



Illawarra  
Women's  
Health  
Centre

Established 1986



# Young Women's Outreach Program

Illawarra Women's Health Centre

# About The Program

## Overview

Our eight-week health and wellbeing program for girls and young women (12-16 years old) is delivered in small and confidential group settings within schools.

Designed by our specialised social workers and counsellors, this unique highly regarded program builds resilience and develops the skills, knowledge and confidence of girls and to understand and protect themselves across three critical health domains: mental health, domestic, family and sexual violence and sexual and reproductive health.

The program provides a safe, transparent and collaborative space to build resilience and respect for self and others, increase knowledge of physical and mental health, and develop students' capacity to discuss health and wellbeing issues with perspective and sensitivity.

Using evidence-based strategies and innovative forms of engagement our program empowers participants to make informed choices about their lives, bodies and relationships, for today – and into the future as they grow into strong and independent women.

## Additional Offerings

The young women's program also offers:

- Free individual counselling to young women
- Psychoeducational workshops tailored to the needs of each group
- Health forums at the Illawarra WHC to connect women to community support services

Over the last six years, we have systematically collected individual pre and post program evaluations, run student focus groups and interviewed school counsellors, welfare officers and Principals as to the benefits of the program. The feedback from all stakeholders has been consistently and overwhelmingly positive.

For more information about these services, please contact us.

## Acknowledgement Of Country

Our Centre is situated on the land of the Dharawal Nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land, where the Aboriginal people have performed age-old ceremonies of storytelling, music, dance and celebration. We acknowledge and pay respect to Elders past and present, for they hold the memories, traditions and hopes of First Nations people. We must always remember, that under the concrete and asphalt, this land is, was, and always will be, traditional Aboriginal land.



# Who We Are

The Illawarra Women's Health Centre is a community-based feminist health care centre for women only. Established in 1986 we provide a safe place for women to access specialised high-quality women's medical and health care services. We also offer a range of health and wellbeing workshops, programs and community-based group activities and support groups.

## Our Vision

Women and girls are respected, safe, healthy, and supported to lead rewarding lives.

## Our Purpose

To improve the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of women and girls, and ensure their views, engagement and experiences inform decision making at all levels.

## What We Do

We are a community-based women's health centre run by women for women and girls.

### Our core business includes

- Free or low-cost individual and group health care.
- A woman-centred safe space for social support and community activities.
- Health education and outreach programs.
- Advocacy and social change strategies to improve policy and services impacting women and girls.

# Why Young Women?

## 1 in 3

Young women have been diagnosed with or treated for either depression or anxiety. <sup>(2)</sup>

## 2 in 5

Young women aged 18-24 have reported being sexually harassed in the past 12 months. <sup>(1)</sup>

## 41%

Of young women report having concerns about body image. <sup>(1)</sup>

## 51%

Over 50% of girls feel they are seldom or never valued for brains over looks. <sup>(1)</sup>

## 70%

Of Australian girls aged 15-19 reported believing that online harassment and bullying was endemic and that receiving unwanted sexually explicit content was common behaviour young women report having concerns about body image. <sup>(3)</sup>

Sources

- 1. Women's Health Victoria, (2017) "Growing Up Unequal „How sex & gender impact young women's health & wellbeing" Issue. 12.
- 2. Mutha-Merenege, P "Girl Interrupted 10 years of girls' rights in Australia (2020), Plan international.
- 3. Australian Woman Against Violence Alliance (2022). Young Women's Report. Canberra, WESNET.

# Program Facilitators



**Gabrielle McCann**  
Young Women's Program Coordinator

Over the past ten years, Gabrielle has gained significant experience as an educator, both within the classroom and in a wellbeing capacity. She has obtained formal qualifications in teaching, psychology and counselling, and acknowledges the privilege and responsibility of working with young people. Gabrielle believes in a holistic approach to educating young people, engaging all aspects of the person including mind, body and spirit. She is an advocate for vulnerable and marginalised groups including women and children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ communities. As the Young Women's Program Coordinator, she is committed to designing and implementing evidence-based programs for young women in the Illawarra.



**Chynna Foster**  
Young Women's Program Facilitator

Chynna is a Clinical Psychologist and Young Women's Program facilitator at the Illawarra Women's Health Centre. Her facilitation style is warm, collaborative and informed by both her clinical experience and interest in research. Chynna has a passion for education and the therapeutic value of group work. Chynna has a particular interest in working with young people and strongly believes in the power of education, information, support in inspiring and empowering young people to connect to their own agency and ultimately drive social change.

# Session Overview

"Our students have benefitted hugely from the weekly sessions which can be evident in a number of ways. The program skillfully built rapport with all the students which led two students to engage in one-to-one counselling sessions that have equipped them with the skills to manage the complex life challenges they are confronted by."

Participating School

## Establishing Safety

The purpose of this initial session is to establish and promote safety and trust in the group. Members and facilitators co-create a group agreement to ensure members are aware of the rights and responsibilities in the group. We promote a safe and inclusive space.

## Body Image & Self-Esteem

This session allows participants to explore their relationship with themselves through reflective exercises. It also includes psycho-education about the impact of social media.

## Boundaries & Consent

In this session, members are given the knowledge and tools to set and hold boundaries across a range of spaces. We discuss issues around consent and examine online safety.

## Making Choices & Values-driven action

Incorporating the skills and knowledge gained from the previous sessions, members are encouraged to practice making values-based actions through an exploration of real life scenarios and choices.

## Identity

This session explores the different elements of identity including, cultural, gender, sexual, and spiritual. Facilitators initiate discussion about the importance of understanding one's own identity and respecting different identities.

## Healthy & Harmful Relationships

Members discuss the types of relationships and explore the importance of healthy relationships, whether intimate or peer. We examine the mind/body connection and practice strategies for emotional regulation and effective communication.

## Sexuality & Pleasure

Young women are so often pressured into engaging in sexual activity. This session empowers young women to explore their own needs and make informed choices in their future intimate relationships.

## Reflection

This final session provides members with an opportunity to reflect on the joys and challenges of the group experience. They share their intentions and hopes for the future and provide feedback on the program.

# Theoretical Frameworks

The development of the program is based on a range of theoretical frameworks to help give young women evidence support they need.

## Trauma-Informed Practice

The Young Women's Program is delivered from a trauma-informed framework. A trauma-informed frame acknowledges the prevalence of trauma and the complexity of its impact. We aim to respond to participants in a respectful, collaborative and sensitive manner that will promote both individual and group safety.

## Narrative Approach

A narrative approach involves considering the context and the story of each challenge, rather than situating the problem within the individual person. This paradigm acknowledges the diverse cultural experiences that participants may have and positions each individual group member as the expert of their own lives.

## Intersectionality

An intersectional approach considers the nuance of identity and acknowledges the impact of multiple, intersecting identities. An Intersectional lens emerges from a social constructionist paradigm which considers each individual person in relation to their own unique context.

## Strengths-based, Anti-oppressive and Feminist Practice

A strength-based framework aims to shift focus from a deficit-oriented and pathologising approach to support participants to connect with and identify their own strengths. A feminist and anti-oppressive approach involves acknowledging the systemic power differentials that govern society and the complex spaces of privilege and disempowerment that young people navigate.

## Arts-based Interventions

Art based intervention is utilised as both a tool for self-expression and a method of self-regulation. Using mixed media to explore and reflect on each of the topics can support participants to engage in a way that feels safe and comfortable.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Who is this program for?

The program is designed for young women between the ages of 12-16 years old (Year 7-10). While all young women could benefit, those who are struggling socially or emotionally may find this program especially helpful.

## How many students can be in each group?

A small group of students - up to a maximum of 12.

## How long will the program go for?

Each session is 1 hour each week for 8 weeks.

## When will the program take place?

During school hours, as suitable for each school.

## What will happen during the sessions?

Every session will be a little bit different. We will do a range of different exercises exploring the topics mentioned above. Some of these may involve group discussion, art, mindfulness, journaling and more. We will also be guided by member responses and the concerns raised by the group.

## Who will be leading the group?

Experienced and qualified counsellors and psychologists, employed by the Illawarra Women's Health Centre. Please see page 5 for more information.

## Will it be the same students each week?

Groups are closed to new members after session 3, to allow time for the group to get to know each other and to feel comfortable.

## Can we choose what topics to cover in the program?

While we ensure our programs are aligned with the Department of Education's requirements, we also consult with schools prior to program delivery to ensure the program is targeting the specific needs of your students.

## What resources do you need from the school?

We ask the school to provide the following:


1. A key contact from the school (i.e. Student Support Officer or Wellbeing Coordinator) to be available for the duration of the program to organise logistics and provide engagement with participants
2. A classroom or space that is available at the same time each week. The space should be in a quiet and private space to ensure members feel safe.

For more information, please contact the Young Women's Program Coordinator **Gabrielle McCann**.


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 **Open Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm**