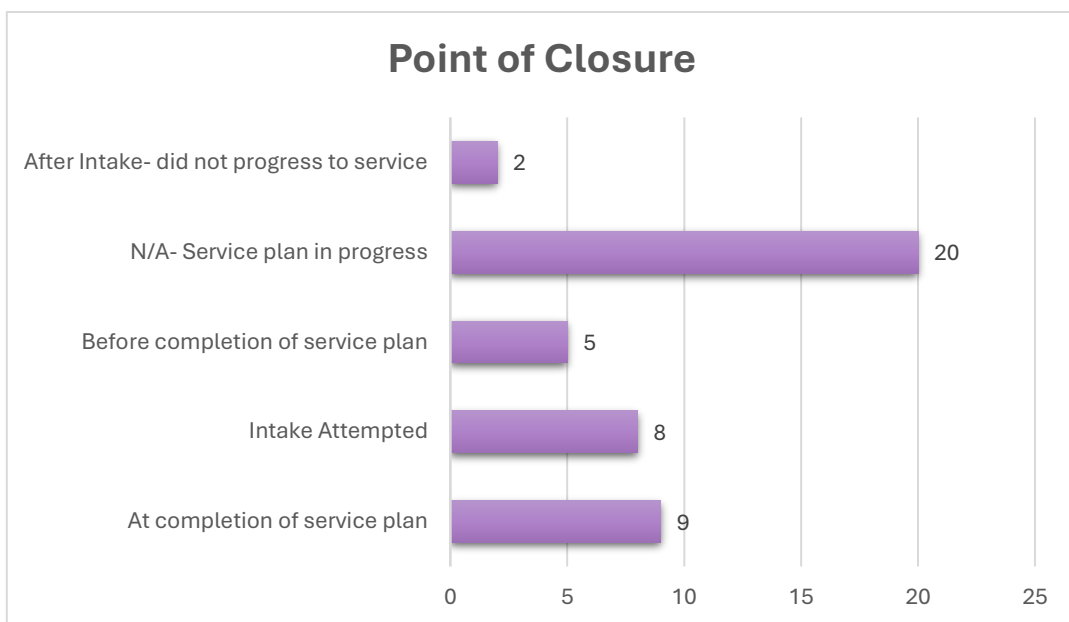


Figure 6 Point of Closure

## Verbatim Comments

### Partners

“Art therapy is [widely] known for its benefits for clients experiencing anxiety and family violence with lots of techniques to overcome traumatic events.”

“The program is inclusive to this group who are vulnerable.”

“They [the Program team] are not rigid, [a key strength with this client group].”

## 9. Clients felt seen and respected

Stakeholders indicated that vulnerable clients are often wary of services due to negative past experiences including discrimination, othering, deadnaming, service denial and ineligibility. As a result, these young people can be unwilling to talk to or access mental health services. In contrast, the relational and non-directive approach of the CAT Program was seen by stakeholders as highly effective in building strong relationships of trust between the Creative Arts Therapist and the clients. This was acknowledged as being particularly important in therapeutic work and had enabled long term engagement with clients. Figure 5 in the previous section highlights this long-term engagement with one client attending as many as 14 sessions, another 11 and another nine sessions.

The relational and non-directive approach began at the point of intake with 100% of clients interviewed reporting that the CAT Program was easy to access due to:

- The high level of support to participate provided by the Creative Arts Therapist commencing at the point of contact and continuing through the referral process and engagement.
- The useful information provided about the Program upfront; and the
- Seamless referral process experienced for existing FAN clients.

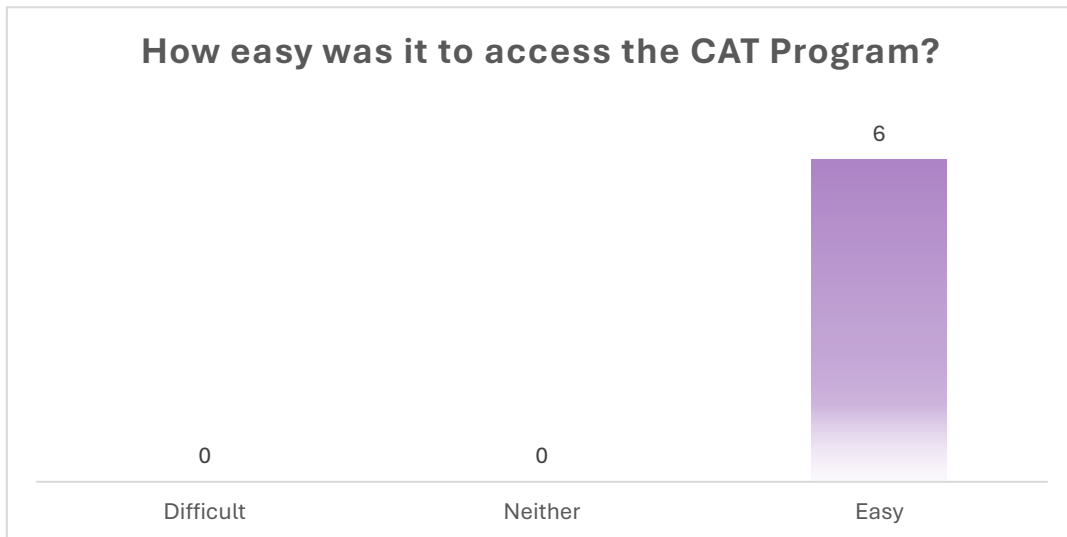


Figure 7 Ease of Access

The supportive intake process was reported by stakeholders as playing an important part in ensuring clients felt seen and respected including:

- The willingness of the Creative Arts Therapist to meet potential clients at referring organisations sites to facilitate their participation in the CAT Program.

- A warmer intake process compared to other mental health services which was seen as particularly valuable.
- The effort required to engage these highly vulnerable and disengaged clients and the extra work the Creative Arts Therapist undertook to ensure the successful uptake of a place.

Stakeholders reported receiving positive feedback from clients about their experience of the CAT Program with 100% of clients interviewed feeling a lot of respect for who they were as shown in Figure 8. The trauma informed, Family Violence expertise and LGBTIQA+ inclusive practice played an essential role in fostering this sense of respect experienced by clients. In addition, clients valued being around others with similar lived experience and acknowledged the inclusive environment created by the CAT Program.

Clients also reported the importance of the correct use of pronouns by the CAT Program and describing clients in the way they describe themselves as playing a significant part in fostering feelings of respect.

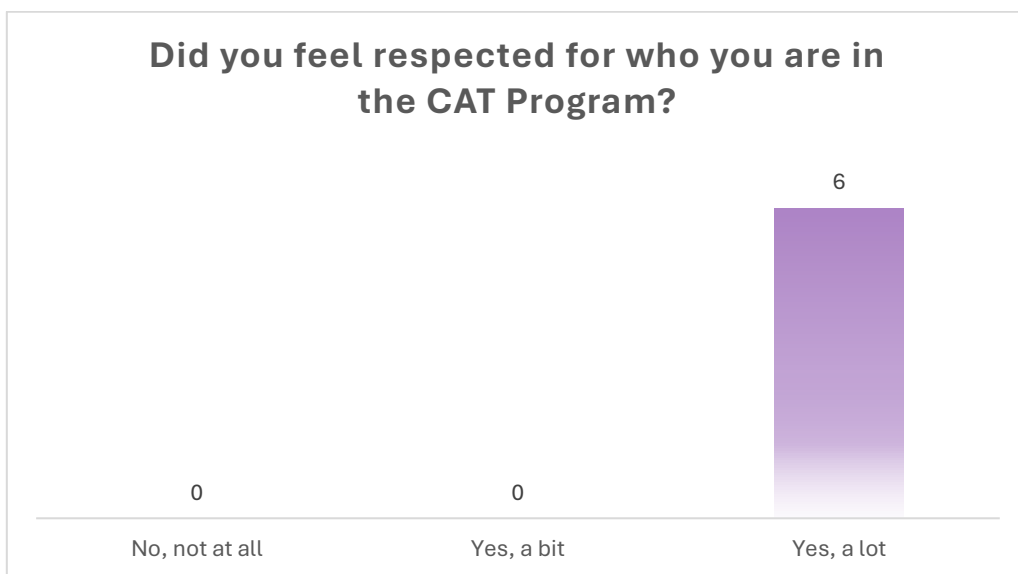


Figure 8 Level of respect felt in the CAT Program

The non-clinical nature of the CAT Program, and the accepting and non-judgmental environment that was welcoming and inclusive, all helped to create a feeling amongst clients that they could say anything to the Creative Arts Therapist, who appeared to be free of preconceived views about right or wrong. As a result, the CAT Program was experienced as a safe space for clients to be themselves.

Clients valued the client led approach, with both the therapist and the artwork directed by the client. This meant clients were able to choose what they focused on in the session and were able to gain support by engaging in art as a coping mechanism to help them to express their emotions and experience through art.

Creative arts therapy was acknowledged by clients as supporting identity formation and being particularly impactful for young people working to uncover and define their identities. Importantly, the creation of their identity as an artist and an individual enabled them to become *more than* their experience of family violence.

In addition, FAN’s commitment to ensuring the client voice is heard was acknowledged and contributed to clients feeling seen and respected. An example to highlight this was offered by Uniting in relation to the Pathways to Resilience Brochure Review with FAN facilitating a specific focus for young people in the review to ensure their perspectives informed the revised brochure. Stakeholders described this as a culture of seeking the client voice and client input, another important strengths of FANs approach.

## Verbatim Comments

### Partners

*“Pleasantly surprised by how supportive the intake process is.”*

*“Ability to engage young people who mental health services have found very difficult to engage with.”*

### Clients

*“I had an intake meeting and was referred over - I didn’t have to do much, which was good as I’m not great with things I’m uncertain with – it made a difference having the support.”*

*“[The Creative Arts Therapist] genuinely listens really well. I don’t feel like anything I could do would ever be wrong”*

*“Always safe.”*

*“Everyone is so welcoming. They ask for pronouns and say my pronouns.”*

*“My individuality and experience have been acknowledged and I’m given the space to express myself freely.”*

*“Very good and understanding and caring.”*

*“A safe space. People don’t judge me for how I identify with myself.”*

## 10. An effective, evidence-based alternative to talk-based therapy

There is a growing evidence base that demonstrates the efficacy of Creative Arts Therapy to improve both mental and physical health with the research highlighting the positive outcomes for people experiencing stress, trauma, depression, and anxiety<sup>7</sup>. This evidence was validated by stakeholders and clients with feedback demonstrating the positive outcomes achieved by creative arts therapy as an alternative to talk therapy due to the opportunity provided for non-verbal expression particularly when articulating experiences was difficult for clients<sup>8</sup>.

Stakeholders acknowledged Creative Arts Therapy as an effective and evidence-based alternative to talk-based therapy suggesting that some clients can find talk-therapy intimidating, particularly those with trauma and associated mental health issues. Stakeholders reported that the CAT Program was less confronting for these clients and provides a method for them to process their experiences in their own way. This was validated by the experience of clients with several reporting gaining little from their experience of talk-therapy. Clients described being able to express their feelings through art as the most valuable part of the CAT Program.

Importantly, the arts aspect of the CAT Program was appealing to those clients who described themselves as artists as well as those who might not, all preferring the indirect approach, which gave them something tangible to focus on while processing the impacts of trauma.

One client described the challenge they experienced connecting with emotions and trauma-based issues: often being overwhelmed by their emotions, which made it difficult to function and meant that talk therapy had offered little value for them.

The CAT Program provided clients with a safe space to process emotions and experiences that could be difficult to articulate with words. Clients reported that the creative process had helped them gain a deeper self-

<sup>7</sup> Gray, Deanne, 2022, *The Proven Efficacy of Creative Arts Therapies: What the Literature Tells Us*, ANZACATA Co. Ltd.

<sup>8</sup> Hu, J., Zhang, J., Hu, L., Yu, H., & Xu J., 2021, *Art therapy: A complementary treatment for mental disorders*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 686005, viewed at <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.686005>

awareness which had been incredibly therapeutic, with creative arts therapy providing a vehicle for clients to explore things they might not feel comfortable discussing directly. This indirect approach allowed the clients to channel internalised experiences and emotions into a representation of the unspeakable that was external to themselves.

In contrast to talk therapy, creative arts therapy was described by clients as providing distance between the client and their experiences and/or emotions, which made the CAT Program less confronting. One client described creative arts therapy as a release, as if they were leaving their emotions/experience with the art.

One client who had participated in creative arts therapy in the past described the CAT Program as the best creative arts therapy they had ever experienced. Another client described their struggles with verbal communication and said that through art they were able to express themselves and show what they were feeling when they had difficulty putting it into words.

One client described creative arts therapy as feeling more therapeutic compared to the intensity of talk therapy. They described their mind going blank in talk therapy and the difficulty they experienced translating emotions into words.

Clients described being able to express their feelings through art, which felt less overwhelming than trying to explain things verbally. Another talked about being a visual and hands on person, so creative arts therapy was helpful for them as it provided a way to express themselves in a more visual way.

Clients described how difficult it was to talk about their feelings, while creative arts therapy provided them with a much easier way to express themselves. Creating art helped clients communicate things that were difficult to articulate.

When asked whether creative arts therapy was more helpful for clients than other types of therapy, most clients found creative arts therapy more helpful, however others indicated that all types of therapy have their place and can be equally as helpful depending on which parts of mental health was the focus. One client indicated that creative arts therapy was useful for trauma and talk therapy better for day-to-day life struggles.

Another client found creative arts therapy more helpful in managing their anxiety and another described creative arts therapy as being the most helpful as it provided a way for them to express their feelings in ways that talking therapy did not, providing a much-needed outlet to process their emotions.

Another client had not expected to connect so deeply with the process. They were surprised at how quickly art allowed them to tap into emotions they were unaware of, and how healing it was to see their feelings reflected in their artwork. Invitations from the therapist about what they might like to do with their feelings and experiences also enabled the clients to access a level of insight they had not anticipated.

## Verbatim Comments

### Clients

*“Words are hard. It’s easier to just draw how you feel with intention rather than saying words.”*

*“I’ve done so much therapy and haven’t got anything out of talking about it.”*

*“I have trouble connecting with emotions and trauma-based stuff which means I don’t get a lot out of talk therapy.”*

*“Both of them have their place – both are equally helpful.”*

*“I’ve found it more helpful with anxiety over the last few months.”*

*“Art Therapy allows me to express my feelings in ways that talking therapy didn't.”*

**Partners**

*“Art therapy is really appealing to some clients as opposed to talk based therapy.”*

*“Seems like a really good alternative for clients who find the talk-based therapy a bit intimidating.”*

**11. Successful in affecting positive change**

The most commonly reported barriers preventing clients from achieving their goals included mental health and trauma. Clients also mentioned financial, housing, health, and family issues. The evaluation demonstrated that the CAT Program was successful in addressing in these barriers.

The referral and intake processes enabled therapeutic goal setting with 100% of clients interviewed indicating that the CAT Program had helped them to achieve their goals (Figure 9). All clients also reported that things had changed for the better for them since being part of the CAT Program (Figure 10), that they were in a better position to seek support if they needed it (Figure 11) and that their wellbeing was better at the time of the interview compared to before the CAT Program (Figure 12).

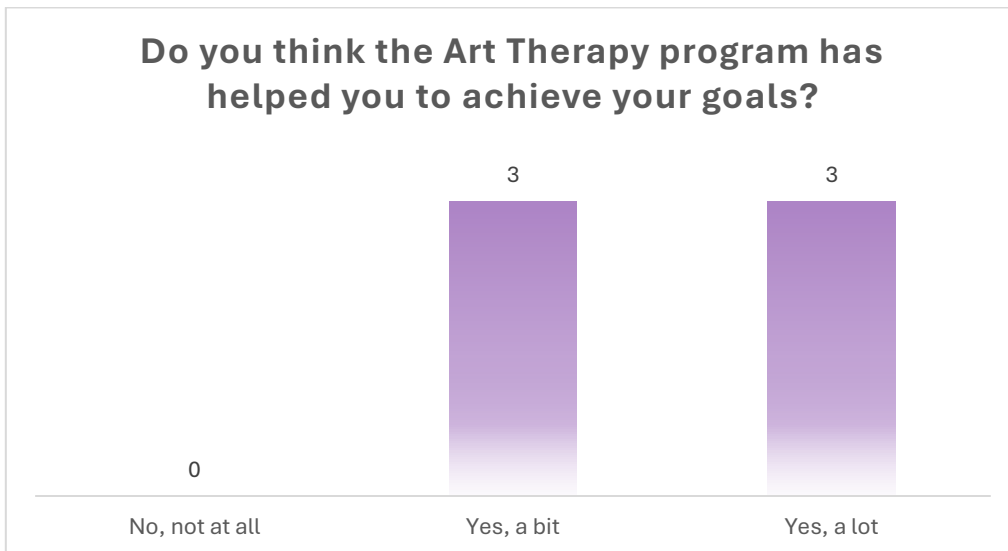


Figure 9 Enabling Client Goals

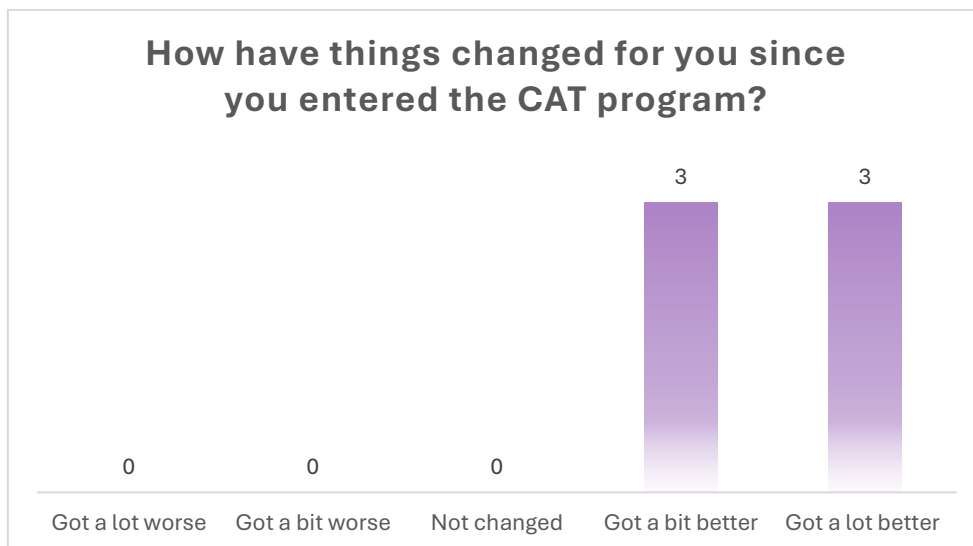


Figure 10 Change affected since entering the CAT Program

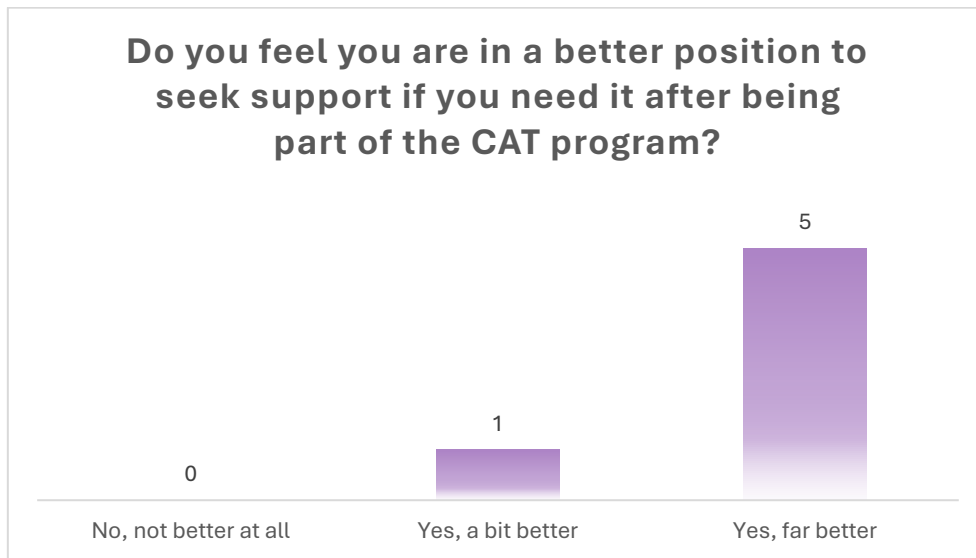


Figure 11 Ability to seek help after being part of the CAT Program

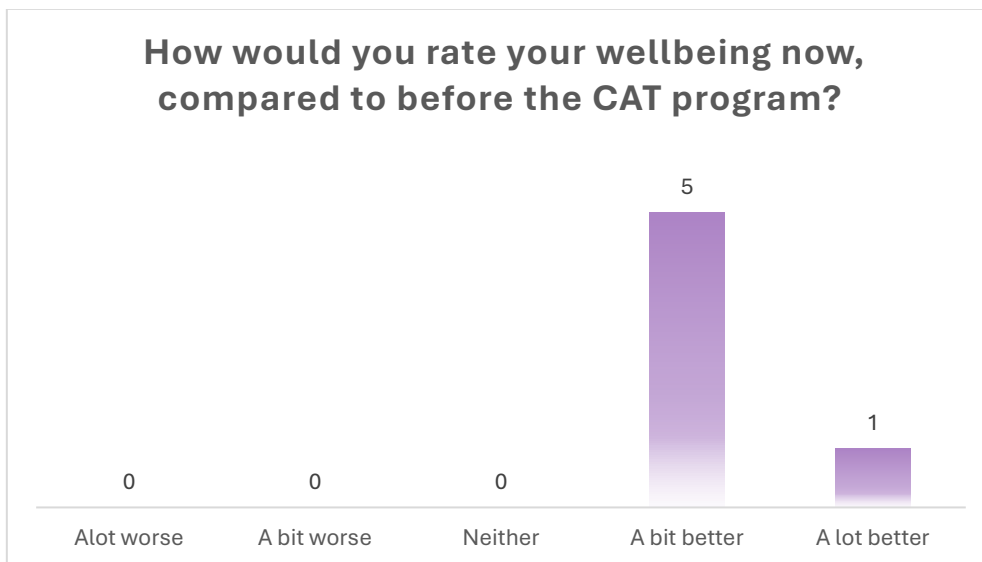


Figure 12 Wellbeing rating compared to before the CAT Program

Clients reported that being part of the CAT Program had helped them to bring about positive change to their lives and circumstances with greater levels of empowerment reported, improved mental health, progress towards identity formation, increased self-esteem, safer and more connected to others, and enhanced wellbeing.

Area of their life	Positive change
<b>Empowerment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the first places the client has felt comfortable and has since started their own social group for people with similar mental health issues.</li> <li>• Helped them stand up to the PUV.</li> <li>• More empowered in daily life.</li> <li>• Better at advocating for their own needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Mental Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better at managing their mental health.</li> <li>• Improved overall mental health.</li> <li>• Increased motivation.</li> </ul>

Area of their life	Positive change
<b>Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A greater sense of self.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more positive view about themselves.</li> </ul>
<b>Safer and more connected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More supported, less alone, and less stressed.</li> <li>• Reduced feelings of isolation.</li> <li>• They feel safer and more connected.</li> <li>• A stronger sense of inclusion, and progress in building social connections</li> <li>• Better social skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noticeable impact on their overall wellbeing</li> <li>• Better at coping with family issues.</li> </ul>

Table 1 Positive changes to client Circumstances

Clients suggested a dedicated fit for purpose arts studio, with access to their choice of art materials and equipment, and a wider variety of the arts-based approaches as opportunities to improve the CAT Program

## Verbatim Comments

### Clients

*“I feel more supported less alone, and less stressed than I did before the program. It's had a noticeable impact on my overall well-being.”*

*“The Program has helped me feel more empowered in my daily life. I've also become better at managing my mental health, and I feel safer and more connected. It's given me a stronger sense of inclusion, and I've made progress in building social connections.”*

*“Helped me have a positive stance about myself. Helped me stand up to someone who has emotionally abused me.”*

*“Helped me cope with a lot of stuff – family stuff. Helped with accepting name change stuff.”*

*“The Creative Arts Therapist is very supportive and very good at what they do – a very calming safe person to be around.”*

## 12. Increased service access

The evaluation showed that the CAT Program increased access to a safe and affordable therapeutic service for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence and/or homelessness and who otherwise may not have been able to access services.

Stakeholders reported a lack of options for LGBTIQ+ young people experiencing family violence and homelessness in the eastern region as a key barrier for the target group. One stakeholder interviewed speculated as to where LGBTIQ+ young people would go if the CAT Program did not exist.

Figure 13 shows the high number (18) of referral sources in place demonstrating the wide impact of the CAT Program with ten different organisations making one referral each and both Uniting and Monash Youth Services making six referrals to the CAT Program. Most referrals were made internally to FAN (10) and through Pathways to Resilience (8).

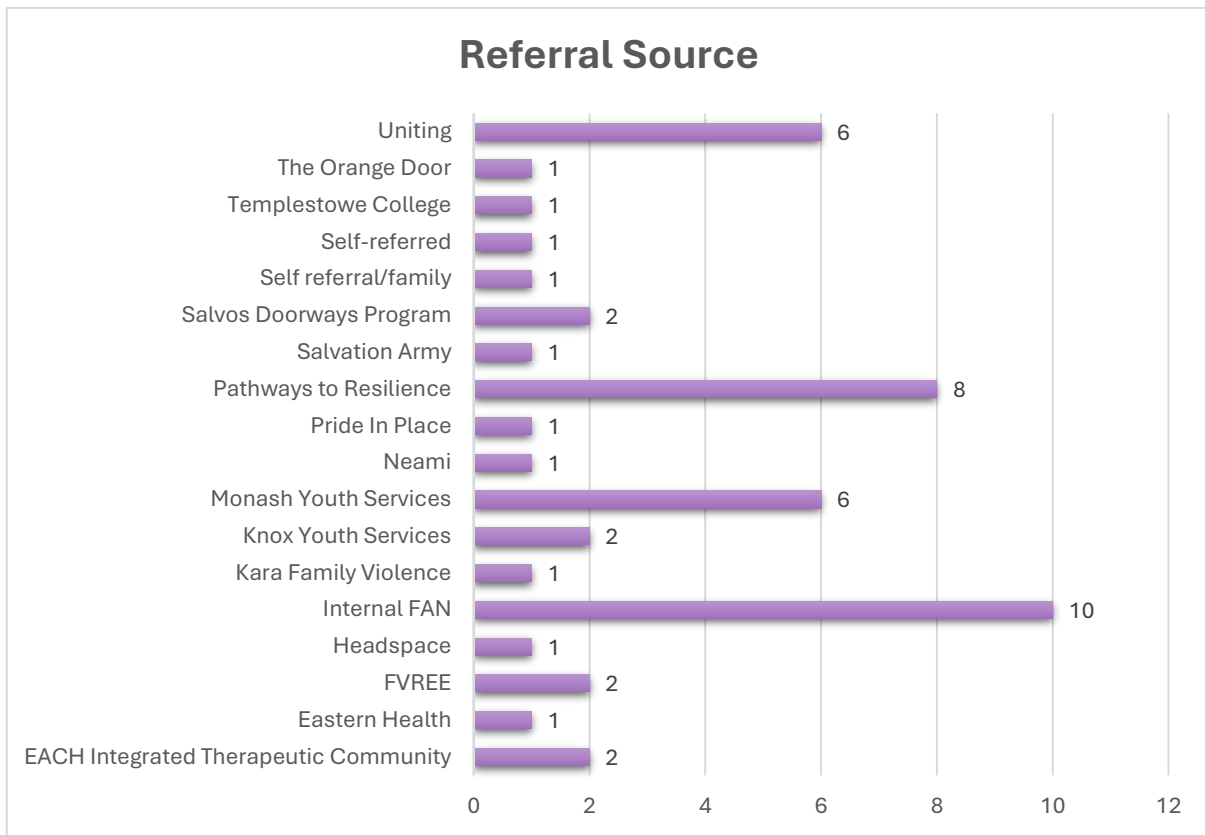


Figure 13 Referral Source

The short wait list was recognised by stakeholders as important to increasing the accessibility of the CAT Program. As the client numbers increased the CAT Program was able to hold clients to avoid waitlists, allowing clients to commence work with the Creative Arts Therapist immediately, avoiding attrition caused by delayed service commencement.

For young people who have experienced family violence and homelessness, and particularly those from the LGBTIQ+ community and young parents, cost is a significant barrier to accessing support. Being able to access the CAT Program free of charge was an important aspect in increasing service access for this cohort.

While the techniques used by the CAT Program are creative, as mentioned earlier in this report, there is no requirement for clients to be artistic or to have prior artistic experience, which stakeholders indicated made the program more accessible.

Importantly the CAT Program is not postcode specific for LGBTIQ+ young people, making it accessible to those from diverse locations across Melbourne and regionally. One client reported that despite moving to regional Victoria they were willing to travel the long distance to continue accessing the CAT Program due the value it offered them. In a constrained service environment with a shortage of programs for young people experiencing homeless and family violence, this flexibility was highly valued by the stakeholders interviewed and was seen as a key success of the program in increasing accessibility and addressing a service gap for this cohort.

This flexibility was further highlighted by the age range which is inclusive of young people aged 12-25 years. This was recognised as strengthening Pathways to Resilience offerings which caters to clients of 15-25 years. By allowing greater flexibility the CAT Program was able to reach younger clients extending the scope to include a young person aged 11 years as shown in Figure 14. This flexibility is significant when considered within the context of program shortages and services for this cohort.

Figure 14 also shows that most clients were aged 19 years (8), followed by six clients aged 23 years and five clients 20 and 18 years, respectively. The oldest clients were 24 years (4).

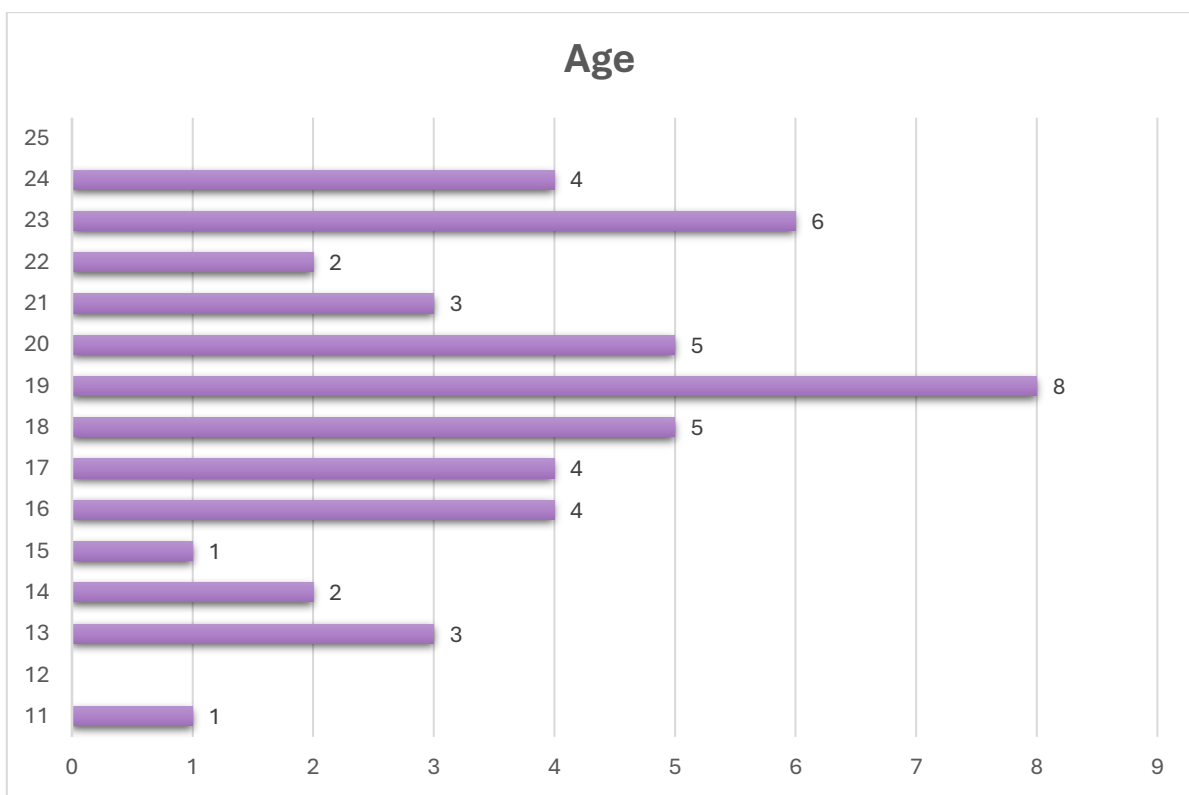


Figure 14 Age of Clients

### 13. A key role in building sector capacity

FAN’s strong reputation and their positive contribution to the sector was celebrated by stakeholders. As a leader in the sector, the CAT Program has enabled FAN to expand their services to have a greater impact in response to client needs.

The CAT Program was acknowledged by stakeholders interviewed for its role in increasing sector capacity and addressing a critical service gap for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced family violence.

FAN’s established reputation for providing LGBTIQ+ inclusive and intersectional services was acknowledged, with stakeholders reporting the value of the CAT Program and value accorded by FAN offering this unique service for LGBTIQ+ young people.

The ability of FAN to work collaboratively was recognised by stakeholders, with regular attendance at governance and intake meetings for clients.

The CAT Program teams active involvement in the Regional Family Violence Partnership working groups was acknowledged as was the FAN CEO’s involvement in the Eastern Homelessness Service System Alliance.

Being prepared to provide secondary consults in LGBTIQ+ family violence to upskill practitioners working in Melbourne’s Outer Eastern Region about family violence and homelessness and the unique experience of LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people clients was also recognised by stakeholders.

Key FAN and CAT Program personnel were acknowledged for being easily contactable and responsive, which was valued by stakeholders.

**Verbatim Comments**

**Partners**

*“Really appreciate the willingness of FAN running and offering a service for local services and being prepared to provide consultative advice.”*

*“FAN is recognised for inclusive LGBTIQ+ and have a great reputation in that regard. There are no other services that are specific to LGBTIQ+ young people.”*

**14. Demand and scalability**

FAN was engaged in creative arts therapy prior to receiving the Paul Ramsay Grant, consistently delivering above their annually funded targets in response sector need as shown in Table 2 below.

Year	% by which target was exceeded	Annual Target
2023-24	242%	10
2022-23	170%	10
2021-22	229%	7

*Table 2: FAN Annual Program Targets prior to Paul Ramsay Grant*

The CAT Program has increased FAN’s capacity to respond to the recent rises in service demand, where previously referrals had exceeded capacity.

Despite CAT Program design taking around three months to complete and implement, client numbers exceeded the annual target of 40 with a total of 44 clients engaged at the time of the evaluation.

The CAT Program experienced a significant influx of referrals between November and December 2023 (six in 24 hours) which was considered indicative of high levels of demand for limited therapeutic services in the region. This was similar to anecdotal reports made by other agencies regarding the launch of a therapeutic program in late 2023 which required them to close their books on the same day.

Strong interest and support for the CAT Program was expressed by all stakeholders interviewed.

In recognising the value of the CAT Program and the demand for services, the potential to expand the program with the addition of another creative arts therapist to enable greater reach and flexibility was suggested by stakeholders. An additional creative arts therapist would also assist in providing professional peer support to

enhance self-care and therapeutic practice and help to mitigate the potential challenges and the personal impact of working with such a highly vulnerable cohort such and the minority stress that can often be experienced in a single practitioner model.

Stakeholders acknowledged that the CAT Program team had successfully delivered sessions from the Uniting site, which was highly valued. Continuing this approach to extend the reach of the CAT Program into the future was suggested.

Stakeholders indicated receiving valuable information about the CAT Program early on when it was first launched, including information explaining the referral process. Providing regular updates to stakeholders about the CAT Program status was suggested to ensure the continued promotion of program availability, sharing progress and good news stories.

## Verbatim Comments

### Partners

*“Capacity to further expand on availability and the days they would be available – to be more flexible.”*

*“Funding to have more than one art therapist - Increase resourcing.”*

### Clients

*“I really appreciate FAN.”*

*“I just want to express how grateful I am for this Program. It's had such a positive impact on my life, and I hope more young people can access it.”*

## Recommendations

6. In response to high levels of demand and the lack of specialist services for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced domestic family violence and homelessness expand the program capacity and reach through funding for an additional creative arts therapeutic practitioner and the continued delivery of sessions on site at referring organisations.
7. Implement a single session approach as an important modification for the program to create a no-failure approach for clients.
8. Explore the potential for a dedicated fit for purpose arts space, with resources to support a wide range of arts-based approaches, materials, and artistic expressions.
9. Continue to advocate for young people including LGBTIQ+ and pregnant and parenting young people to ensure their experiences of family violence are recognised as Family Violence, including supporting the development of new MARAM tools to include an adolescent assessment.
10. Increase program promotion including regular program updates for referral partners about program progress, key learning, and good news stories to build program awareness and sector knowledge of the benefits of creative arts therapy for LGBTIQ+ young people and pregnant/parenting young people who have experienced domestic family violence and homelessness.