

Annual Report 2025-2026

Sexual Assault Support Service

Acknowledgement

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) acknowledges the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples as the traditional and original custodians of Lutruwita. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, recognising that they possess deep knowledge, traditions and culture that can enrich our future. We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledge the effects of sexual violence through colonisation that continues to cause harm today.

We acknowledge and extend deep gratitude to victim-survivors whose expertise and wisdom guide our path forward in addressing and preventing sexual violence. Their insights shape our strategies and responses. Additionally, we honour and remember victims who are no longer with us. In their memory we commit to profound and meaningful change.

Support

This document contains references to sexual harm – including child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours. We encourage readers to exercise care as they engage with the content. If the information in this document raises concern or distress, the following services can be contacted for support:

Statewide Sexual Assault Support Line
24/7 support line for people impacted by sexual violence
1800 697 877

1800RESPECT
24/7 counselling and information support for domestic, family and sexual violence
1800 737 732 / SMS 0458 737 732

13Yarn
24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
13 92 76

Kids Helpline
24/7 support for children and young people aged 5-25
1800 55 1800

Lifeline
24/7 crisis support line
13 11 14

Generative AI disclosure: *Generative AI was used to assist with drafting and editing this report. SASS staff reviewed, verified and approved all content and retain responsibility for its accuracy and integrity. No client information or other confidential or sensitive information was entered into the AI tool to create this report.*

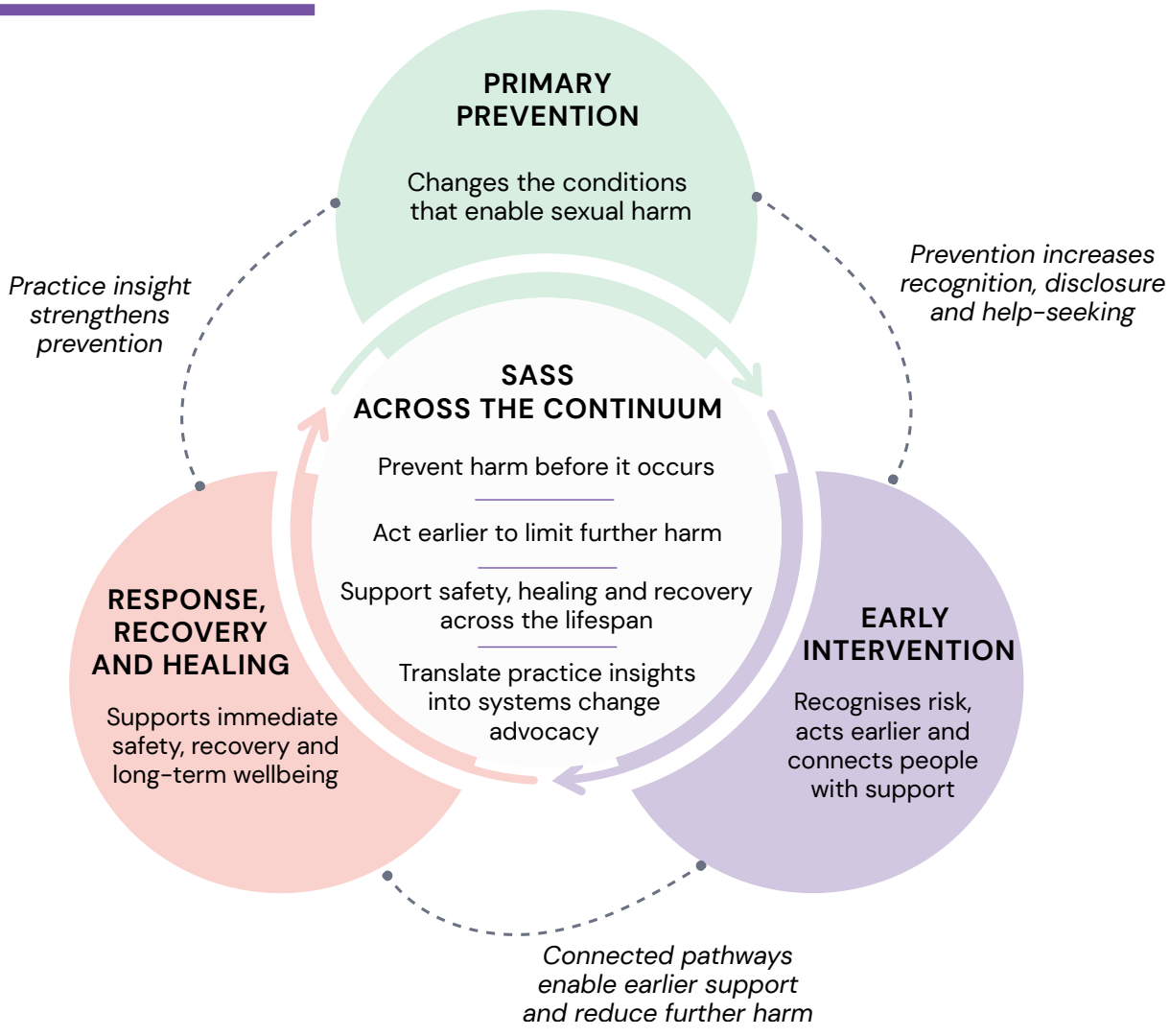
About SASS

Since 1986, Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) has been a specialist, community-based organisation working to prevent sexual violence and support people affected by it in Tasmania.

Our work spans primary prevention, early intervention, crisis response, recovery and systems change. We provide therapeutic and practical support to people affected by sexual violence, specialist intervention for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours, and education with schools, workplaces and communities. Evidence and insights from this work inform our contributions to policy and decisions about prevention, support and justice.

Our approach is trauma-informed, evidence-based and centred on victim-survivors. We respect each person's dignity, circumstances and choices, while working with families, services and government to help create safer communities for all.

A connected system



From our Chair



Audrey Mills
Chair, SASS Board

As SASS celebrates its 40th anniversary in November 2026 we recognise four decades of specialist support advocacy and leadership to preventing and responding to sexual violence in Tasmania. We honour the people who established this service and those who have sustained it and the victim-survivors whose experiences continue to shape its purpose.

The Board's role is to help secure the foundations for the future of the organisation through sound governance, a supported and capable workforce, high quality services and sustainable funding. The SASS Board is made up of volunteers bringing a wide mix of skills and experience including legal, financial, psychology, clinical, management, communications and governance.

The Board takes a strategic approach to governance and is well supported by the CEO and a strong management team who regularly present to the Board on their work. I express my thanks to all Board members for their dedicated service, wisdom and commitment.

At the heart of our work is our commitment to victim-survivors. People affected by sexual violence deserve timely access to care that respects their dignity, choices and individual recovery. Breaking the cycle of harm also requires sustained investment in primary prevention and early intervention. A safer future depends on commitment across all areas of SASS's work, supporting victim-survivors while working to ensure fewer people experience sexual violence.

SASS continues to experience growing demand for services. In response SASS has implemented innovative responses to address the growth in our wait lists but demand remains high. SASS has also extended the primary prevention work into the broader community to partner with organisations to deliver training to workplaces. Our prevention work also extends to providing therapeutic support to children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours, SASS continues to be a leader in this field and has also partnered with universities to undertake further research.

To continue to deliver effectively requires sustainable funding. It enables SASS to retain specialist expertise, plan with confidence, evaluate and improve its work and build enduring partnerships. Funding arrangements must also allow services to respond as demand grows. The connections between prevention early intervention and recovery need to be recognised in how the system is funded. We recognise that there are many demands for funding but funding SASS should be regarded as essential.

The Board thanks our government and philanthropic funders, donors and community supporters for their investment and trust. SASS also acknowledges the support of our past Patron Barbara Baker AC and looks forward to working with our new Patron Her Excellency Caroline Wells.

On behalf of the Board I express our sincere thanks to our CEO Shirleyann Varney for her dedicated leadership of our staff, her advocacy and commitment. We also express our thanks to our amazing staff whose work changes lives and builds a stronger community in Tasmania.

Together with our partners and communities we are building on 40 years of work to shape a future where lutruwita/Tasmania is free from sexual violence and where safety respect and consent is upheld.

From our CEO





Shirleyann Varney
CEO, SASS

Every day at SASS, we see why Tasmania needs a connected response to sexual violence: one that prevents harm, intervenes earlier and supports people's safety, healing and recovery. These responsibilities belong together. What we learn through supporting victim-survivors strengthens prevention, while prevention helps people recognise harm and seek support.

Primary prevention means changing the conditions that allow sexual violence to occur. It involves challenging harmful attitudes, unequal power and behaviours that excuse or normalise harm, while strengthening respect, equality and accountability. This takes sustained work in the places where people learn, work and connect. Through our work with schools and universities, workplaces and communities, we help translate these principles into everyday practice.

Early intervention requires courage from all of us across services and government. We must be willing to engage with people at risk of causing sexual harm, or who have already done so. For children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours (HSB), this means recognising their capacity for change and providing specialist intervention, alongside families, schools and other services. It means naming harm clearly, maintaining accountability and creating opportunities to learn safer behaviours.

We hear from victim-survivors that we must do everything in our power to prevent others experiencing the harm they have endured. That calls us to pursue every opportunity informed by evidence and practice wisdom, including work that can feel confronting. Supporting recovery, changing the conditions that enable violence and intervening before further harm occurs are connected responsibilities. We need the courage, collaboration and sustained investment to act on all of them—to create safer communities for all.

During 2025–26, our team continued strengthening these connections across SASS. We expanded opportunities for earlier therapeutic support, strengthened our statewide work with children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour, and brought specialist prevention expertise into more community settings. Through our stepped care model, we supported more people and ensured victim-survivors were supported earlier, while recognising that demand remains high.

Progress must be matched by funding that enables our response to grow with the need for help. Investment in prevention and early intervention must sit alongside sustained support for people already harmed. Victim-survivors need access to specialist care when they seek it, with time and choice in their recovery. Funding SASS across the continuum would strengthen the connections between these functions and support a more effective system response.

I thank our skilled and committed SASS team for the care, judgement and persistence they bring to this work. I also thank our Board for its guidance, and our colleagues across government and non-government organisations for their partnership and willingness to work through complexity together.

Above all, I acknowledge the people who place their trust in SASS. Their experiences, choices and aspirations remain at the heart of our work and our determination to help create a safer Tasmania.

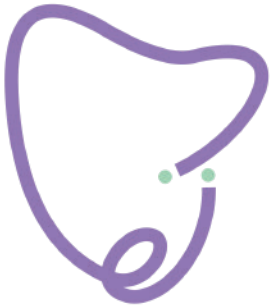
Highlights 2025–26

Specialist support, earlier intervention and prevention—working together to create safer communities

2,376

CLIENTS SUPPORTED

across all SASS programs and support pathways.



845

NEW REFERRALS

across all programs.

+392

MORE CLIENTS SUPPORTED

compared with the previous financial year.

15.9%

REDUCTION IN THE COUNSELLING WAITLIST

compared with the previous financial year.

328

AFTER-HOURS CALLS

responded to with specialist support, information and care.

Community connection: Light Up the Dark Fun Run

500+

PEOPLE CAME TOGETHER FOR LIGHT UP THE DARK

$4,000

RAISED TO SUPPORT SASS'S WORK

Extending prevention and strengthening responses



26
SCHOOLS

2,872
STUDENTS

reached through CaRE@School, alongside 483 staff and 26 parents



22
ELEVATE & MINI ELEVATE SESSIONS

442
PARTICIPANTS

including police recruits and medical students



18
WORKPLACE EDUCATION SESSIONS

246
PARTICIPANTS

across leadership, management and staff training



36
PAST PROGRAM TRAINING SESSIONS

188
PROFESSIONALS

strengthening responses to harmful sexual behaviours

Shifting systems through advocacy

14

Legislative, policy & implementation processes contributed to

SASS contributed specialist evidence and practice wisdom to 14 legislative, policy and implementation processes across prevention, safeguarding, harmful sexual behaviours, disability inclusion and justice reform. Through this advocacy and our public policy work, we helped strengthen the visibility of sexual violence and promote responses grounded in safety, dignity, choice and accountability.

CaRE@School

Primary Prevention

Growing a culture of respect

The conversations children and young people have about consent, boundaries and relationships help shape what they expect for themselves and how they treat others. Through CaRE@School, SASS creates space for these conversations, helping students explore what respect looks like in everyday life and understand their right to safety and choice.

The work reaches beyond the classroom. By involving school staff and families, we help build shared understanding among the adults children turn to—so that messages about respect are reinforced, concerns are heard and young people are supported to seek help.



Across funded and fee-for-service delivery, CaRE@School reached 26 schools, 2,872 students, 483 staff and 26 parents during the 2025–26 financial year.

Tasmanian Government funding through DECYP and DPAC supported 18 schools, reaching 1,700 students and 211 staff. This included additional DECYP funding for 10 schools during the 2025 calendar year. A further eight schools engaged SASS on a fee-for-service basis, reaching 1,172 students, 272 staff and 26 parents.

Each school offers an opportunity to carry this learning into friendships, classrooms, homes and the wider community. This is the lasting purpose of CaRE@School: helping children and young people grow up knowing that their boundaries matter, that relationships should be respectful, and that they deserve to be heard and safe.

Student feedback

"Now I feel safer to go to a place and talk to someone – if I need to"

"It's a big eye opener. Great tips and thanks for making it fun as well"

"I think SASS are really cool and I love what they do and I think it helps people a lot"

Partners in Prevention

Primary Prevention

Bringing consent into university life

University life brings new relationships, greater independence and opportunities to shape the cultures people carry into adulthood. Residential communities are especially important settings for conversations about consent, boundaries and belonging.

Through Partners in Prevention (PiPs), SASS worked with the University of Tasmania and La Trobe University to bring prevention into the places where students live and connect. The pilot engaged 74 participants, combining specialist education with opportunities to explore consent and respectful relationships in everyday situations. The La Trobe evaluation report on PiPs is due to be released in November 2026.



Primary Prevention Practitioners, Alex Morris and Tom Duff

To build on the work of PiPs, SASS and UTAS have continued collaborating to deliver further consent and respectful relationships programs with five CaRE@Uni sessions delivered in Semester One 2026 and two consent refresher sessions at Jane Franklin with 50 participants. CaRE@Uni is an adapted version of the full PiPs research program content.

This work recognises that consent education needs room for questions, reflection and ongoing conversation. By working within university communities and building evaluation into program development, SASS is strengthening both its prevention practice and understanding of what helps learning translate into everyday action.

Sharing prevention knowledge

During 2025–26, SASS shared learning from Partners in Prevention (PiPs) at the Australasian Safer University Symposium and the PHAA National Conference.

Kate Johnstone, Primary Prevention Manager, also contributed to From Bystander to Upstander, part of Working Women's Centre Tasmania's podcast series for the Small Steps Safe Workplaces Conference 2025. Joining Laurel House's Kathryn Fordyce, Kate explored practical ways to intervene in workplace sexual harassment, support people affected and promote accountability, bringing specialist prevention knowledge to a wider audience.



Workplace prevention

Primary Prevention

Creating safer, more respectful workplaces

Workplace sexual harassment is prevalent and preventable. The Australian Human Rights Commission's 2022 national survey found that one in three workers had experienced workplace sexual harassment in the previous five years. Its consequences can extend beyond the workplace, affecting people's health, safety, livelihoods and participation in work.

Philanthropic funding granted by the Elsie Cameron Foundation in 2021 enabled SASS to develop and pilot a specialist workplace prevention program. That investment has grown into an expanding program delivering tailored, trauma-informed education across sectors, including community services, legal services, health and aged care, manufacturing, government services and higher education.

During 2025–26, SASS delivered 18 Every Moment Matters fee-for-service workplace sessions, with 246 participant attendances, including:

- Positive Duty for Leaders: four sessions and 51 participants.
- Safer Workplaces Training for Managers: one session and 21 participants.
- General staff training: 12 sessions and 168 participants.
- Respect Starts Here: one session and six participants.

> *"SASS worked closely and collaboratively with us from the outset to understand the specific needs of our workforce and to identify any potential barriers to engagement. This partnership approach ensured that the training content and delivery were meaningfully adapted to support optimal participation, particularly for individuals who may have been at risk of disengagement due to pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, or discomfort with the subject matter."*
>
> Every Moment Matters – Senior Executive Participant, 2026

Engaging people at different levels of an organisation helps connect leadership responsibilities with everyday practice. Leaders and managers explore their role in preventing harassment and creating conditions where concerns can be raised safely. Staff build practical skills to recognise harmful behaviour, respond safely to disclosures and take constructive bystander action.

As part of SASS's whole-of-system approach to preventing sexual violence, the program addresses the cultural, structural and power dynamics that enable workplace sexual harassment and inhibit reporting. Each partnership reflects the workplace's people, operating environment and risks, helping organisations translate prevention responsibilities into meaningful action.

Industry partnerships extend this work. In November 2025, SASS and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) launched Respect Belongs in This Workplace, a statewide campaign supporting practical action to prevent workplace sexual harassment. The campaign offers free resources downloadable from the SASS website, alongside discounted specialist training for TCCI members, helping workplaces build knowledge, strengthen reporting pathways and create cultures of respect.

Our partnership with the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) brought attention to the experiences and prevention needs of Tasmania's built environment sector. An industry roundtable in December 2025 explored local perspectives, risks and opportunities, providing a foundation for further engagement and locally relevant prevention approaches.

Together, education, practical resources and industry collaboration help build shared responsibility for safer workplace cultures. This work demonstrates the lasting value of philanthropic investment in specialist prevention: creating the foundations for an approach that can reach more workplaces and strengthen Tasmania's collective capacity to prevent sexual harm.



One of the downloadable posters that can be found at www.sass.org.au/posters



SASS CEO Shirleyann Varney and TCCI CEO Michael Bailey OAM launch Respect Belongs in This Workplace – a statewide campaign

Workplace Case Study

Primary Prevention

Prevention in practice

Preventing sexual harassment at work takes more than knowing the rules. It means recognising harmful behaviour, knowing how to respond and understanding that creating a respectful workplace is everyone's responsibility.

Through its Every Moment Matters: Prevention for Workplaces program, SASS works with organisations to build the knowledge, confidence and practical skills needed to prevent sexual harassment and strengthen respectful workplace cultures.

In 2026, SASS delivered 11 specialist workshops to 145 employees in one Tasmanian workplace. An independent interim evaluation found strong and consistent improvements across knowledge, attitudes and confidence. Across 25 measures, responses aligned with the program's intended outcomes increased from 73.6% before training to 89.3% afterwards.

Some of the biggest shifts occurred where people had initially been least certain. Confidence applying principles of lawful consent in workplace situations increased from 61% to 96%, while self-reported confidence knowing how to respond when witnessing sexual harassment rose from 66% to 95%.

Participants also became better at recognising conduct that can be minimised, normalised or overlooked. Recognition of sexually explicit jokes in shared workplace spaces as sexual harassment increased from 61% to 93%, while recognition of harassment occurring through a private employee group chat increased from 56% to 90%.

> *"Feeling more equipped to call out & respond to sexual harassment in the workplace."*
> Prevention for Workplace Program participant

But perhaps the most important shift was from recognition to responsibility. When asked what they would do differently, participants described checking in with colleagues, speaking up about inappropriate behaviour, using active bystander skills, reporting concerns and reflecting on their own conduct. Almost half of respondents identified checking in with and supporting colleagues, while 40% said they intended to call out or speak up about inappropriate behaviour.

These results matter because SASS's evidence-informed workplace prevention program is not only about recognising and responding to workplace sexual harassment after it occurs. It is about building workplaces where people notice, act, support one another and take responsibility for the culture they help create.

These findings provide encouraging evidence of stronger workforce knowledge and confidence. Translating that learning into sustained cultural change requires continued education, visible leadership, clear reporting pathways and organisational accountability. Together, these elements help build workplaces where people recognise harm, act safely and support one another.

Training & Education

Primary Prevention

Early Intervention

Building confidence to respond with care

The response someone receives when they disclose sexual violence can shape what happens next: whether they feel heard, whether they seek further support and whether they feel able to make choices about their own recovery.

SASS has a longstanding commitment to helping professionals and communities respond safely and compassionately. Through ELEVATE and Mini ELEVATE training, we bring specialist knowledge into the services and settings people turn to, supporting participants to understand sexual violence and respond in ways that uphold safety, dignity and choice.

During 2025–26, SASS delivered 22 sessions, recording 442 participant attendances. This included training for 135 police recruits and 85 University of Tasmania medical students, continuing our investment in the people who will shape future experiences of policing and healthcare.

Tailored education extended this work into other settings, with 15 participants from Kennerley Kids attending a session on child sexual abuse and grooming, and nine participants from Independent Schools Tasmania undertaking supportive school responses training.

We also created space for community conversations about consent, engaging nine Commissioner for Children & Young People (CCYP) youth ambassadors and nine participants in the Migrant Resource Centre's Mother's Circle.

Each session is an opportunity to carry specialist understanding beyond SASS—helping more people recognise harm, listen without judgement and respond with care.





PAST Program

Early Intervention

Supporting safer futures for children and families

Responding to harmful sexual behaviours means protecting people from harm while recognising children's capacity to learn, change and build healthier relationships.

The Prevention, Assessment, Support and Treatment (PAST) Program combines specialist assessment and therapeutic intervention from SASS with practical family support and case coordination from Mission Australia. Together, we help children and young people develop safer behaviours and support families with supervision, boundaries and safety planning across home, school and community settings.

In early 2026, SASS re-established direct statewide clinical delivery of PAST, with SASS clinicians commencing in the North and North West.

Our approach holds compassion and accountability together. The safety and wellbeing of those affected by harmful behaviour remain central, while children and families receive clear guidance and support to make lasting changes.

During 2025–26:

- 192 children and young people received support from SASS through PAST, alongside support for their parents and carers.
- 128 new referrals were received statewide, including 85 in the South.
- 36 training sessions reached 188 professionals across Tasmania, building capability to identify and respond to harmful sexual behaviours.
- Among children accessing PAST, 58% had recorded exposure to family violence and 42.5% had a recorded disability, reinforcing the importance of coordinated, developmentally appropriate care.

The figure of 192 clients excludes support provided to parents and carers, as well as stakeholder consultations, and does not represent the full statewide total. Data relating to services delivered by Laurel House in northern Tasmania between July and December 2025 were not available for inclusion.

Early Intervention

PAST: Building earlier pathways to support

With federal funding and in partnership with La Trobe University, SASS is developing a brief intervention intake pathway to provide practical support sooner and identify who needs more intensive intervention. Rollout is planned for January–February 2027, with the aim of offering initial support within two weeks.

Towards safer pathways for emerging adults

With funding from the Tasmanian Government, SASS commissioned Griffith University's Scoping Study of Services for Emerging Adults Engaging in Harmful Sexual Behaviours. The study identified a significant service gap for people aged 18–25, who can lose access to developmentally informed intervention when they turn 18, while appropriate community-based therapeutic options remain extremely limited.

The research provides a foundation for discussions across government and relevant sectors about how Tasmania can respond to this gap. SASS is also considering what the findings could mean for the future development of PAST and our broader work, with a focus on timely, developmentally appropriate support, accountability and preventing further harm.



Stepped Care

Recovery & Healing

Reaching people sooner

During 2025–26, SASS continued to reshape how people access specialist sexual violence support, moving beyond a traditional waitlist model towards a more responsive stepped care approach.

Demand remained consistently high. During the year, SASS supported 2,376 clients across the organisation and received 845 new referrals across all programs, an average of approximately 70 each month. SASS designed its stepped care model in response to this sustained demand and the need for earlier support and more flexible pathways into care.

SASS's stepped care model matches the intensity and type of support to each person's needs. For some, early support may meet their needs at that time. For others, it helps build safety, stability and readiness for more intensive therapy. People can enter support at different points and move between options as their needs change. Intensive therapy is one pathway; others may find what they need through brief interventions, groups or practical support. Urgent help remains available throughout. Our Intake team helps people understand these choices, building trust, assessing needs and connecting them with appropriate care.

People do not wait without support.

Implementing stepped care has involved strengthening Intake and clinical triage, introducing more active waitlist management and multidisciplinary review, and expanding brief interventions and therapeutic groups. Together, these changes provide clearer oversight of people's current needs and help match specialist clinical capacity to the level and nature of those needs.

Alongside these changes, SASS achieved a 15.9% reduction in the counselling waitlist, while supporting 392 more clients than in the previous financial year. This represents important progress in access, while demand remains high. Many people awaiting individual counselling are already receiving therapeutic support through other parts of the pathway.

During 2026–27, SASS will continue strengthening the model, including developing step-down pathways that support a gentler transition from intensive therapy and allow people to reconnect with support as their needs change.

Through stepped care, SASS is creating earlier opportunities for support, providing greater choice and strengthening access to specialist care.

Immediate response: support when it matters most

Through Arch, SASS works alongside partner agencies so people can access coordinated support in one place. This helps reduce the burden of navigating separate services and gives people space to understand their options.

During 2025–26, SASS supported 289 people through Arch who agreed to have their details recorded. Other people accessed support anonymously and are not included in this figure.



Our after-hours service responded to 328 calls between 5 pm and 9 am, supporting 157 clients who agreed to have their details recorded, as well as people accessing support anonymously. The team also coordinated 56 forensic medical examinations, with support that could include attending alongside the person and following up afterwards.

These figures capture only part of the work. A single call can lead to hours of specialist support, safety planning and coordination. Attending a forensic medical examination as a support person can take approximately three hours alone. Behind each contact is time spent listening, supporting choice and helping someone navigate what happens next.

Early support: meaningful care sooner

Brief interventions and therapeutic groups offer space to address current concerns, build coping skills and strengthen connection. During the year, 260 clients received brief intervention support, and SASS delivered 11 therapeutic group sessions.

For some people, this support meets their needs at that time. For others, it helps build safety and stability before more intensive therapy.

Therapeutic Groups

Recovery & Healing

Recovery through therapeutic groups

Therapeutic groups are an important part of SASS's evolving approach to specialist sexual violence support. Facilitated by experienced clinicians, our trauma-informed groups provide opportunities for victim-survivors to strengthen their understanding of trauma, develop practical coping and emotional regulation skills, and build confidence, connection and wellbeing. Through structured psychoeducation and therapeutic activities, participants can develop strategies to support their recovery in a safe, supportive environment, without the expectation of sharing personal experiences of sexual violence.

As part of SASS's stepped care model, therapeutic groups provide meaningful support at different stages of a person's recovery journey. For some, groups offer earlier access to specialist support while awaiting individual trauma-focused therapy, helping to build safety, stability and readiness for more intensive therapeutic work. For others, group-based interventions may provide an appropriate level of support in their own right. This flexible approach enables SASS to better match the intensity of support to individual needs, improve continuity of care and make effective use of specialist clinical resources.

SASS will review the group program in December to inform planning for 2027. This will include exploring how groups could support a gradual transition from individual therapy, helping clients consolidate therapeutic gains and prepare for planned transition out of SASS. Planning will also consider virtual group options to improve access for people across Tasmania who face geographic, transport or other barriers to attending in person.



Stock image used to protect client privacy.

Specialist Therapy

Recovery & Healing

A space for recovery

Specialist therapy provides time to build trust and work through the impacts of sexual violence at each person's pace.

During the year, program caseloads included:

- Adult Counselling: 943 clients.
- Children and Families: 389 clients, with 470 new referrals across both counselling programs.
- Forensic Therapeutic Program: 123 clients and 62 new referrals.
- Redress Support Service: 299 clients and 94 new referrals.
- PAST: 192 SASS clients, with 128 new referrals statewide.

Across our clinical programs and support pathways, SASS recorded approximately 3,500 appointments—each an opportunity to support safety, wellbeing and recovery. Caseload figures include people receiving support and those awaiting therapy. Some clients access more than one program.



Feeling safe matters

Safety is more than a principle in our service model. It is something we want people to experience when they connect with SASS.

Across 147 completed feedback surveys, the statement "I feel safe engaging at SASS" received an average score of 9.3 out of 10.

This feedback offers an encouraging indication of people's experience and reinforces the importance of listening, respecting choice and building trust throughout support.

Redress Support

Recovery & Healing

A service to support the whole journey

In 2025–26, SASS's Redress Support Service supported survivors of institutional child sexual abuse to navigate the National Redress Scheme. The program supported 299 clients, with 94 new referrals during the year.

During the year, 27 clients lodged applications and nine received outcomes. Behind these milestones is substantial specialist work, combining application assistance with therapeutic support to help survivors participate safely and make informed decisions.

Many victim-survivors face overlapping barriers, including complex mental health needs, disability, literacy difficulties, housing instability, geographic isolation and incarceration. Our specialist clinicians tailor support to each person's circumstances and readiness. Active waitlist support, outreach and collaboration with legal and community services help maintain engagement and continuity of care.

Application milestones capture only part of this work. Victim-survivors progress at different rates and may require support while awaiting decisions, responding to information requests or considering reviews. Processing delays, unclear correspondence and repeated requests for historical information can increase distress, reinforcing the importance of accessible, trauma-informed Scheme processes.

The impact extends beyond application completion. Case studies demonstrate how consistent, flexible support can build confidence and strengthen survivors' sense of agency. Respecting each person's pace and choices is central to helping them navigate a process that can bring painful experiences back into focus.

With SASS's current Commonwealth funding concluding in June 2027, planning must recognise the full Redress journey and victim-survivors' continuing support needs. Preserving choice, psychological safety and continuity of care will be essential as SASS works with funding and service partners to plan for this transition.



In Focus

Systems Change

Connecting evidence, practice and systems change



Through *In Focus*, SASS's thought-leadership series, we explore the issues shaping how sexual violence is understood, prevented and addressed, bringing research and specialist practice knowledge into broader public conversation.

Published on our website for government partners, policymakers, sector leaders and practitioners, the series connects decisions about policy, funding and organisational practice with what they mean for people's safety, dignity and access to support.

A central theme is the distance between commitments and everyday experience. Child-safe policies need cultures where children are heard, concerns can be raised and leaders welcome scrutiny. Responses to harmful sexual behaviours need timely specialist intervention, practical support for families and coordination across schools and services. In each setting, progress depends on people having the knowledge, capability and responsibility to act.

The series also explores how the way we understand sexual violence shapes whose experiences are recognised and what responses become available. Frameworks can bring important issues into focus while leaving others less visible. Effective policy must reflect the breadth of sexual violence across relationships, settings and life stages.

Alongside the series, SASS published Strengthening Sexual Violence Policy Architecture in Tasmania in June 2026. The paper examines the implications of treating sexual violence primarily as a subset of family violence. While deeply interconnected, they are not synonymous. Sexual violence also occurs in institutions, workplaces, community settings and other relationships, with distinct prevention and recovery needs.

The paper identifies opportunities for clearer recognition, dedicated action and stronger accountability, while supporting coordination where responses intersect. Together, these publications ask what must happen for evidence and policy intent to translate into safer communities. Reform needs sustained attention to implementation: capable workforces, clear responsibilities, accessible support and leadership that follows through. Without these foundations, even well-designed reforms can fall short of their purpose.

By making specialist knowledge publicly accessible, SASS contributes to shared learning and more informed decisions across government, services and communities. This work carries insights from practice into the wider changes needed to prevent harm and strengthen support for people affected by sexual violence.

Policy & Advocacy

Systems Change

Strengthening systemic responses to sexual violence

Policy decisions shape how sexual violence is prevented, whose experiences are recognised, what support is available and how people are treated when they seek safety or justice. For victim-survivors, these decisions can influence whether a response offers safety, dignity and choice, or creates further barriers and harm. SASS's systems change advocacy brings specialist practice wisdom, evidence and insights from victim-survivors' experiences into these decisions.



Assistant Minister Ged Kearney, Assistant Minister Rebecca White and SASS CEO Shirleyann Varney announce the extension of the Federal Government's 500 Workers Initiative in Tasmania through to 2030

During 2025–26, we contributed to legislative reviews, government consultations and sector collaboration across prevention, safeguarding, harmful sexual behaviours, disability inclusion and justice reform. Across this work, our focus remained consistent: preventing harm, strengthening accountability and ensuring responses uphold safety, dignity and choice.

Our priorities included strengthening Tasmania's approach to sexual violence policy, advocating for a clear blueprint to coordinate family violence reforms, and supporting a best-practice framework for engaging lived-experience advocates.

We have strongly advocated for child-centred, rights-based approaches, including advocating for the Child Rights Impact Assessment Framework to be embedded in Tasmanian policy processes. Across broader reforms, we worked to ensure that the distinct needs and experiences of people impacted by sexual violence remained visible.

Making influence visible

Policy influence is not always immediate or easy to trace. A recommendation may be adopted directly, strengthen another organisation's submission or help clarify a government response. Progress can also emerge through sustained conversations that bring specialist evidence and victim-survivors' experiences into decisions.

Across the year, we heard parliamentary champions return to ideas we have worked to bring into focus. Shared language alone does not establish SASS's influence. Yet when prevention, accountability and trauma-informed support become more visible in public leadership, it signals that the conversation is shifting.

These changes matter. They help build understanding of sexual violence as a matter of prevention, safety, health, justice, gender equality and community responsibility, requiring sustained and coordinated action.



Sustaining the work of change

A recommendation may need to be repeated, refined and carried by many people before it reaches a point of action. Progress depends on evidence, relationships and a willingness to keep working through complexity.

For SASS, this also means looking beyond what a reform promises to what people will experience when it is implemented. Clear responsibilities, a capable workforce, accessible services and accountability for delivery help turn policy commitments into safer, more effective responses.

This work is never done by one organisation alone. We acknowledge the sustained advocacy of victim-survivors, community advocates and colleagues across services, government and parliament. Their willingness to share expertise, listen and work through complexity helps make change possible.

SASS will continue bringing specialist evidence and practice insights into decisions, working alongside others to make sexual violence harder to ignore, harder to misunderstand and harder to leave unaddressed.

Some of our contributions to policy consultations in 2025–26

The consultations and reform processes below highlight some of the areas in which SASS contributed specialist advice and advocacy during 2025–26, alongside broader policy engagement that is not always captured through formal or public processes.

Legislative and regulatory reform

- Community Protection (Offender Reporting) Amendment Bill 2025
- Commission of Inquiry (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2026
- Strengthening Our Responses to Family Violence in Tasmania: Family Violence Act 2004 and Related Legislation Discussion Paper
- Liquor Licensing Reforms

Policy, systems and implementation

- National Family and Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Framework
- Change for Children Action Plan: Collaboration for Change 2026-29
- Understanding Children and Young People's Sexual Behaviours: Tasmania's Harmful Sexual Behaviours Framework
- Towards a Tasmanian Disability Inclusion Plan Discussion Paper
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Youth Justice Strategy
- Commission of Inquiry Recommendation 6.7 – DECYP Guidelines
- Trauma-Informed Capability Framework
- 2026 National Family and Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Workforce Survey
- Tasmanian Youth Justice Facility Model of Care – Consultation Draft
- Youth Justice Model of Care: Implementation Resources
- Safe2Say

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Primary Prevention

Moving from awareness to action

Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) 2026 gave SASS an opportunity to bring the conversation about sexual violence prevention into the places where people live, work, volunteer, play and connect.

This year's campaign, Play It Safe: Building Respect in Community Sport, focused on the important role community sport can play in shaping cultures of respect, safety and accountability. The campaign moved beyond awareness to ask how individuals, organisations and communities can contribute to prevention through the environments they create every day.

Sporting partnerships were central to the campaign, with engagement across organisations including the Tasmania Devils, UTAS Sport, Taroona Football Club, Sandy Bay Harriers Club, and Tasmania Surf Life Saving. SAAM messaging was brought into club environments, game days and community activities, helping to make prevention part of everyday conversations.



Minister Jane Howlett and SASS CEO Shirleyann Varney launch the 2026 SAAM campaign with Tasmania Devils representatives Lauren Jauncey, Geordie Payne and Matilda Elbourne

SASS also worked with Volunteering Tasmania and a broad range of community and sector partners, recognising the important role volunteers and community leaders play in shaping safe and respectful environments. The strong response to ELEVATE training reflected growing interest in practical prevention capability.

For SASS, SAAM is about more than a month of activity. It is part of our ongoing commitment to prevention and to working alongside communities to build safer, more respectful environments.



The breadth of engagement in 2026 demonstrated the value of bringing people and organisations together around this shared responsibility. It also strengthened SASS's role as a specialist support service and a leader in prevention, working across the continuum from responding to sexual violence to helping prevent it.

Light Up the Dark

Primary Prevention

Community, connection and hope



Holly Smee from Sandy Bay Harriers with Minister Jane Howlett and SASS CEO Shirleyann Varney

More than 500 people came together in sparkles and glow paint for Light Up the Dark at Kingston Park, closing SASS's Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2026 activities with movement, connection and hope.

Held in partnership with Sandy Bay Harriers Club, the event was more than a fun run. It was a collective statement that our streets, parks and public spaces should be safe for everyone, day and night.

For many people, moving through public spaces after dark is shaped by vigilance rather than freedom. Choosing well-lit routes, sharing a location with a friend or deciding not to go out can become everyday calculations that limit freedom and erode a sense of belonging.

Light Up the Dark named that reality and responded with connection. Walking and running together through illuminated spaces sent a powerful message: safety matters, people matter, and no one should have to navigate that fear alone.

Alongside the lights and colour was an opportunity to show support for people affected by sexual violence and recognise that creating safer communities is a shared responsibility. Our Primary Prevention team spoke with participants about the campaign and SASS's broader work, helping turn awareness into conversations about care, respect and preventing harm.

The event raised $4,000 for SASS, supporting our work with people affected by sexual violence. We thank Sandy Bay Harriers Club, the organisers, volunteers and everyone who took part. Their energy lit up the night, refusing to accept fear as the norm and showing what is possible when we walk, run and stand together.



Primary Prevention Practitioner Adie Delaney at the Light Up the Dark Fun Run

National Accreditation

A step towards excellence in quality and safety

Quality and safety are central to how SASS works. They shape how we deliver services, support our people and continually improve the experience of those who come to us for support.

In 2026, we completed our first independent assessment against the National Safety and Quality Primary and Community Healthcare Standards. The assessment gave us the opportunity to examine our systems and practices against a nationally recognised framework, recognise what is working well and identify where we can improve.

It also prompted us to look closely at what quality and safety mean in practice: having strong systems, supporting a skilled workforce, responding to people's needs and continuing to learn from the experiences of those who use our services.

The assessment is an important step in strengthening how SASS works. It also supports our longer-term aspiration to be a centre of excellence in specialist sexual violence services. The findings will help guide ongoing improvements across the organisation.

We thank our clients, employees and Board members who contributed their time, knowledge and experience to the assessment process. Their input will help shape the improvements we make from here.

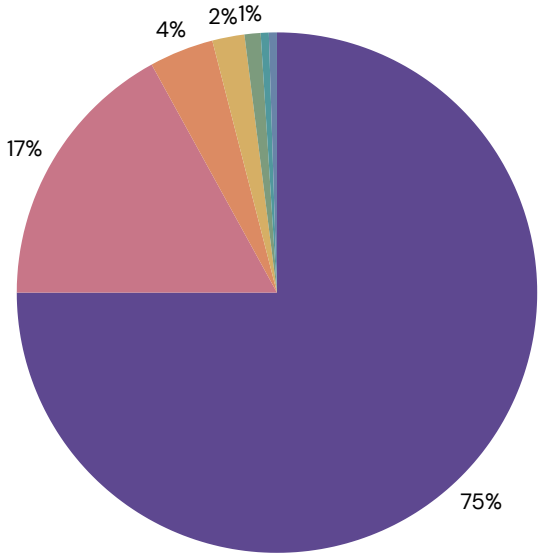


Financial management

Sustaining our impact through careful stewardship

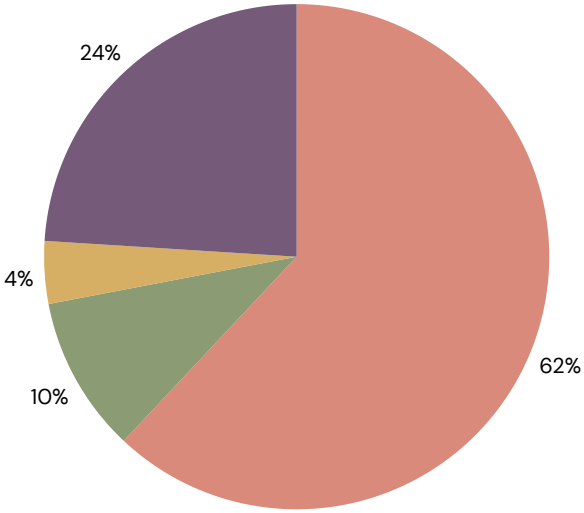
Careful financial management supports SASS's ability to respond to people's needs today and sustain our work into the future. As demand grows and funding pressures continue, we remain focused on directing resources where they can make the greatest difference—supporting victim-survivors, strengthening prevention and investing in the people who deliver our specialist services.

Where our funding comes from:



- Tasmanian State Government
- Federal Government
- Other Grants
- Fee-for-Service
- Interest
- Other Income
- Donations

How we use our funding:



- Clinical Therapeutic Services
- Primary Prevention Services
- Systems Change
- Business Operations

Together, we can create a Tasmania free from sexual violence

Sexual Assault Support Service

SUPPORTED BY:

Tasmanian Government

Australian Government
Department of Social Services