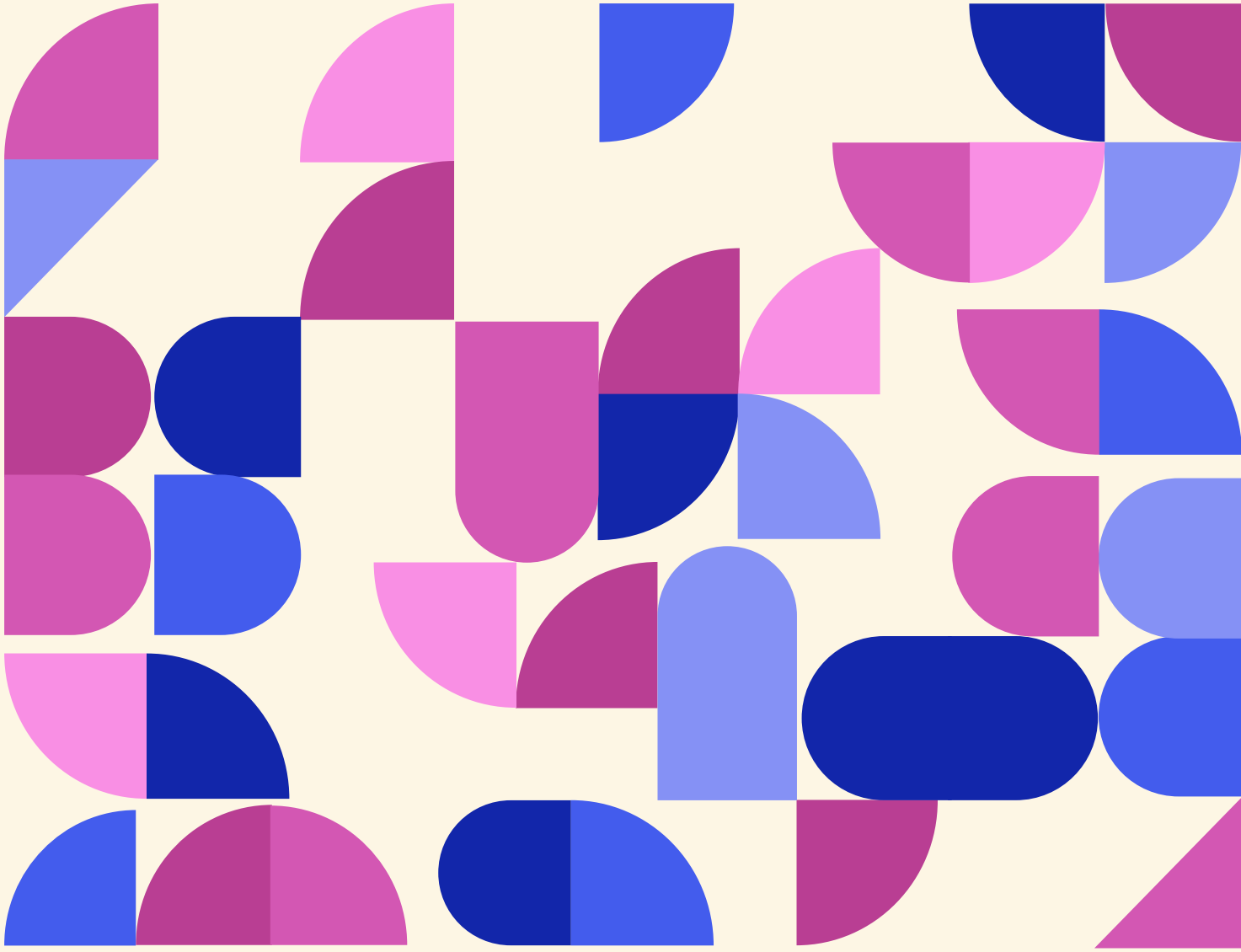
KWOOP

Keeping Women Out Of Prison

COALITION

Strategy 2025-2028



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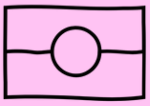


Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge with deep respect Aboriginal peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we work. For over sixty thousand years, Aboriginal peoples have nurtured these lands across many diverse nations, language groups and clans, maintaining the world's oldest continuous culture.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present from all Aboriginal communities. We honour their wisdom, resilience and enduring connection to Country that has sustained their peoples through generations. We recognise the profound spiritual and cultural relationships that Aboriginal peoples continue to maintain with their traditional lands and waters.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the ways in which Aboriginal peoples have been disproportionately affected by the criminal legal system in Australia. We recognise that this has caused immeasurable harm to individuals, families and communities across generations.

We are committed to working respectfully alongside Aboriginal communities and Elders to address these inequities and to support Aboriginal peoples' right to self-determination. Through our work, we strive to contribute to a more just system that honours Aboriginal peoples' strength, culture and aspirations for their communities.

A message from our Co-Chairs

The increase in women incarcerated in NSW over the past three years is due entirely to the unconscionable increase in Aboriginal women on remand. Aboriginal women's imprisonment numbers and rates are the highest on record. They are imprisoned at a rate 22 times higher than non-Indigenous women. Women on remand are now over 50% of women in prison today and over 70% of the annual flow population. Half the women on remand do not get a custodial sentence at their final court hearing. Most women are charged with minor offences.

Behind these statistics are mothers, daughters, and community members whose lives have been shaped by trauma, poverty, and structural disadvantage.

As Co-Chairs of the Keeping Women out of Prison (KWOOP) Coalition, we have worked alongside women with lived experience, service providers, academics, researchers, and advocates who understand that the current approach is failing women and their families while imposing enormous costs on our communities. Our society is criminalising women' poverty, disadvantage, trauma and Aboriginality.

The KWOOP 2025-2028 Strategy tackles the causes of this criminalisation head on. It embodies the collective wisdom of our Coalition and evidence-based pathways of diversion programmes, trauma-informed support services, and comprehensive transition planning, that can transform outcomes. Through preventing entry into the criminal legal system, supporting women during custody, and ensuring successful community reintegration, we can achieve our vision of halving women's imprisonment rates by 2030.

KWOOP needs the political will and sustained investment to implement these approaches at scale. The economic case is compelling, but the moral imperative is even stronger.

This Strategy charts a course towards justice that centres healing over punishment, prevention over incarceration, and community over isolation.

Professor Emerita Eileen Baldry AO and Nicole Yade, CEO, Women and Girls Emergency Centre (WAGEC)
Co-Chairs, KWOOP Coalition

Strategy in brief

Mission:
To achieve better outcomes for women and children affected by the criminal legal system.

Vision:
To halve the rate of women's imprisonment in NSW by 2030, with a particular focus on Aboriginal women.

Our Community-Driven Approach

Established in 2013, KWOOP is an independent, authoritative Coalition consisting of individuals and organisations including service providers, philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations, universities and women with lived experience of the criminal legal system. KWOOP's vision is for better outcomes for women and children affected by the criminal legal system.

KWOOP membership and broader community of practice is informed by diverse perspectives and real-world insights. This enables knowledge sharing across criminal legal, housing, health, and social services sectors.

The expertise of women with lived experience of incarceration is centred in all aspects of our work.

Growing the community of practice in both knowledge and size is fundamental to driving change and creating lasting impact.

The alarming rise in women's incarceration in NSW:

- 2 400 women move through NSW prisons annually, with a 40% increase in women charged and convicted between 2014-2023.
- We have seen a rise in women held on remand, who now comprise over 50% of the female prison population, with 52% of these women ultimately not receiving a custodial sentence.
- Aboriginal women face the starkest inequities, being 22 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous women.
- 60% of imprisoned women are mothers of dependent children, creating profound intergenerational consequences.
- The costs are huge at $180,000 per woman per year in prison, plus an average of $110,000 annually per child placed in care.

The case for change

The impact of women's incarceration extends beyond prison walls, but understanding why women enter the criminal legal system is essential for developing effective solutions.

Women's pathways into the criminal legal system (police, courts and prisons) are fundamentally different from men's, shaped by a complex convergence of trauma, relational influences, substance misuse, and socio-economic disadvantage. The majority of women managed in the criminal legal system have histories of poverty, early family disruption, childhood abuse, disability and victimisation which may include domestic violence, leading to mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Women's criminal behaviour is often influenced by dysfunctional intimate relationships, with many introduced to crime through romantic partners—whether through love, coercion, or fear.

Economic marginalisation and substance use create additional pathways into the criminal legal system, with women engaging in crime out of financial necessity or to support addiction. These become survival strategies when women face limited options while managing caring responsibilities.

Most criminalised women have experienced abuse and violence, including domestic violence, that negatively impacts their children and requires trauma-informed support. Yet the criminal legal system often criminalises women's trauma responses and survival behaviours rather than addressing the systemic failures that leave women and their families without adequate support, legal representation, or protection from violence.

When Aboriginal mothers are incarcerated, most children enter care or informal arrangements, feeding an intergenerational 'care to prison pipeline'. These children experience profound challenges with poor school engagement and developmental disruptions.

One-third of women enter prison from homelessness or unstable housing, and over half leave prison into homelessness. Stable housing on release is strongly correlated with lower rates of recidivism among women leaving prison.

Strategic investments in prevention, in-custody support, and effective transition programs offer real and effective alternatives to our current one-size-fits-all expensive approach. For example, women with stable housing are nearly three times less likely to return to custody, translating to substantial savings while keeping families together.

By redirecting resources from incarceration toward evidence-based prevention, diversion and alternatives to prison, we reduce government expenditure, break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, and achieve better outcomes for women, children, and the broader community.

Strategic Framework

The KWOOP Strategic Framework 2025-2028 offers a practical, evidence-based plan that addresses the systemic barriers and structural inequities that drive women's criminalisation. It works to dismantle the systems that marginalise and criminalise women and funnel them into the criminal legal system.

Our comprehensive approach works across three strategic priority areas:

1. Preventing Women from Going to Prison:

Helping women before they reach prison through early support, fairer bail decisions, and community-based programs.

2. Supporting Women in Prison:

Working to ensure all women in custody get the help they need, whether they've been sentenced or are on remand awaiting trial.

3. Helping Women Return to the Community:

Supporting women leaving prison by linking them with services to assist with housing, jobs, and reconnecting with their families.

1. Preventing Entry into the System

The most effective way to address women's incarceration is to dismantle the systemic and structural inequities that drive women into prison in the first place.

Our long-term strategy is to work with government to build integrated, positive socio-economic equity measures. These measures address the life course drivers of women's and girls' criminal legal involvement: poverty, intergenerational disadvantage, unmet disability and mental health needs, alcohol and other drug use, violence and abuse, racism, and poor education and housing.

KWOOP's prevention strategy focuses on harnessing existing legislative provisions, expanding diversion programs, and addressing the remand crisis through targeted bail support. For diversion to be truly effective, KWOOP recognises that a multi-layered, cross-sector approach is essential.

Scaling the Sector

Effective diversion programs already exist and have demonstrated success, but they operate on too small a scale to meet current demand. The sector's capacity to deliver these programs falls far short of what's needed, especially in regional and rural areas where women have limited access to alternatives to imprisonment. To create meaningful system change, these proven models must be expanded statewide.

KWOOP advocates for:

- Strategic investment in expanding successful program models across all regions of NSW
- Capacity building within community organisations to deliver high-quality diversionary programs
- Development of specialised services that address the unique needs of women, particularly Aboriginal women

Creation of an integrated service delivery framework for the sector will ensure consistent quality while allowing for local adaptation.

The challenge is not identifying what works, but rather investing in the sector's capacity to deliver these programs at the scale required. This includes ensuring leadership by local and Aboriginal controlled agencies, creating meaningful system change, and building in ongoing evaluation that provides regular feedback for improvement.

Leveraging Existing Legislative Provisions

Section 26 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 provides that a female prisoner who is a mother of young children may serve her sentence in a manner that enables her to be with her children in an appropriate environment. Despite its potential, this provision remains underutilised.

The Women's Diversion Pathway Program has demonstrated remarkable success using these provisions, with 100% of participants retaining care of their children, remaining in the community and completing their orders. The evidence-based approach not only maintains family unity but also delivers significant cost savings across government services.

Similarly, Section 11 of the Act enables courts to defer sentencing while women participate in rehabilitation programs, creating opportunities for evidence-based alternatives to custody. Expanding utilisation of these provisions requires consistent advocacy, education of judicial officers, and support for programs to which courts can confidently refer.

Section 14 of the NSW Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020 allows for a person charged with a crime to be released into the care of a responsible person, potentially with or without conditions, if they have a mental health or cognitive impairment.

These legislative provisions represent significant untapped potential for keeping women out of prison. However, realising this potential requires a coordinated effort to ensure appropriate community services are available and that these provisions are consistently applied for women across police, courts and prisons. Without this systematic approach, these powerful tools for diversion and family preservation will continue to be underutilised.

Addressing the Remand Crisis

The remand crisis demands particular attention.

Remand refers to the detention of a person who has been charged with a crime but is waiting for their trial or sentencing. This means that instead of being released on bail or set free until their court date, the individual is kept in custody by court order.

With more than half of women on any one day in prison held on remand and the majority not receiving a custodial sentence, targeted bail support programs are needed. Many have been proven to be highly effective.

One such program has achieved significant success in preventing unnecessary incarceration through its coordinated approach to bail support, achieving 23 successful Supreme Court bail applications. By preventing the loss of housing during remand periods and providing appropriate support, these types of programs demonstrate how early intervention can keep women in the community.

For these approaches to be effectively scaled, they require a multi-layered, cross-sector approach, including: sector capacity building, cultural change in bail decisions, engagement with legal representatives, and adequate funding for comprehensive support services.

Cultural Change in Sentencing, Policing, and Legal Practice

Even the best diversionary programs will have limited impact without a corresponding shift in the culture of policing, legal practice and sentencing that systematically criminalises women's responses to marginalisation. Incarceration, particularly remand, is the default response rather than an option of last resort, reflecting systemic discrimination within the criminal legal system. We note that as well as remand, the rate of women incarcerated for Justice Procedure Offences (JPO) is high, and advocate reviewing their extensive use. JPOs include such things as breaches of court orders like breaking bail or not meeting parole conditions.

KWOOP advocates for a step-change in how criminal justice in NSW approaches women's offending through:

- Co-designed education and awareness programs for all justice system professionals (magistrates, judges, police, legal representatives) on the efficacy of diversionary approaches for women
- Development of clear guidelines and protocols that prioritise diversion for women, particularly those with caring responsibilities and Aboriginal women
- Regular engagement with judicial officers and lawyers to showcase successful diversion outcomes and share timely information about available programs
- Formal collaborations between community services, legal aid, and police to facilitate smooth diversion pathways
- Comprehensive training on gender-responsive approaches that recognise women's unique pathways into offending, for both lawyers and law enforcement.

This cultural shift must be supported by structural changes that make prevention and diversion the expected path rather than the exception.

Recommendations for Preventing Entry into the System:

1. **Establish a Legislative Implementation Framework** to increase use of Section 11 and Section 26 Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 and Section 14 Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020 for all eligible women, with clear referral pathways and support.

2. **Scale up the Aboriginal Women on Remand Pilot statewide** to provide targeted bail support that prevents unnecessary incarceration of Aboriginal women.

3. **Establish a Judicial Education Program** co-designed with women with lived experience to showcase successful diversion outcomes and change sentencing culture.

4. **Develop a NSW Diversion Investment Strategy** with sustainable funding that covers full-service delivery costs for evidence-based programs.

5. **Create formal collaboration** among community services, legal representatives, and police to facilitate coordinated diversion pathways.

6. **Implement clear diversion guidelines** that prioritise community-based alternatives for pregnant women and women with caring responsibilities.

2. Supporting Women in Prison

For women who do enter prison, KWOOP advocates for conditions and services that minimise harm, address underlying issues, and prepare women for successful reintegration into the community. Crucially, this support must begin from the moment a woman enters custody, with a comprehensive transition planning approach that recognises incarceration as a temporary state and focuses on preparation for community reintegration from day one.

KWOOP advocates for a complete policy change to provide all women in custody with the same access to programs and services regardless of legal status, including:

- Transition planning services that maintain housing and community connections
- Parenting programs and enhanced family contact options
- Trauma-informed services recognising that many women's substance use is linked to histories of violence and abuse
- Universal access to drug and alcohol counselling and rehabilitation
- Mental health support and trauma-informed therapy
- Educational and vocational programs that build skills aligned with employment markets

Equal Access to Support Services Regardless of Remand Status

A fundamental reform needed is equal access to support services for women on remand. Currently, women on remand—who comprise over 50% of the female prison population—are excluded from many educational, therapeutic, and transition planning services despite some remaining in custody for months or even years. This is particularly concerning given that 52% of women on remand ultimately do not receive a custodial sentence, meaning they are denied crucial support services while unnecessarily detained.

Marginalised Women

Three subgroups of women in prison who are particularly marginalised include:

Victims of Misidentification
We acknowledge misidentification as a serious issue in the domestic and family violence response system, where victim-survivors are wrongly identified as perpetrators. Women who experience this misidentification face significant additional harms and barriers to safety. These women require services that are explicitly trauma-informed, recognising the impacts of both the original violence and the system's failure to correctly identify them as victims, while providing support that prioritises their safety, agency and recovery.

Women with a Disability, Cognitive Impairment and/or Complex Support Needs
Women with cognitive disability, other disabilities and/or complex support needs (more than one disability such as having mental health disorder, cognitive disability and chronic health problem), represent a large population within criminal legal agencies, with Aboriginal women being significantly over-represented.

These women need specialised support that addresses their disability, substance use, and trauma through well-funded, consistent services. Women without National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) packages should be assessed for eligibility, and those with existing packages should be diverted from prison based on their support needs, and not remanded in custody.

Key priorities include keeping these women out of prison wherever possible through comprehensive, culturally appropriate support. When imprisonment cannot be avoided, they need accessible programs designed for different learning styles, staff trained in disability awareness, reasonable adjustments throughout prison facilities, and thorough planning for their release that addresses their specific needs. Without these essential supports, these women face greater risks of worsening health, social isolation, and returning to prison.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Women
CALD women represent a significant portion of NSW's prison population, comprising about 22% of inmates, with many originating from Vietnam, China, Sudan, and Lebanon. These women typically carry traumas from forced migration due to conflict, war, and political upheaval, and face additional challenges including language barriers, visa uncertainties, and fear of deportation.

The key issues affecting CALD women's pathways to prison include high rates of mental health problems (62% of women entering prison have long-term mental health issues), extensive histories of domestic violence (71% have experienced relationship abuse), and substance use as a coping mechanism. These challenges are significantly compounded by structural barriers such as limited English proficiency, lack of understanding of Australian legal systems, social isolation, and restricted access to culturally appropriate support services.

Supporting Family Connections

Evidence-based parenting programs have demonstrated positive outcomes for maintaining family bonds during incarceration. One program has shown impressive results: 89% of participants felt confident in their parenting skills, and 100% reported usually positive interactions with their children. KWOOP advocates for the implementation of similar evidence-based parenting programs in NSW correctional facilities to help mothers build confidence, improve family communication skills, and enhance the quality of contact with their children.

The successful reopening of the Women and Children's Program at Jacaranda Cottages in 2024, allowing 25 women to reside with their children, provides the opportunity to maintain family bonds. For women not eligible for a diversionary program, KWOOP supports the expansion of such programs and advocates for policies that strengthen these family connections, including enhanced visiting arrangements, video calls, and facilitated playgroups for mothers and children aged 0-5 years.

We support the continuation of the successful Co-located Caseworker Program, where child protection caseworkers are stationed within correctional centres to assist women in custody whose children are involved in the child protection system. This program helps women establish and maintain contact with their children and work towards child protection goals. While evaluation shows the program is well designed and beneficial, it could be strengthened through more coordinated case planning and increased availability of programs to help women achieve reunification.

Prohibitive costs and limited duration of phone calls from correctional facilities also hinder family connections. KWOOP advocates for free personal calls to nominated numbers of immediate family members, especially children, recognising these connections as crucial for rehabilitation and reducing reoffending.

Strong family contact reduces children's emotional and psychological impacts, including grief, confusion, helplessness and behavioural changes that can affect educational engagement and development. These connections are powerful protective factors against recidivism, poor mental health, and social isolation, increasing the likelihood women will be released into supportive environments that facilitate successful community reintegration.

Education and Vocational training

Opportunities to engage in skills training, educational and/or vocational planning should be initiated upon entry into custody, regardless of remand status or sentence length, for those who want it. This early intervention approach allows women to make productive use of their time by pursuing qualifications, developing marketable skills, and creating pathways to future employment. For women serving short sentences or ultimately released without conviction, even brief engagement with educational programs can provide valuable connections to continuing education opportunities in the community. These programs, when conducted with community partners, can help maintain crucial housing arrangements, preserve family connections, and protect employment prospects that erode during remand periods and jail time.

Finally, the specific needs of Aboriginal women require culturally appropriate services delivered by Aboriginal-controlled organisations and staff who understand the intersections of cultural, historical, and personal factors. KWOOP advocates for expanding cultural support programs, increasing the number of Aboriginal staff and/or Aboriginal external program providers, ensuring that all services for Aboriginal women are developed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

Recommendations for Supporting Women in the System:

1. **Implement evidence-based parenting programs** in NSW women's correctional facilities to strengthen family connections and build parenting confidence.

2. **Eliminate cost barriers to family communication** by providing free personal calls to nominated numbers and increasing communication access for all women in custody.

3. **Mandate equal access to all programs and services for women on remand,** including skills training, educational, therapeutic, and transition planning services, with specialised support for marginalised women including those with disability, cognitive impairment, CALD women, and victims of misidentification.

4. **Develop and implement a comprehensive trauma-informed care framework** for all staff working with incarcerated women, ensuring that appropriate training is provided for those working with marginalised women including those with disability, cognitive impairment, and CALD women.

5. **Expand educational and vocational programs** that align with contemporary employment markets and skill requirements as well as the needs of women in custody.

6. **Increase the number of Aboriginal staff and services** to develop culturally safe environments for Aboriginal women.

3. Helping Women Return to the Community

The period immediately following release from prison is critical in successful community reintegration.

KWOOP's transition strategy focuses on addressing the immediate practical barriers women face upon release while building long-term stability through mental health, disability and trauma services and support, safety from domestic violence and other abuse, poverty and disadvantage reduction, secure housing, income and employment.

Comprehensive Wrap-around Transitional Support

KWOOP advocates for a comprehensive wrap-around transitional support model that begins the moment a woman enters custody, whether on remand or serving a sentence. This throughcare approach - which has been Corrections' policy for decades, but remains a challenge - recognises that successful reintegration requires extensive planning starting at reception, not in the final weeks of custody.

From day one, women should receive coordinated support addressing multiple needs simultaneously:

- Housing planning should begin immediately, working to maintain existing tenancies where possible or identifying suitable housing options for release. This includes early engagement with housing providers, applications for priority housing, and development of realistic housing pathways based on individual circumstances and needs. For women on remand, preserving existing housing or finding housing is particularly critical given the large number who are homeless as well as the high percentage who will not receive a custodial sentence.

- Employment preparation should be integrated throughout a woman's custody period, with skill development, education, and vocational training aligned with employment markets and women's needs. This includes development of realistic employment plans, and preparation of documentation needed for job applications. Women on remand should have equal access to these opportunities to prevent the deterioration of employment prospects during custody.

- Counselling and therapeutic support should address underlying trauma, mental health issues, disability and substance use challenges, with a focus on developing coping strategies and support networks that will sustain recovery in the community. These services are particularly important for women on remand who often experience acute stress and uncertainty.

Practical transition planning should address identification, financial support, transportation, and communication needs well before release to ensure women exit custody with these fundamental needs met. For women on remand who may be released with no notice following court appearances, having these practical supports pre-arranged is crucial.

Immediate Housing Solutions

Developing immediate housing solutions is foundational to successful transition out of prison. KWOOP advocates for the provision of 30 days of Temporary Accommodation for all women upon release who don't have sustainable housing options. This critical breathing space allows women to focus on reconnecting with children, attending appointments, and addressing other pressing needs without the immediate stress of homelessness. Beyond temporary solutions, investment is needed in a full spectrum of housing options from transitional accommodation to long-term stable housing, with specific attention to maintaining existing tenancies during remand periods and creating specialised housing options for mothers with children.

Practical Support Measures

Successful transition requires addressing the immediate practical barriers women face upon release. KWOOP advocates for a comprehensive pre-release essential services package of practical supports. This includes:

- Pre-release identification processing through Service NSW staff stationed in correctional facilities ensures women have valid identification upon release – a fundamental prerequisite for accessing housing, employment, and essential services. This should be complemented by the activation of Centrelink payments before release, eliminating the financial distress and uncertainty many women experience while waiting for benefits to be processed.

- To maintain vital connections, women should receive refurbished mobile phones with data plans, enabling them to contact support services, stay connected with their children, and communicate with potential employers.

- Additionally, pre-loaded Opal cards (if in the Opal card area) or transport funding for regional and remote areas, to provide immediate transportation access, ensuring women can attend appointments, job interviews, and access services without facing mobility barriers during this critical transition period.

Employment Pathways

Employment pathways represent another critical element of successful transition. The stigma and bias faced by women with criminal records create significant barriers to employment. Introducing women to the options available to them post release once they have accessed stable housing and community connections is essential.

One program has demonstrated how employment can be a powerful pathway out of criminal justice, having placed 115 justice-involved women into meaningful employment through a comprehensive approach that includes stable housing, ongoing support, and partnerships with employers.

Government has a crucial leadership role to play in demonstrating to other sectors the importance and value of employing justice-involved women, helping to break down stigma and create broader employment opportunities.

Evidence-based Program Models

The effectiveness of comprehensive transition support has been demonstrated by many successful programs operating in NSW. One program exemplifies this approach by providing immediate access to safe accommodation upon release coupled with extensive wrap-around support. This stable foundation enables women to focus on their health, wellbeing, and family reunification rather than immediate survival concerns.

Similarly, another program has established a proven model that works on both sides of prison walls, creating genuine pathways to change for women facing the dual challenges of domestic violence and criminal justice system involvement. This gender-specific, trauma-informed approach addresses the complex intersections of violence, trauma, and justice system contact.

KWOOP advocates for sustainable, long-term funding to expand these models and programs across NSW, ensuring all women leaving custody have access to the comprehensive support needed for successful transition into the community.

Recommendations for Supporting Successful Transition:

1. **Establish a 30-day Temporary Accommodation guarantee** for all women upon release who don't have sustainable housing options.

2. **Implement a pre-release essential services package** including identification processing through Service NSW, activated Centrelink payments, refurbished mobile phones with data, and pre-loaded Opal cards or other transport support.

3. **Explore a NSW Government employment pathway program** specifically for justice-involved women with targets for each Department.

4. **Develop a coordinated approach to housing that maintains existing tenancies** during remand periods and creates specialised housing options for mothers with children.

5. **Expand funding for evidence-based transition programs** to ensure statewide coverage and accessibility.

6. **Establish a framework for transition planning that begins at entry to custody** for all women, including those on remand and that links women with the services and programs they need when released.

Conclusion

KWOOP's three-year strategy for 2025-2028 presents a comprehensive roadmap to reducing women's incarceration in NSW, with a particular focus on the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women. Through coordinated action, sustainable funding for evidence-based programs, and strategic policy reforms, we can achieve our vision of halving the rate of women's imprisonment in NSW by 2030, and creating a more just, effective, and economically sustainable approach.

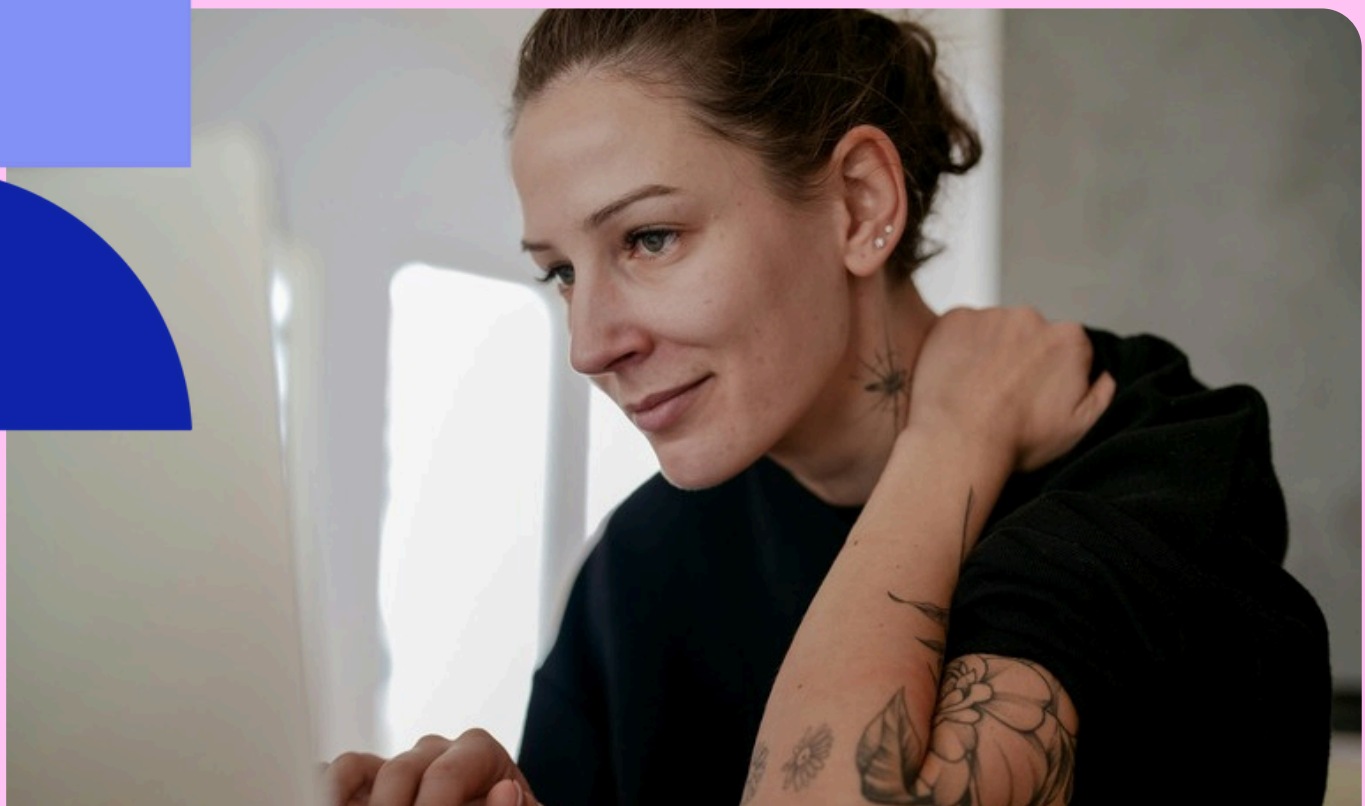
Our three strategic priorities seek to create meaningful, systemic change that addresses both the immediate barriers women face and the longer-term structural issues that contribute to women's pathways into prison:

- **Prevention** - keeping women out of the criminal justice system
- **In-system support** - providing appropriate care for women in custody
- **Successful transition** - supporting women's reintegration into the community

Through this comprehensive approach, we aim to reduce women's incarceration rates, improve outcomes for children and families, and generate significant cost savings across government services.

The economic case for reform is compelling. The current approach incurs substantial costs that could be reduced through strategic investments in prevention, support, and transition initiatives. These costs extend beyond the direct fiscal expense of imprisonment to include lost income, family support services for children, Out of Home Care placements, and long-term health, income and housing support needs. By redirecting resources from the high costs of incarceration toward evidence-based alternatives, we can achieve better outcomes for women, children, and communities while generating significant fiscal savings across all relevant government portfolios.

Finally, this strategy will evolve as our sector grows and changes. We will update our approach based on new evidence, program outcomes, and feedback from our community of practice, ensuring it remains effective in achieving better outcomes for women and children affected by the criminal legal system.



Appendix

Preventive, diversionary, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services and programs in the community, form the cornerstone of our Strategy, providing essential pathways for positive outcomes and community safety. These are integrated throughout our strategic framework, reflecting our commitment to addressing root causes of criminalisation and supporting sustainable change.

The following summary highlights key programs referenced in our Strategy. This represents a cross-section of services and programs that require expanded funding to address all aspects of women's involvement with the criminal legal system and achieve both immediate and long-term positive outcomes.

Appendix

1. Aboriginal Women on Remand Pilot
The dramatic increase in the rate of women's imprisonment following changes to the bail laws in 2018 have had a particularly devastating effect on Aboriginal women. In the two years after these legislative changes, the number of Aboriginal women held on remand has doubled. To address this over-representation, Legal Aid Australia developed the Aboriginal Women on Remand Pilot (AWRP), a targeted bail support program to reduce the barriers to services for Aboriginal women to access criminal law services.

The program was created to provide culturally sensitive legal support with an understanding of the inequities Aboriginal women face in the justice system. The client-centred legal service offered by AWRP assists Aboriginal women to feel empowered to participate fully in their legal matters.

The AWRP provides a holistic model of service delivery and triage for Aboriginal women on remand.

The program works in collaboration with stakeholders and community organisations to reduce delays during court processes and accelerate resolutions in criminal matters. Aboriginal women are fast-tracked to an assessment for Supreme Court bail and given specialised support while in custody waiting to appear before the court. Additionally, the AWRP organises priority referrals to residential rehabilitation or other community support services where necessary.

For more information: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients

2. Circle Sentencing
Circle Sentencing is a restorative justice program for eligible Aboriginal adults who have pleaded guilty or are found guilty of criminal offences in a local court. It is a program to help reduce reoffending, improve justice outcomes and improve community safety.

Rather than being sentenced by a Magistrate alone, representatives from the local Aboriginal community help decide appropriate sentences and devise suitable outcome plans for Aboriginal defendants. The defendant sits in a circle with respected Aboriginal community members, support people and the local magistrate to discuss the offending behaviours. The victim may also choose to participate.

The process emphasises accountability, cultural support, and community healing. It is designed to reduce reoffending and strengthen cultural identity.

It is available in selected Local Courts across NSW, and as of 2025, has been expanded to Sydney's Downing Centre.

For more information: https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/2025/circle-sentencing-expanded-to-sydney-s-downing-centre.html

3. Drug Court of NSW
The Drug Court of NSW supervises the intensive community-based rehabilitation of eligible drug-dependent offenders who would otherwise be sentenced to full-time imprisonment. This is often referred to as the 'Drug Court program' and is a specialist court that sits in four locations, Parramatta, Toronto, Sydney and Dubbo in New South Wales. It takes referrals from the Local and District Courts of offenders who are dependent on drugs and are considered to be eligible for a Drug Court program.

The Court commenced operations in 1999, based on similar initiatives in the United States. It provides an alternative to prison for adults facing serious drug-related offences. The primary objectives of the NSW Drug Court are to reduce the level of drug-related crime and reduce offenders' level of drug-dependence. It attempts to address underlying drug dependency which has resulted in criminal offending.

Eligible participants enter a 12-month, structured program that includes treatment for drug dependency, social supports, frequent drug testing and regular court reviews. Sentencing is deferred while progress is monitored. Successful completion can result in reduced or non-custodial penalties.

For more information:
https://drugcourt.nsw.gov.au/documents/Factsheet_-_What_is_the_Drug_Court_program.pdf

4. Early Drug Diversion Initiative (EDDI)
EDDI is a police-based diversion initiative which came into effect in 2024. It is a program for adults who commit small drug offences and allows police to divert adults found in possession of small amounts of illicit drugs away from the court system. Under the EDDI, instead of charging an individual, police issue a $400 fine, which can be waived if the person completes a drug education or counselling session.

Individuals can only access this option up to two times. The program aims to provide people with low-level drug offences the opportunity to understand the risks associated with illicit drug use and receive support.

It also aims to increase court efficiencies by diverting these individuals away from court. This initiative focuses on harm reduction and early intervention and is available state-wide.

For more information: https://www.nsw.gov.au/money-and-taxes/fines-and-fees/support-and-community-services/early-drug-diversion-initiative/early-drug-diversion-initiative-easy-read#toc-what-is-this-fact-sheet-about

5. Jacaranda Cottages: Women & Children's Program
The Women and Children's Program, run at the Jacaranda Cottages inside the Emu Plains Correctional Centre, is an arrangement that allows inmates who are mothers to continue to live with and provide care to their children while they are imprisoned.

The Jacaranda Cottages are a purpose-built residential facility with the capacity to house 24 women and 32 children. Children up to the age of six can live full-time at the facility. Children up to the age of 12 can stay overnight, on weekends, or during school holidays. Applications are rigorously assessed by the Women and Children's Panel, made up of experts, industry professionals with final approval by the NSW Deputy Commissioner of Corrective Services.

At its optimum level, resident mothers and children, while housed in the Jacaranda Cottages, can have access to playgroups, weekly mothers groups, kindy gym, swimming lessons, community pre-school, and a range of external excursions.

These activities would have the effect of maintaining community identity and bonds, normalising community exposure and providing networks of support for women and children.

The primary objective of this program is to ensure the best interests of the child, recognising a child's right to continuous care from their primary caregiver. By facilitating ongoing contact between carer and child, the program minimises the detrimental impacts of separation and incarceration on the wellbeing of dependent children, mothers, families and communities.

For more information: Microsoft Word - Community Legal Centres NSW submission re support for children of imprisoned parents in NSW.docx

6. Justice Advocacy Service (JAS) – Court-Based Diversion
JAS is delivered by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service, supporting people with cognitive impairments or mental health conditions who are involved in the criminal justice system, whether as victims, witnesses or suspects/defendants. The service supports clients to exercise their rights to fully participate in criminal justice processes.

The JAS is available across NSW, including in rural, regional and remote areas. The team uses an individual advocacy approach by arranging a support person to be with the victim, witness or suspect/defendant when they are in contact with the criminal justice system. A potential client does not need to provide evidence of a cognitive impairment to access the service. If police, court staff, legal representatives, correctional officers or other stakeholders believe the person may have a cognitive impairment, a referral can be made to the JAS.

The Court-Based Diversion program helps eligible individuals access community-based treatment and support under Section 14 of the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020. Trained advocates assist with court processes, safety planning, and referrals. The goal is to prevent incarceration and address complex needs.

For more information: https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/legal-assistance-and-representation/justice-advocacy-service.html

7. MERIT (Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment)
MERIT is a voluntary, court-based intervention program that allows defendants with drug or alcohol issues to engage to work towards rehabilitation as part of their bail process. The program operates within a harm minimisation framework and aims to reduce substance use and offending behaviour, as well as improving health and social functioning in offenders.

As an 'early referral' initiative, defendants are referred to MERIT pre-plea and potentially as early as prior to the first court appearance, meaning that no admission of guilt is required to be eligible.

If accepted into the program, a drug treatment program is developed that matches the person's needs and runs for approximately three months. It provides access to a wide range of alcohol and drug treatment services, operating before a plea is entered. Treatment can include counselling, case management, welfare support, detoxification, opioid substitution therapy and/or residential rehabilitation.

Participation is considered during sentencing and can lead to non-custodial outcomes. It aims to address the root causes of offending and reduce reoffending. MERIT operates in over 70 Local Courts across NSW.

For more information: https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/diversion-and-therapeutic-programs/the-magistrates-early-referral-into-treatment-merit-program.html

8. Community Restorative Centre (CRC) Miranda Project

CRC's Miranda Project is a community-based gender-specific support service for women who have experienced domestic and family violence (DFV) and who are in contact with the criminal legal system. At its heart, the project aims to help women live life free from the criminal legal system and the violence that puts them at risk of incarceration or reincarceration.

Miranda, which was established in 2017 by the Community Restorative Centre, currently operates out of two women's health centres: Penrith and Liverpool. Through the provision of specialist, outreach trauma- and violence-informed casework, the project addresses the many intersecting unmet needs of women at any stage of their journey through the criminal legal system. The support is long-term, relational and holistic, focusing on addressing the social determinants that contribute to criminalisation in order to build genuine pathways out of the criminal legal system.

The services offered are highly individualised, working with women to achieve their personal goals, maintain connections with community, access services to meet their needs and increase safety. The program provides advocacy and assistance with a range of issues, including sourcing accommodation, social and emotional wellbeing, physical and mental health, alcohol and other drugs support, building life skills, child and family contact, legal needs, staying safe and pathways to education and employment.

Miranda case workers provide intensive support to around 115 clients and briefer support to 150 clients annually. It is the only program of its kind in Australia that places criminal legal system and violence prevention specialists directly in women's health centres. In this way, it offers a unique service for women with high levels of need who have historically experienced barriers to service access and supports.

For more information:
https://www.crcnsw.org.au/services/the-miranda-project/

9.SHINE for Kids: Bringing Up Great Kids Program

Developed in 2005 by the Australian Childhood Foundation, Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) is a long-running program which aims to support families and children affected by trauma.

BUGK is a reflective parenting program targeted at vulnerable families which aims to promote positive and nurturing relationships between parents and their children.

The program supports parents to strengthen their relationships with their children by improving self-awareness, emotional insight and listening skills. Through the development of the reflection and communication skills of parents, the program promotes respectful family interactions and the healthy identity development of children. It aims to identify and address the sources of hurtful or damaging attitudes held by parents, and through reflective techniques, it facilitates the establishment of a new relationship context for children and parents based on trust.

BUGK is delivered through a series of modules totalling 12 hours, led by trained facilitators. Since its inception, more than 4 000 facilitators have been trained, and the program has reached more than 50 000 parents across Australia and internationally. The program has also been used flexibly by child and family service providers to target the specific needs of at-risk families.

For more information:
https://professionals.childhood.org.au/bringing-up-great-kids/

10.Success Works

Success Works, a registered not-for-profit social enterprise, supports women affected by the criminal legal system by breaking down the barriers to employment. It began as a pilot program of Dress for Success Sydney in 2019 and transitioned to a stand-alone service in 2022.

The program recognises that the lack of access to education and employment for many women with a criminal history is a key driver of re-offending.

Success Works offers a comprehensive program which aims not only to achieve job outcomes, but to address the social and economic vulnerabilities of women affected by the criminal legal system which hinder their stability, independence and employability.

A key feature of the program is the development of partnerships with employers challenging stereotyped attitudes which lead to discrimination and loss of employment opportunities.

The program provides employability skill development and transitional support for women. This support is continued once employment is commenced and through the early months of employment.

Through job readiness workshops, mentoring programs and employer engagement programs, Success Works offers the support needed to build the skills, self-belief and resilience which is at the core of employability.

For more information: https://successworks.org.au/

11. Women and Girls Emergency Centre: From Now
The Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC) is a feminist, grassroots organisation that supports women and children in crisis. Every night, WAGEC provides safe accommodation for around 200 women and children escaping domestic and family violence or experiencing homelessness. Their work goes far beyond crisis response. They deliver holistic, trauma-informed support including case management, therapeutic services, and community programs that prioritise healing, dignity, and long-term recovery.

WAGEC exists to disrupt the systems that perpetuate gender-based violence, poverty, and homelessness. Their approach is grounded in lived experience and feminist values, and they work across early intervention, crisis support, and long-term recovery. They advocate for systemic change, partner with communities, and challenge the status quo - as one woman is still killed every 10 days by a current or former partner in Australia.

In 2023, in partnership with the Judith Neilson Foundation, WAGEC developed From Now, a program designed to meet the needs of women transitioning out of the corrections system.

The program offers safe transitional accommodation for pregnant women and mothers with children post-release for a period of 3-6 months to ensure a stable and supportive environment during the critical transition period. Key features of the program include:

- Daily intensive support to build independent living skills, emotional regulation, and parenting capacity
- Tailored child-focused interventions through WAGEC's SEED Program
- Economic empowerment via mentoring, education, and employment pathways through WAGEC's ACCESS Program
- Holistic case management and referral pathways to legal, psychological, and substance use services

This program is grounded in evidence-based frameworks, including the National Plan to End Violence Against Women 2022–2032 and the UN Bangkok Rules, which advocate for gender-sensitive alternatives to incarceration and recognises children as victim-survivors in their own right.

For more information: https://www.wagec.org.au/from-now/

12. Youth Koori Court
The Youth Koori Court (YKC) is a culturally appropriate diversionary court for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who plead guilty in the Children's Court. It was established in 2015 in Parramatta to address the significant over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the criminal legal system, with further courts opening in Surry Hills (2019) and Dubbo (2023).

The YKC operates within the Children's Court framework but uses a different, culturally responsive process. It has the same legal powers as the Children's Court but places greater emphasis on involving the young person's family, community, and respected Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander elders.

The court works with the young person to identify risk factors contributing to their offending, such as homelessness, disengagement from education, substance use, or health issues. Together, they develop an Action and Support Plan to address these issues, strengthen cultural identity, and rebuild community connections.

Progress is reviewed over several months, with the young person returning to court multiple times to report on their actions. At sentencing, the judicial officer considers the young person's efforts and progress under the plan, aiming to reduce incarceration and support long-term positive change.

For more information:
https://childrenscourt.nsw.gov.au/criminal/koori-court.html

Join our KWOOP Community of Practice

KWOOP's strength lies in our diverse and growing community of practice, which brings together professionals, advocates, researchers, and individuals with lived experience who are committed to transforming outcomes for women in the criminal legal system. Whether you're new to this sector and seeking to understand the complex issues facing criminalised women, or an experienced practitioner looking to deepen your knowledge and enhance your skills, our community offers valuable opportunities for learning, collaboration, and professional development.

Our community of practice provides access to evidence-based resources, sector expertise, and networking opportunities that can strengthen your work and broaden your understanding of gender-responsive approaches to justice.

We regularly share research findings, best practice examples, policy updates, and training opportunities that keep members informed about developments in the field. By joining our community, you become part of a collective effort to create systemic change while building your own capacity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of women and children affected by the criminal legal system.

Our community of practice is generously supported by the Judith Neilson Foundation.

To find out more, please visit **www.sydcf.org.au/kwoop** or email **kwoop@sydcf.org.au**

KWOOP
Keeping Women Out Of Prison
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Neilson Foundation
Judith Neilson Foundation

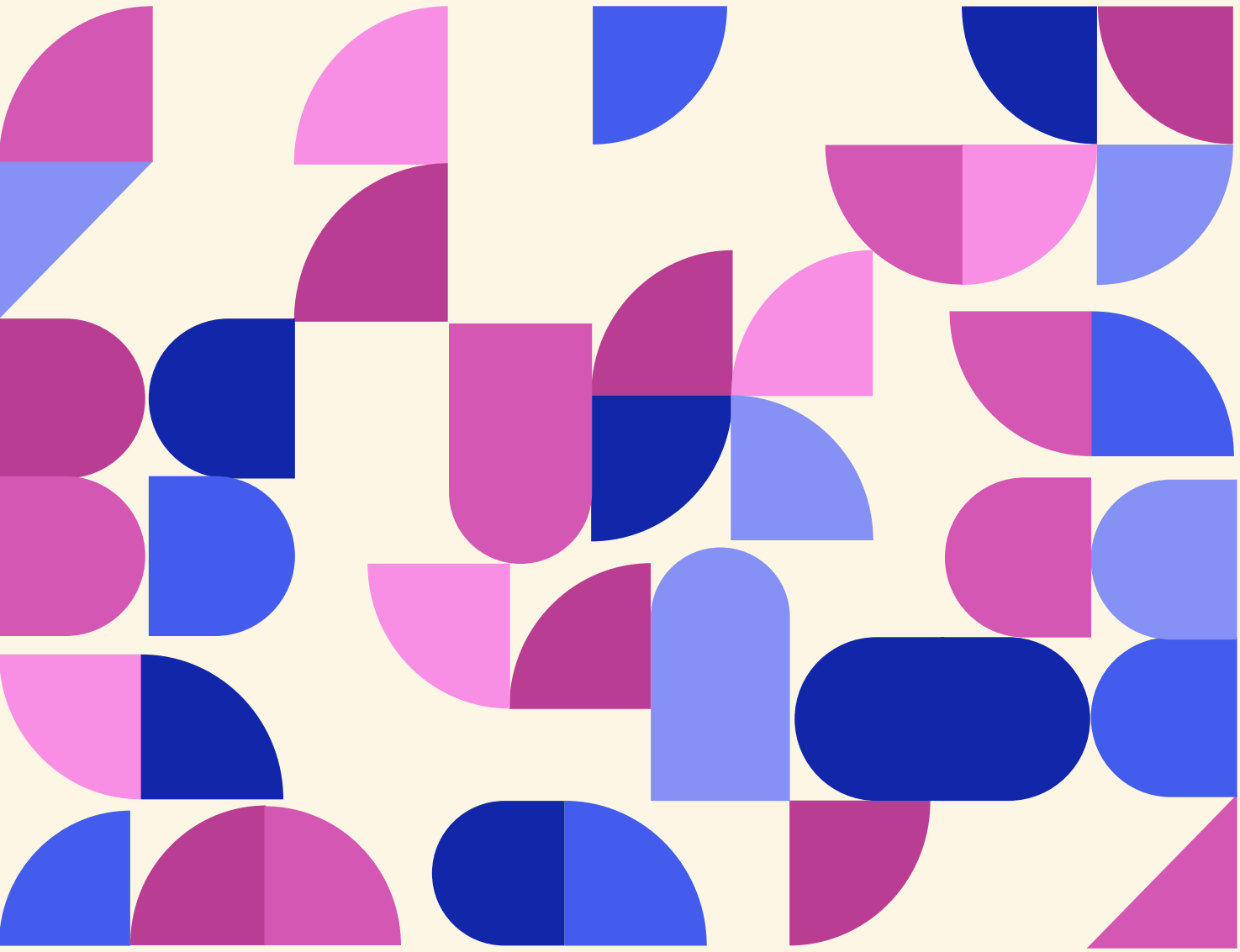
KWOOP
Keeping Women Out Of Prison
COALITION

A sub-fund of
SYDNEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

KWOOP's Origin Story

In 2013, KWOOP was founded by then Chair of the Sydney Community Foundation, the late Rosalind Strong AM, together with the late Lorraine Orfanidis, a passionate volunteer and supporter of women in incarceration. Their inspiration came after learning that education was largely inaccessible for women in prison. Rosalind, a lifelong educator, was motivated by this inequity, while Lorraine brought deep commitment from her volunteer work supporting incarcerated women.

Together, they moved quickly to bring together experts to research the issue, advocate for reform, and develop practical interventions to ensure women affected by the justice system in New South Wales have the greatest chance of success upon release.

Today, KWOOP is a vibrant and growing coalition at the forefront of sector support and advocacy for meaningful reform. Guided by a collaborative approach and a commitment to evidence-based solutions, we champion the rights and needs of women navigating the criminal justice system, creating pathways to healing, rehabilitation, and lasting change.

Since it's establishment the Sydney Community Foundation has offered significant support to KWOOP's aims. It is now a key impact fund of the Foundation. Through this partnership, donors can also make tax-deductible contributions to advance KWOOP's vital work.