



2022/23

# ANNUAL REPORT

CatholicCare Diocese of Broken Bay

A series of  
**heartfelt  
stories**

demonstrating the  
important work we do

*CatholicCare*  
Diocese of Broken Bay



We have presented our annual report quite differently this time. There is always such huge interest in seeing our mission in action. These heartfelt stories demonstrate the important work we do, so we have deliberately included more stories this year. Many of these stories are reflections from people who have been supported by CatholicCare.

We have changed some names and images to protect their privacy.

We are happy to share program specific updates and statistics with those who are interested.

*Cover image by Will Walters, one of our amazing Boonah artists.*



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land across our Diocese. We recognise Aboriginal people as holding the memories, the traditions and the culture of the lands we live and work upon. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



## OUR VISION

We strive for a world where people are safe, well and connected with each other in inclusive communities.

## OUR MISSION

We support and enrich the lives of individuals and families. We live out the Gospel by walking alongside people to find and build solutions to their needs. We deliver evidence-based services, and do so with commitment, regardless of the difficulties faced. To this mission we bring a long history of service and faith, the resources of dedicated staff, volunteers and partners, a willingness to go beyond essential care, and persistence in supporting justice and wellbeing for all.

## OUR VALUES

- Faith
- Respect
- Courage
- Excellence
- Compassion
- Social Justice

Catholic Social Teaching guides our work and provides the foundation for our values:



### RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

Everybody, regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or religious beliefs, is of great value and worth. The work of CatholicCare upholds the dignity of all.



### COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD

Every one of us has a responsibility to consider the good of others and the good of us all, including future generations. CatholicCare hopes for a society in which every person has their needs met and can reach their full potential.



### WALKING WITH PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES IN SOLIDARITY

People thrive through relationships. We need each other and are responsible for one another. CatholicCare walks with people, supporting them to face challenges and celebrating with them in times of joy.



### SUBSIDIARITY IN DECISION MAKING & ACCOUNTABILITY

CatholicCare respects the right of people to make decisions about their lives. We are accountable to the people and communities we serve in our decision making.



### AN OPTION FOR THE POOR & VULNERABLE

CatholicCare gives priority to those in the greatest need, the most vulnerable, isolated and at risk.



### SUPPORTING THE WHOLE PERSON

CatholicCare recognises the importance of supporting the needs and aspirations of people and communities in a complete way – we support them in body, soul and spirit.



### CARE FOR CREATION

Social, economic and ecological issues are interrelated and cannot be solved separately. CatholicCare operates in ways that nurture the web of life on earth. We are good stewards of all that is given to us.



**Most Rev Anthony Randazzo  
Bishop of Broken Bay**

Speaking with many people in our community during the year, I am often hearing and seeing their financial challenges and struggles.

Energy increases, mortgage and rent hikes, grocery bills that seem to go up each week, and even job uncertainty. This can often lead to a feeling of being overwhelmed which in turn can take a huge toll on one's mental, physical and even spiritual wellbeing, which may also lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

At the same time I am so impressed and grateful to those who recognise when a family member, friend or even a complete stranger is doing it tough and reaches out to help.

We are blessed in Broken Bay to have many wonderful people who look for the opportunity to carry out Christ's mission to serve the most vulnerable.

I only have to see those who come forward during our pastoral works appeals or CatholicCare's annual homelessness fundraiser to know they listen to God's call to make a difference in the lives of others.

I am also very aware of the daily and tireless efforts of our CatholicCare workers who really "walk the talk" of the Gospel.

The way they respond to the varied needs of so many on a regular basis, often with innovative programs and initiatives, is inspiring.

Sometimes they are there for the long haul, other times they just need to be there briefly to help someone or a family get back on their feet. But they are there.

Whatever the circumstances, I am indebted to our CatholicCare team, their volunteers and supporters and I thank them all for their strength of purpose and service.

With every blessing in the Lord.



**Tim Curran  
Executive Director  
CatholicCare Diocese of Broken Bay**

Apart from the Omicron variant wave of infections from July to September which resulted in significant disruptions for many of our clients and staff, CatholicCare was able to operate largely free of the direct impacts of COVID for the first time in more than two years. Some of the indirect impacts of COVID though impacted us greatly.

High inflation, labour shortages, and a further deterioration in housing availability and affordability placed additional pressures on our organisation. And the elevated prevalence of mental illness, domestic violence, and alcohol and other drug dependencies across our communities resulted in unprecedented demand for our financial and relationship counselling, emergency relief, homelessness and domestic violence services.

Following the end of the COVID pandemic, or at least the end of Government led emergency responses to the pandemic, the new Labor Governments at both the Federal and State level turned their minds to social policy reform with important reforms and investments occurring in areas such as the NDIS, early childhood education and care, and domestic and family violence.

Whilst more work needs to be done by the new Federal and NSW Governments in these and other areas such as social housing, aged

care and mental health services, a sense of optimism permeates the social and community services sector for the first time in a decade.

CatholicCare benefited from some of these new initiatives and investments, with success in capital grant tenders to build a new domestic violence refuge in Arcadia and new early learning centres in Toukley and Wyoming.

We were also allocated additional funding to expand our domestic violence support programs and men's behaviour change programs, and we were successful in tendering for the short-term emergency placement program for children experiencing a breakdown in the out of home care system and needing immediate accommodation and support.

We also established new out of school hours and vacation care programs, and opened new supported independent living properties.

All this service growth required vast amounts of time and energy from our managers and support staff, and it is a great credit to them that they were able to successfully expand our programs and services whilst dealing with the abovementioned operational challenges posed by COVID. That they were also able to complete important initiatives aimed at further enhancing our service quality and business process efficiency on top of this, is truly remarkable.

I would like to thank all CatholicCare managers, service support staff, and members of our People & Culture, Finance, ICT, Communications & Engagement, and Quality, Risk, Safeguarding & Compliance teams for their extraordinary efforts through the year.

Thank you also to our Advisory Council members and members of our various sub-committees. Your ideas, support and guidance is greatly appreciated by me and the members of our Senior Leadership Team.

Finally, I would like to thank and acknowledge the invaluable contribution of our frontline staff and volunteers. Every piece of work we deliver in support of our clients, participants, families and communities happens through you. I am continually inspired by your passion, devotion and professionalism, as well as your flexibility and pragmatism which have been amply displayed through the three long COVID years.



**Ted Wziontek  
Advisory Council Chair**

The past year has seen CatholicCare not only consolidate post the pandemic but also grow. Improved attendance and new OSHC's delivered significant growth. We saw stronger revenue across disability supports and out of home care.

In line with the 2022-2025 Strategic Directions, new business opportunities were identified in

supported independent living, domestic violence and allied health supports.

The cost of living pressures that all families are experiencing are creating increased demand in financial services, homelessness and domestic violence supports.

Many families have multiple jobs creating a greater need for early learning centres and before and after school care.

The Advisory Council was pleased to see greater integration across the parishes in the Diocese, who now have a much better appreciation of the role of CatholicCare.

The Advisory Council welcomed two new members - Carmen Izurieta and Julie Anderson. Both are very experienced executives in the

social care sector and have already made a great contribution. Julie comes with strong background in clinical governance and has stepped in as Chair of the Clinical & Care Governance Sub-Committee.

As part of its governance, the Advisory Council reviewed and recommended the 2023/24 financial budget as well as monitored progress of the strategic plan.

We would like to thank Bishop Anthony for his continued support.



**We are the social care agency of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Broken Bay.**

With 35 years experience serving the communities of Northern Sydney, the Northern Beaches and the Central Coast, we deliver a wide range of services to improve individual, family and community wellbeing.

Across all our services, we honour the unique talents and challenges of our clients, regardless of circumstances, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or ability. Whatever assistance is needed, we serve in justice and love.

We delivered over \$63 million of services this year, providing care to 17,525 children, young people, individuals and families.

With funding from Government, individual supporters and other sources, as well as a workforce of more than 800 people, we offer:



**FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**



**DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORTS**



**SERVICES FOR SENIORS**



**CHILDREN'S SERVICES**



**HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS**



**HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY & PASTORAL CARE**



**DISABILITY & NDIS SUPPORTS**



**THERAPY SERVICES**



**PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM**

# WE CELEBRATE 2022/23

## PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Reconfigured our Intensive Therapeutic Care services and introduced a new, lower density model of care providing a more individually focused care environment for children with high and complex needs, and an opportunity to work with children with intellectual disability.

In our STEP Program, we focused on developing more bespoke care service models in response to community need and were approached by the Department of Communities & Justice to provide group home care to a sibling group of five keeping them together and supported – a very rewarding project for all involved!

Our foster care team undertook community engagement campaigns leading to a new cohort of potential carers to support children and young people in need.

## DISABILITY FUTURES

Grew our Supported Independent Living (SIL) services with the opening of Wahroonga House and transitioned four new participants.

Established partnerships with new Specialist Disability Accommodation providers to deliver additional SDA properties in Point Frederick, Wyoming, Toukley & Macquarie Park next year which will triple our SIL participant numbers.

## HOMELESSNESS & FAMILY SERVICES

Partnered with the North Sydney Local Health District to launch Northern Sydney's first Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Supported Playgroup, a commitment towards increasing cultural community connections and providing a safe space for jarjums and their families to learn about, and stay connected to culture.

Celebrated our 1 year anniversary at Dom's Place, with over 4,000 visits.

Became a Tier 3 Registered Community Housing Provider, allowing us to continue to provide short-term crisis support accommodation to the most vulnerable in our communities.

We established new, and extended our existing food networks across the Diocese to help families at a time when Australians are feeling the pinch.

## CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Established four new OSHC and two new vacation care services across Diocesan schools.

The Department of Education asked us to set up an OSHC service at East Gosford Public School to rave reviews!

In collaboration with our Disability Futures team, we created a mainstream OSHC at St Gabriel's Special Education School in Castle Hill. This clever combination ensures regulatory compliance, streamlining of business operations, allows families to access the Child Care Subsidy and enrolments of children over the age of 12. We will extend to a vacation care offering in September.

We successfully applied to the Department of Education's Capital Works Fund for two new community preschools on Diocesan school sites.

## SENIORS SERVICES

Delivered our *Let's Get Moving*, *Brain Games* and *Arts Smarts* Memory Innovations Centre programs to 146 seniors across the Diocese receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback about the programs and our incredible facilitators who create such a welcoming and fun environment for our seniors.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

Increased funding allowed us to expand our Domestic & Family Violence (DFV) services with a focus on providing holistic care including support at court, case management, primary prevention and intervention support and development and delivery of CALD and cognitively impaired service user programs in the Men's Behaviour Change sector.

Strengthened our community presence and partnerships by participating in conferences, MC'ing forums, presenting training sessions and establishing and chairing community of practices across several key areas of our business.

Collaborated with Bara Barang on school based traineeships to provide opportunities for skill development to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students on the Central Coast to empower them and to enhance their career prospects.

Addressed increased stalking and tracking concerns alongside our clients and Police - purchasing a bug sweeping device to provide increased client privacy and safety, decreasing the need for Police intervention for high risk cases.

# RELINQUISHING THE HAPPY FAMILY DREAM

"But he's a great dad," is the phrase that Domestic Violence Caseworker, Fernanda hears all the time. "The kids don't see him when he's violent," the woman will say, yet she will tiptoe around the house in a constant state of distress and vigilance. "Kids can sense that," Fernanda says. For Tegan, she put up with extreme physical violence and gaslighting because she wanted to believe that her abuser was a good dad. She yearned for the tightknit family unit, the camping holidays and that father daughter bond, and it took a lot for Tegan to relinquish that dream.

Tegan describes her relationship with Daniel as "wonderful" when they first got together. They had big plans for their future, and over time they bought a home and became parents to a healthy little girl.

Tegan first realised that something was odd on the night they moved into their family home. After dreaming of this moment for years, Daniel decided to go out and get drunk with his mates.

When Tegan became pregnant, Daniel started to become violent, and the physical violence peaked when their daughter, Sophia was one. "Daniel drank a lot and smoked marijuana," Fernanda says.

“**He had a way of convincing Tegan that everything was her fault.**”

When Tegan began receiving support from CatholicCare in September 2022, she knew that there were problems in her relationship, but she found it very difficult to identify the violence.

"Tegan needed a lot of reassurance because she felt guilty for going behind his back," Fernanda says. Initially Tegan didn't feel ready to leave.

Fernanda explains the importance of respecting the woman's wishes, where appropriate, and honouring her timing. "In those first three months of working with Tegan it was important that we listened to what she thought was safest to do. The moment when a woman chooses to leave is very risky because the perpetrator suddenly experiences a loss of control, and they can become erratic and unpredictable."

Fernanda spent three months safely planning with Tegan until she was ready to leave. Tegan and Sophia moved into safe accommodation and ended up staying for three months until they could secure a private rental. "The positive impact of moving out on that little girl was instant," Fernanda says. "Sophia was suddenly so calm, so peaceful and so settled. Tegan could see how much better her little one was for leaving, so that motivated her."

Fernanda says that it was beautiful watching Tegan become confident in her own decision making. "She didn't hesitate at all in taking up the lease, which was a huge change from when I met her. She was so much more empowered. The counselling that CatholicCare assisted her to access helped a lot with this, and she came a long way in understanding domestic violence and not taking responsibility for her ex-partner's acts."

Daniel also received extensive support from CatholicCare and is currently engaged with our Men's Behaviour Change Program.

"It was a beautiful journey, and I was very lucky to work alongside Tegan." She spent so long trying to 'fix' the problems because she wanted that dream person," Fernanda says.

Tegan hasn't given up on her big dreams for the future, but those dreams now come from a place of knowledge, awareness and deep confidence in herself.

# BEING THE FACE OF GOD IN THE UNKNOWN

"The Catholic Chaplaincy team became our spiritual family," says Eleanor, who accompanied her husband, Jonathan in the final months and weeks of his life at Royal North Shore Hospital. "When you have a loved one who is very unwell, the outside world keeps moving but inside the hospital it feels like a different world, and it's not a place you want to be ... but the Pastoral Care team would come and uplift us. The comfort they brought was beautiful. At the end of every visit they would say, 'God bless you' and we really felt it."

Various members of the Catholic Chaplaincy team would visit Jonathan and Eleanor during their time at Royal North Shore Hospital, including priests, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and Pastoral Care Practitioner, Louise. "Louise was an important part of our spiritual journey," says Eleanor.

Jonathan was first diagnosed in 2019 and when they filled out the hospital paperwork, Eleanor recalls having the option of being visited by the Pastoral Care team. "I grew up Catholic and my husband was baptised Mormon, but he went to the Catholic Church when he moved to Australia, so it made sense to receive pastoral care from the Catholic Church."

Eleanor says that at a basic level, the pastoral care visits meant that they weren't just staring at four walls. "It meant a lot to have someone who wasn't directly in our circle to come in," says Eleanor. "Every time they left, we experienced a good, uplifting feeling. It was as if we had a new lease of life to get back on the saddle. They were patient, kind, empathetic and compassionate."

It was a condition of the hospital that children could not enter the haematology ward where Jonathan was receiving care.

“**With three children under the age of 12, that was really hard,” says Eleanor.**”



Jonathan, Eleanor and family

Without Jonathan's immediate family by his side, Eleanor describes clinging to their 'hospital family' that was made up of doctors, nurses and other patients, and the Pastoral Care team that formed their 'spiritual family.'

Louise says that she would always come away from a visit with Jonathan and Eleanor feeling enriched by their faith and their witness. "They were a beacon to us of what family life is, of what faith is and what hope is," says Louise. "They were a couple very much in love. You'd walk in and they'd be radiating this joy and peace. I understand the role that we became in being a spiritual family to them, but equally they ministered to us by being who and how they are."

Louise describes her work with patients and their families as a ministry of the unknown. "On a daily

basis, a patient's condition can change. Depending on how the patient is that day, they may or may not be in a position to want to talk. You're entering a sacred space, a space where someone is very, very unwell and no one knows what the outcome is."

Louise says that she relies on the patient to lead how her time with them will flow. "If a patient is comfortable with you, then you find that they share with you what is going on for them, not only physically but in their home life and spiritually. We take a very holistic approach."

During her visits with Jonathan and Eleanor, Louise says that much of the time was spent sitting, listening and reflecting back what was going on for them. "I'd ask what they would like prayers for, and they liked it when I prayed," says Louise. "I went in to serve and to wait on them. This is a ministry of being the servant. In *Dead Man*

*Walking*, Sr Helen Prejean said, 'I will be the face of God for you,' and that is how I see my role."

For Eleanor and Jonathan, pastoral care helped them spiritually, emotionally and mentally, and Eleanor describes it as the push they needed to go forward.

"My husband would always say that when he gets better, he would like to pay it forward and provide pastoral care for others. Unfortunately, he didn't make it and passed away in July 2022. He was 39 years old."

Eleanor has since completed the Diocesan Pastoral Care Course and has plans to volunteer at Royal North Shore and Mona Vale Hospitals in the future. "I would like to pay forward that feeling of hope," says Eleanor. "I know the struggles, but I also know the joy and the hope that comes with receiving this support."

# AMY SAYS NO TO ABUSE

"I planned my escape to take place at 7.00am on 24 September 2022," says Amy who had been a victim of domestic violence for three years. "I planned for it to happen at a time when Chris was a 45 minute drive away. I was wearing a tracker, but I could run to the police station in 20 minutes and I knew he wouldn't get there in time. When I got to the police station, he called me and said, 'Don't do anything stupid. I can learn to tolerate you. Just go home.' But I didn't listen. I walked inside."

"That night we stayed in a safe house," Amy says ...

**"and the following day I met Gesse from CatholicCare. That was day one of our new life."**

Gesse, who works as a Specialist Lead in CatholicCare's Domestic Violence Response Enhancement team, recalls her first meeting with Amy and her 10 year old daughter, Ella. "We met in person at the Waitara Family Centre. Ella wasn't wearing weather appropriate clothing, and she only had one pair of shoes that didn't fit her anymore. She was such a sweet, polite young girl who loved to read."

It was clear from the start that Amy was resilient, proactive and self-directed. She had stayed with Chris for so long out of fear that she would lose her visa and be sent back to her home country."

During the early years, Amy experienced verbal, physical, financial and sexual abuse. "The financial abuse was significant to the extent that Amy couldn't purchase clothing for herself or her daughter," Gesse says. "When she went to the shops, Chris would restrict her access to money, and she would have to call him at the checkout to tell him the cost and justify her spending. The fact that these phone calls took place at the checkout made it humiliating and shameful. When Amy got a life insurance payout from her mother, he took that money and spent most of it on himself. He also threatened to make Amy disappear."

Amy explains that there were only two reasons why she could leave the house, either to take Ella to school or to do the groceries. "He made me walk everywhere and it was a 2.5km walk to the supermarket. I would spend everyday shopping, cleaning and cooking. I wasn't allowed to do anything else. At one point he locked us inside the house for two months. I was completely isolated because he had written to all my family and friends pretending to be me, saying I didn't want to have contact with them anymore."

The priority upon engaging with CatholicCare was to develop a safety plan. "We helped Amy secure her social media and email accounts, and we gave her a safe phone that she could use to communicate with support services," Gesse says. "We also supplied vouchers to buy clothing. Brokerage support was provided to assist Amy and Ella to move to Perth where they re-established themselves. We helped her secure accommodation, and we paid for removalist costs. We were also able to organise financial assistance from the Red Cross, which was a \$3,000 upfront payment which made a huge difference for them."

It wasn't all smooth sailing when they first arrived in Perth. "We couldn't afford much, and Ella was bullied at school for her clothes," Amy says.

**"Everything has settled now, and Ella has friends. Two weeks ago, I bought a car and soon I will start my job as a flight attendant. I feel so proud."**

Gesse is inspired by Amy's capacity to know exactly what she needed to make her daughter safe. "She was responsive to the support and very appreciative," Gesse says.

Amy says that everyone at CatholicCare was so nice, kind and knowledgeable. "They were the only people I had," Amy says.

**"I was a foreigner here and didn't know anyone, so the support of CatholicCare meant everything to me."**

Speaking of her hopes for the future, Amy's dream is for the Department of Immigration to allow her to stay in Australia. "Our visa is pending a final AVO from the Court, and hopefully that is everything they need," Amy says. Connecting with Helen Shanahan, a Perth-based singer-songwriter who sings about abuse, has been an instrumental part of Amy's healing journey. In her song called, 'No,' Helen sings "You crossed the boundary. You crossed the line. I didn't think that you were the kind ... I wish I could have said no. But I just didn't know what you are supposed to know. If only I had said no."

Three years later, Amy saying no to abuse has launched her into a new life, and she is currently writing a book about her journey. "I hope that my story is the impetus that another woman needs to say no and to start their new life."



# MEDIATION GIVES AMANDA & DAVID BREATHING SPACE

When Amanda first contacted CatholicCare for help with property mediation, her life was nothing short of chaotic. "You name it, it had happened," says Family Dispute Resolution Practitioner Melanie. "Amanda lost her licence, she had a car accident, and she had a medical incident that put her in hospital. Her two sons weren't comfortable going to see her and the bank were about to sell their properties."

Melanie worked with Amanda and former partner, David for several months assisting them with mediation around both parenting and property. "They owned multiple properties and had quite a few assets, but they had huge debts with significant mortgages on their properties," says Melanie. "Amanda and David were living in two separate Sydney based properties, which meant that they weren't getting rental returns for these properties. Their financial situation was dire. Amanda wasn't working and David had been retrenched."

Melanie says that the aim was to allow some breathing space for the family. "Obviously, the most important thing is the kids, but it is really hard to focus on the kids when there is this urgent financial situation happening in the background. The kids were not coping with the situation, and they had started threatening self-harm."

It became evident very quickly that Amanda had a mental illness that was exacerbating the stress of the situation. "They were in a huge mess and agreed they needed a property settlement mediation," Melanie says.

The property mediation resulted in full agreement on the division of the properties as well as other assets. These agreements were drafted into Consent Orders and filed with the Court. The outcome was that Amanda and David could sell some of their properties which relieved their financial pressures significantly.

Melanie admits that Amanda found it hard to follow through with the agreement. "She had second thoughts about how they could make it work without having to sell anything. Those thoughts were all part of her mental illness."

However, the mediation significantly reduced the stress of both parties, which ultimately improved their capacity as parents. "At the time the kids were living with David, and he was very stressed," Melanie says. "The mediation reduced his stress, which meant he could focus on parenting again."

Following the successful property mediation, a parenting mediation was attempted, albeit unsuccessfully. "Amanda wanted the kids to return to her and David tried to explain that the kids didn't feel comfortable doing that," Melanie says. Both parties realised they needed the Court to make decisions that were in the children's best interests.

Today, life for Amanda and David is far from perfect, but mediation has removed some of the major stressors in their lives. "They have some breathing space now," Melanie says, "and they can focus on the children again."



# ADAPTING SEASONS FOR GROWTH FOR SENIOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

For Jacque who works as a Supported Playgroup Leader and Group Worker at CatholicCare, she was very familiar working with primary school aged students and their parents. So, when she was faced with the task of running the *Seasons for Growth* program for Years 11 and 12 girls, it was a new and exciting challenge. As she entered the room on day one of the program, she was met by a group of highly intelligent, insightful girls who gave up their lunch break over eight weeks. "It was an incredible experience," Jacque says.

*Seasons for Growth* is a program that strengthens the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people who are adapting to experiences of change, loss and grief in their lives. It explores the cyclic nature of grief and is underpinned by William Worden's model of grieving.

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**"We start in autumn and then move to winter when we talk about the heaviness of grief," says Jacque.**

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"Then we move onto spring and finally summer to explore grief's different stages."

Jacque explains that she followed the *Seasons for Growth* adolescent program. "It is designed for Year 7 right through to Year 12," Jacque says. "But what is happening for adolescents in Year 7 is very different to Years 11 and 12. So we decided to make some additions to the program. We looked at helpful versus unhelpful coping tools. We explored aspects of our lives we can control versus aspects we can't. We did some cognitive behavioural therapy. So, we were using the program but had the opportunity to bring other things into it."

The school identified eight Year 11 and 12 students who could really benefit from the program. "Some had experienced the death of a parent or sibling, and others had parents who were separated or divorced," Jacque says.

For Jacque, it was a privilege to witness the students' growth over the eight weeks. "To watch them connect emotionally with themselves and each other was so special. As they listened to each other's stories they realised that they weren't the only ones with these feelings. Obviously, everyone's stories were unique, but they also recognised aspects of their grief that were similar."

Each week the girls were invited to bring in reminders of their experiences, such as a song, a piece of art or some music. "One of the girls whose parents had separated brought in photos from when she was young and living in one home, and more recent photos of the two different homes," Jacque says. "Other girls brought in songs, and we explored songs that relate to different seasons of their grief. The program offers a really creative way of helping young people express their feelings."

Over the eight weeks, Jacque recalls watching friendships grow across cliques that might not normally have occurred. "Eight weeks is quite a long program," Jacque says, "so they spend a lot of time getting to know each other and growing together."

Jacque says that working with such a receptive group of students was extremely rewarding. "They had to give up their lunch break in order to attend, which for most teenagers is unheard of." But those eight sacrificed lunch breaks, by all accounts, were well worth it.



# RECONNECTING ISOLATED SENIORS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

When 99 year old Oi Mei first met Winnie, she finally had someone with whom she could share stories in her native tongue. As a fellow Cantonese speaker who was born in Hong Kong, Winnie was able to appreciate and resonate with Oi Mei's experiences in a special way. They met just three months ago and they have already formed a bond that has enriched each of their lives.

Winnie volunteers with CatholicCare's Aged Care Volunteers Visitors Scheme, where volunteers spend time developing friendships, having a chat and sharing a cuppa. The one-on-one visiting scheme matches volunteers from the local community with seniors who are socially isolated and in need of companionship.

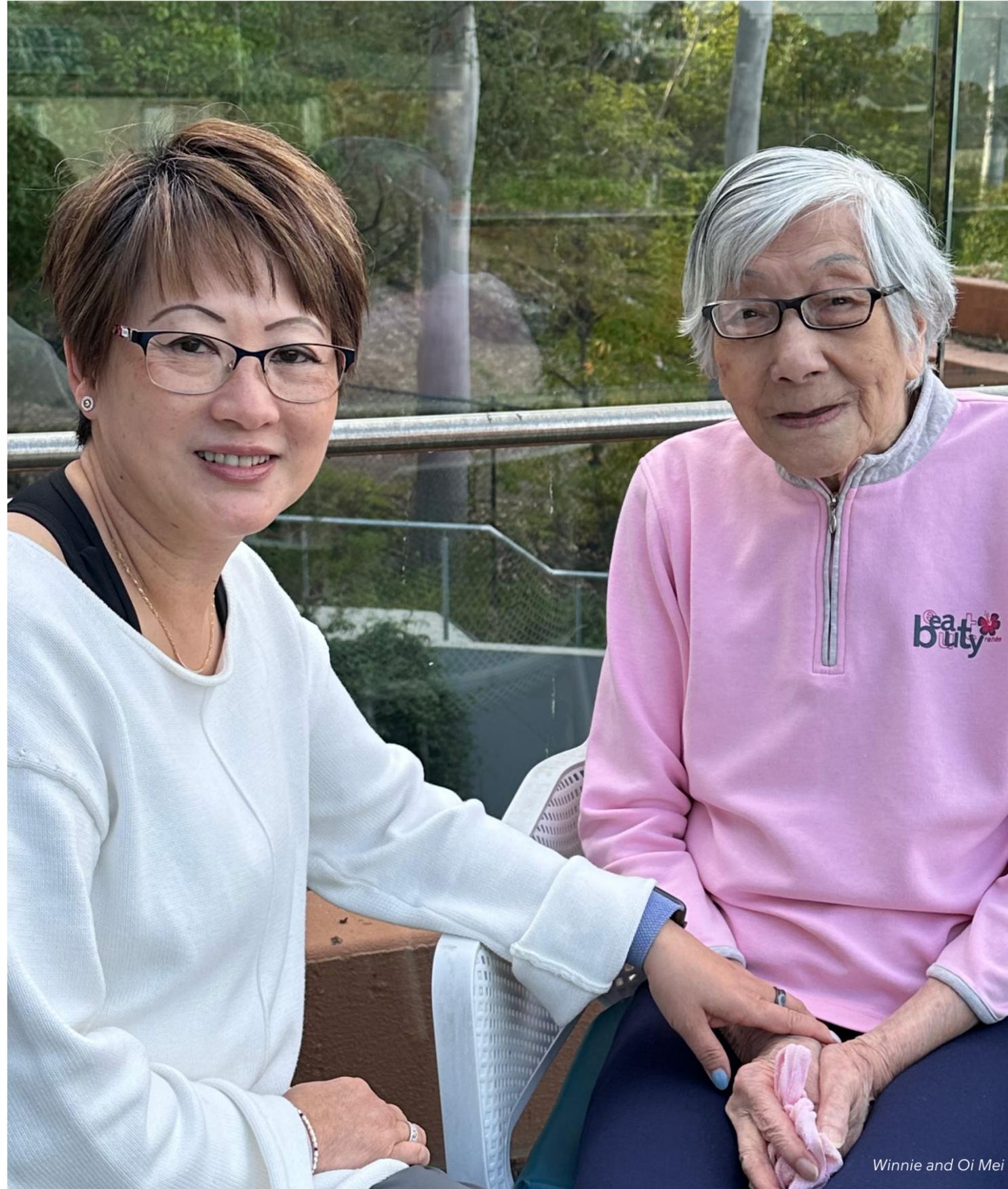
Research shows older Australians are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness than any other demographic. Add language and cultural barriers to the mix, and that feeling of segregation from society can become all consuming.

Winnie visits Oi Mei once a fortnight and they chat about everything - from food to religion to her fellow residents at the nursing home! "It doesn't have to always be something serious," Winnie said. "It's all about having the company of another person and having someone to share stories with."

Winnie recalls the moment that Oi Mei learnt she could speak Cantonese with her. "She'd never had a visitor who could speak to her in her native tongue. She was so happy."

For Winnie, the close connection she has formed with Oi Mei has given her greater empathy.

"It is easy to focus on the stress and be overwhelmed in our own lives, that we forget the experiences of others," Winnie says. "I am inspired to keep giving back to the community. One day we will all be in aged care or something similar and we would want someone to invest their time into us."



Winnie and Oi Mei

Another of our volunteers Barbara, agrees that volunteering has increased her empathy.

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**"I've noticed how easy it is to become selfish, especially when you are newly retired and can do whatever you want with your time. It's good to do something like this to remind me that there are people who don't enjoy the same freedom I do."**

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Barbara has been visiting Dawn in her nursing home since 2018 and has witnessed the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on Dawn's physical and emotional wellbeing. "During the lockdowns, Dawn was restricted to her room, and she lost her ability to walk. After COVID she needed a wheelchair to get her out and about, but she is slowly regaining her ability to walk."

Barbara says that Dawn always seems genuinely pleased to see her and they like to chat about films. "She is very bright and will often research the movies I have seen."

Professor Susan Kurrle, a geriatrician and ageing expert at Sydney University, says COVID-19 lockdowns led to huge numbers of older people becoming socially isolated, which then led to intense feelings of loneliness.

Slowly but surely, the Aged Care Volunteers Visitors Scheme is reconnecting seniors with the outside world, and it is an enriching experience for all involved.

# MY HEALING JOURNEY

70 year old Sal has walked with a limp for thirty years. As a nurse, she has spent her working life on her feet but has wandered the wards with a hobble.

The cause of Sal's foot injury was too traumatic and painful to revisit, so she ignored it for years. Since engaging with CatholicCare's counselling services, Sal has been able to process the trauma associated with her injury and has actively sought treatment. She admits that life isn't perfect, but thoughts of her foot no longer fill her with anger.

As a newlywed, Sal was sexually abused by her father-in-law. Sal was raised in her Samoan culture to put family first and she found herself betrayed by a figure who she was taught to honour and respect. On one occasion, Sal's father-in-law touched her thigh, and she pushed him away. Upon doing so, her father-in-law fell, and Sal saved him with her foot. Ever since that day, the act of saving his fall has haunted her, her injury acting as a daily reminder.

No one in Sal's family believed her story. "How dare she lie," family members would say. Sal lived with the distrust of her family for many years, and it caused great tension with her husband. Sal's husband was one of the few people who believed her, but he wouldn't stand up for her with his family.

“**“His silence is abuse to me,”  
Sal says.**”

When Sal first engaged with CatholicCare's counselling services, she simply needed a listening ear. Sal's counsellor, Samuel recalls her many stories, which clearly demonstrated the love she had for her family. "She would frequently talk about her parents, her children and her extended family," Samuel says.

"Family was such an important part of her life so for Sal to be rejected and accused was devastating and shocking."

After five sessions Sal had some news. "Sam, guess what? I went to the foot specialist to get a brace for my foot." For Sal, the counselling sessions helped her process something that she had kept to herself for thirty years. "This was exactly what I needed to do something about my foot," Sal says.

"To be honest, I didn't do anything amazingly therapeutic," Samuel says. "I spent much of the time just listening." One of Sal's great focuses was on reconnecting with her family. Sal's relationship with her in-laws hasn't been reconciled but she has a greater understanding and acceptance of her situation.

Samuel describes his journey with Sal as fascinating. "It was fascinating to witness how, through the process of addressing her emotional struggles, she finally found the strength to attend to her foot."

Samuel feels deeply moved and excited for Sal as she embarks on her healing journey.



## MARK HAS GREATER CONTROL



Priya, Mark and Jess

It's been a year of change and growth for Mark, who is a proud resident of CatholicCare's newly established Supported Independent Living house in Wahroonga. Upon being asked what he most enjoys about living at Kokoda House, Mark says, "everything!"

Before moving to Kokoda House, Mark was working with our Support Coordination team and together we identified his need for a better, safer accommodation option. His fellow residents, Elyce and Victoria were also Support Coordination clients whose former living arrangements were not geared towards growth and independence. The needs of these clients inspired the establishment of Kokoda House in December 2022, and the impact on their lives has been immense. Launching Kokoda House shows what's possible when CatholicCare's multiple teams work together for the good of our clients.

Previously Mark lived 1½ hours away from his parents, and the move to Wahroonga has meant that he is now in the neighbouring suburb. "Living closer to my parents is very good," Mark says. "I get to see them more, which makes me happy."

Since moving to Kokoda House, Disability Support Partner, Jess says that Mark has experienced a greater sense of control over his life. "Here, he has been encouraged to take on new responsibilities and challenges, which has increased his confidence. Mark helps out with cooking, cleaning and other chores. He has been given choice and control where he can make decisions about his daily routine, activities, and the service he receives."

When Mark isn't belting out tunes from The Beatles, he enjoys spending time with his fellow residents.

“Mark has developed great friendships with the other residents, which has allowed him to develop a caring support system,” Jess says.

Fellow residents, Victoria, Elyce and Priya have also demonstrated enormous growth in their living skills since December. For Victoria, Kokoda House is her first experience of living outside the family home, and she is thriving in her new environment. Priya, who came to CatholicCare from another provider, has also benefited significantly from the move, particularly as she now lives closer to her ageing mother.

Upon being asked about his hopes for the future, Mark says, "I would like to live here for many years." He also envisions a future filled with watching rugby league and wins for his beloved Parramatta Eels!

In many ways, the initial hopes for Kokoda House have already come to fruition, with participants enjoying fulfilling lives as active members of the community. Reflecting on the last year, Jess says that the growth of the residents is all thanks to the friendship, support, care and control that they now have over their lives. In the words of Mark, "I love living here."

## CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD THROUGH ART

"Art is something we really value here," says Director of our Lake Munmorah Early Learning Centre, Stella. "It is such a big part of expressing your thoughts and ideas, and as a child it's one of those go to mediums for communication when you don't have the written word yet." So, when the opportunity arose to partake in the Gosford Regional Gallery's art competition, the children and educators immediately started brainstorming.

After exploring different techniques, mediums and other artists' works, the children came up with a beautiful *Under the Sea* themed piece that was submitted as a collaborative entry.

Stella says that the students this year had demonstrated a particular aptitude for art and had been working hard to hone their skills. "We decided to go along on the ride with them," she says, and it was an exciting and rewarding experience for all involved.

The highlight of the journey was a group excursion to the Gosford Regional Gallery to see their artwork on display. "The children were just mesmerised!" says Stella. "Of course, they were excited to see their own artwork on display, but it was also a wonderful learning opportunity seeing the unique and diverse range of works on display."

They particularly enjoyed the 3D art that was made from fish shaped soy sauce bottles.

“It introduced the children to the idea that you can use real life things for art, and to not just see things as rubbish or junk.”

When the children viewed the projection art, they discovered that art is so much more than just paint and crayons. "They realised that there is art all around us," Stella says. "They are now noticing art in our environment and in the community. They have learnt that you just need to stop and look."

Every year, Lake Munmorah Early Learning Centre holds an annual art exhibition, and their excursion to Gosford Regional Gallery has inspired the themes for this year's exhibition *Land Art, Colour and Monet*.

Art is something the team will keep promoting and encouraging as new children enter the service. "Art is the one way that we can express ourselves and not be judged," Stella says. "It's not right or wrong. It's who we are and what we represent, and it belongs to each of us individually."

# BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR JULIA

It was May 2022, and Julia's whole body went numb as she sat in a hospital room with her 14 year old daughter, Anna. They'd been discharged from the hospital, but they had nowhere to go. Given the physical, emotional and financial abuse being perpetrated by Anna's father, they both knew that going 'home' wasn't an option. "I booked a cabin at a caravan park, and we went straight there from the hospital," Julia recalls.

“**“I was very afraid and in despair.”**”

That evening, Julia received a phone call from CatholicCare that will be forever etched in her memory. "The person on the phone said they had organised a hotel for us. They also said they'd help me find long-term accommodation. I was so grateful."

Julia knew that the promise of stability and safety was key to addressing her daughter's mental health challenges that had seen her hospitalised.

"That week a lady from CatholicCare visited us with self-care items and she spent some time trying to better understand our situation," Julia recalls. In the months that followed, Julia and Anna were supported to move from emergency accommodation into community housing.

CatholicCare Caseworker Zara worked closely with Julia and Anna during their time of crisis. "They originally came through our Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (DVRE) after hours crisis line, and we knew straight away that we were dealing with really



complex needs, from domestic violence to mental health to lack of support," Zara says. "Being originally from Brazil, there were a lot of barriers for Julia in accessing supports that ordinarily as a citizen you would have greater access to."

In addition to supporting Julia to secure housing, CatholicCare provided financial assistance, legal advice, childcare, mediation and mental health support for Anna. "We arranged referrals for counselling and an ADHD assessment for Anna. We also connected them with the school's wellbeing team and we put Julia in contact with a psychologist," Zara says. "Mental health will be an ongoing challenge for them, but at least now they have a strong support system. Julia engaged well with the services and took everything on board."

Julia could not be more proud of how far they have come since that lonely day in the hospital room.

"I am proud that I have been able to help my daughter find ways to be treated. Mental health is still a big stigma in our society, and I think many children and adults suffer without been assessed and supported. I wish that more children could receive the great support we have received."

Today, Julia is working and volunteering, and Anna is engaging with her passion for music through vocal classes and musical theatre.

"The path is not a straight line, it has bumps," Julia says. "But I have learnt the importance of being connected. When we have a network around us, life is better and easier. Now I want to use my knowledge and experiences to help others."

“**“The path is not a straight line, it has bumps,” Julia says. “But I have learnt the importance of being connected. When we have a network around us, life is better and easier. Now I want to use my knowledge and experiences to help others.”**”



## FINANCIAL COUNSELLING MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR NEW MUM JENNIFER

For Jennifer, the appearance of two lines on that pregnancy test will be forever etched in her memory. As a young, single woman, she knew that caring for this baby would fall solely on her. Along with the myriad of emotions that came with a positive pregnancy test, she was anxious about her financial future. Jennifer was supported by CatholicCare's financial counselling team, which ultimately reduced her stress and gave her the breathing space to enjoy her newborn son.

"Jennifer had been employed full-time before her baby's arrival," shares Financial Counsellor, Jill. "She left her job to care for her newborn and she was unsure about the Centrelink benefits she was entitled to. Her preparations for the baby, including purchasing a cot, pram, and other essentials through Buy Now Pay Later credit (BNPL), had been managed reasonably well. However, her credit card and BNPL debt had accumulated, and she had been neglecting payment notices from her bank.

Compounding her concerns were notifications of a forthcoming 25% surge in electricity prices and a 15% hike in rent."

Jennifer held aspirations of returning to part-time work, but even with an income she didn't know how she would manage the ever-escalating cost of living.

Guided by CatholicCare, Jennifer completed a money plan, where they reviewed income and expenses. "We reviewed and discussed potential Centrelink benefits and energy concessions, which Jennifer had been unaware she was eligible to receive," says Jill.

"Together, we examined different work scenarios, reviewing their potential financial impact and how these choices might affect her Centrelink benefits. Addressing Jennifer's debt situation, we emphasised the importance of communication with creditors during times of financial hardship. Collaboratively we formulated a realistic action plan that Jennifer would use with her creditors."

As the financial counselling sessions progressed, Jennifer noticed a newfound sense of understanding and confidence regarding her financial standing. Today her financial decisions come from a place of knowledge, rather than fear and that has made all the difference.

## GENERATIONS CONNECT OVER JUICE & SCONES

"How come you have really little hair?" said one little boy to Fr Vince, at a morning tea for older parishioners and children from Our Lady Star of the Sea Early Learning Centre in Terrigal. "Oh, on here?" Fr Vince said, pointing to the top of his head. "Yes, but don't worry," the little boy said. "It will grow back!"

The morning tea was inspired by the desire to create an intergenerational program where the preschoolers from the Early Learning Centre and older parishioners could connect and share their knowledge and experiences.

"After watching the show 'Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds' we looked at how we could do something similar in our community," said Early Learning Centre Director, Bronwyn. "We knew that many of our families had grandparents who lived a long way away, either interstate or overseas, and that they would benefit by having that intergenerational connection."

We hosted a morning tea after Mass and were delighted to have over 30 parishioners join us! The morning tea was planned to coincide with the Feast Day of Jesus' grandparents, St Anne and St Joachim, as well as World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly. "On the day before the morning tea, we made lemon myrtle scones," says Bronwyn. "We're famous for those scones!"

The children prepared hand written menus and they were very excited in the lead up to the morning. When the parishioners arrived, we gave them a warm welcome and the children did an Acknowledgement of Country using some sign language. The children used special order pads with visuals to take orders and helped with pouring the juice and serving it."

The feedback from parishioners was fantastic. "They loved it!" Bronwyn says. "As I watched on, I found that the little conversations and exchanges were what made the morning so special.

When it was time to wrap up, one of the parishioners asked if the morning tea could happen again. "This isn't just a one off, is it?" Bronwyn says that the plan is to host two morning teas per term and is excited about



the potential for this initiative to strengthen the ELC's relationship with the parish. "We would love to develop an ongoing relationship with parishioners and to build that sense of belonging within the parish community."

The process of establishing this initiative has shown the natural resistance we have at times to stepping outside our comfort zone and connecting with people outside our immediate circles. One elderly gentleman had previously said that he couldn't stay back after Mass for the morning tea. But it only took the invitation of one small child to get him to stay and potentially open his world, even if just for a day. "I have to stay now," he said, "the children have asked me to!"

**“ Playwright George Bernard Shaw said, “We don't stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing.”**

In a post-COVID world where social isolation among the elderly is prevalent and where many young children have limited opportunities to learn from older generations, this initiative is, indeed, a win-win.

# CHANGING LIVES THROUGH LITERATURE

Many of us take it for granted that our kids will grow up learning to read and write, yet for many children throughout Australia, this is not the case. Lack of education and early literacy can affect children throughout their lives and lead to psychological damage, poor health, fewer job opportunities and lower incomes.

When our team at Our Lady of the Rosary Waitara Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) learnt that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities have limited access to reading material, libraries and bookstores, they took action.

In March, staff and students at Waitara OSHC raised \$702 for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, which allowed them to contribute 70 books to children in remote Australia.

“During COVID our team became more aware of the need for books in Aboriginal communities ... ”

says Practice Manager, Amy. “After doing some research, we discovered the Indigenous Literacy Foundation and the wonderful work that they are doing.”

Teaching children about kindness and giving to those less fortunate is taken very seriously across CatholicCare’s Children’s Services. “It is something that we continuously work on and encourage,” says Amy.

Literacy and reading is a big part of the Waitara OSHC service and the children will often be found sitting in the reading area.

“When the children realised that not all children have books to read, they were devastated,” Amy says.

“The children were so happy that they could help other children enjoy books and to encourage the love for reading that they have.”

The fundraiser coincided with Harmony Week, and funds were raised through a book stall that was set up for students at Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School in Waitara. Students at Waitara OSHC were involved in the entire process of planning, marketing and selling books, which was itself a fantastic learning experience.

In the weeks leading up to the fundraiser, the staff and students explored Indigenous art and they learnt about the signs used in art to represent animal tracks, home, rivers and more. The children designed and created large canvas posters that will adorn the walls of the centre for years to come.

This initiative was an excellent way of connecting with the primary school and developing that relationship, which is an ongoing goal and priority for the team at Waitara OSHC.

Moving forward, they are excited to share more Dreaming stories with the children and to keep fostering a love for reading.



Credit: Indigenous Literacy Foundation



Peter top right

## PETER TRAINS HIS BRAIN TO READ AGAIN

Once upon a time, Peter was an avid reader. As he aged, his days became more repetitive, with fewer opportunities to challenge himself cognitively. Attending *Brain Games* classes at CatholicCare's Memory Innovations Centre (MIC) provided the momentum Peter needed to return to reading.

"We worked with Peter on improving his focus," says MIC facilitator, Jacqui. He was frustrated that he couldn't read more than a page at a time.

“**After 12 months of classes he is reading again and he is over the moon,”** says Jacqui.”

Jacqui has also worked with Peter on improving his balance and strength in our *Let's Get Moving* classes. Peter enjoys the mix of ball work, strength training and balance exercises. "Jacqui has been the perfect instructor," Peter says. "She pushes everyone to their own ability, is personable and has a great sense of humour."

When Jacqui saw the MIC facilitator position advertised, she says she knew straight away that it was the job for her. "Working with seniors like Peter is immensely rewarding," Jacqui says. "Their enthusiasm and willingness to learn makes every day wonderful."

Jacqui explains that the classes aren't about who can lift the heaviest weight, complete the most repetitions or solve the problem first. "It's about shared learning experiences, supporting each other and improving their own individual skill set," Jacqui says. "There is a real sense of camaraderie in the groups. It has been special to see many friendships formed. They also have a place where they can readily access support as challenges in their lives arise."

For Jacqui, she aims to make the classes as fun and enjoyable as possible. "We play motivating music with a focus on fun. We make sure that the activities are safe and achievable and not only enhance their abilities, but provide valuable social interaction with their peers."

When Peter first attended MIC, he thought he would just "have a look," but he keeps coming back. "Sign me up for another term!" Peter says.

Jacqui says that there are no expectations of participants, and she encourages anyone who is seeing changes in their brain or keen to meet other seniors or work on their balance and fitness, to come along. "We are a place where you can simply be yourself without fear or embarrassment."



## CLERGY CONNECTION STRONGER THAN EVER

For 36 years, volunteers at Mary Mac's Place have worked tirelessly to provide meals, food hampers, connection, and hope to the most vulnerable members of the community. Connecting with the community has always been a priority, "but this year has been something else," says Homelessness Practice Manager Sean.

“**Our connection with the community and the Church has never been so strong.**”

The 2022/23 financial year began with a mammoth effort made by Broken Bay Catholic Schools and Parishes, raising over \$100,000 for CatholicCare's homelessness programs. Twenty four parishes participated, raising over \$86,000 while schools raised over \$17,000!

Sean largely attributes the success of the fundraiser to Bishop Anthony Randazzo's support for the work of Mary Mac's Place. "Mary Mac's has never enjoyed this much connection with a Bishop. Bishop Anthony is obviously very passionate about Mary Mac's Place. He's given us so much time, support and attention and a profile we've never had before, offering a fine example of how the Church can support social service providers."

Mary Mac's Place's growing connection with the Church and community was exhibited in June when over 100 clergy and key community members attended a dinner at Mary Mac's Place. "The dinner was about Bishop Anthony profiling our organisation and encouraging support from the community. Since this event, we have seen growing interest from schools and parishes in supporting our work."

In the last 12 months Mary Mac's Place has seen a steady increase in demand for the service, with over 100 lunches a day being provided. Increased awareness of Mary Mac's Place in the community is one contributing factor, but Sean says the demand for services reflects the hardship being felt in the community. "Homelessness continues to increase. People are under rental distress with rent increases of over 25% in three years, high inflation and the skyrocketing cost of living. Of course we're seeing more families needing help."

As the demand for services has increased, Sally and her team of volunteers have worked fervently to ensure that everyone who walks through the doors at Mary Mac's Place feels welcome, supported, and connected. "Sally's influence over the last few years has been phenomenal," says Sean. "Sally and the volunteers are the bloodline of this place."

*Thank you to St John the Baptist Parish in Woy Woy for their continual support of Mary Mac's Place.*

# YARNING & CONNECTING AT OUR NEW ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PLAYGROUP

For CatholicCare's Aboriginal Community Engagement Manager, Judith, it took 11 misdiagnosed ear infections before finding out that her son had otitis media, more commonly known as glue ear.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience some of the highest rates of otitis media in the world, and early diagnosis can affect speech and hearing later in life. "This is why connecting Aboriginal kids with cultural services and playgroups is so important. If we were connected to an Aboriginal playgroup, I'm sure someone would have picked up on his glue ear and it would have prevented his speech delays and pain," says Judith. "He would've got grommets earlier, rather than having 11 unnecessary courses of antibiotics."

Knowing personally how important it is to connect Aboriginal children with cultural services, Judith searched for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander playgroups in North Sydney when she started her role at CatholicCare in August. "There was nothing," Judith says. Less than a year later, CatholicCare has its own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Supported Playgroup and it is thriving.

"Not only are we connecting Aboriginal children and families with support services, but we also are giving kids a chance to meet and connect with other kids from their culture. That social connection is so important," Judith says.

Intake Worker, Simone who facilitates the playgroup says that mums and dads come to yarn and share stories. "The conversation topics they come up with are usually very random but so interesting. One week, one of the mums shared about how she could now afford childcare after some recent subsidy changes for Aboriginal children. The other women weren't aware of the subsidy changes, which shows how connecting and



Playgroup Facilitator Bree-Anne and Playgroup Mum Rebecca

sharing information like this is so important. Personally, I have learnt so much since starting the playgroup."

Simone says that the playgroup attracts a diverse range of families. "One mum who attends with her children was brought up in typical white Australia and is married to an Aboriginal man. She is so invested in giving her children opportunities to connect with their culture. One of the other mums fosters an Aboriginal boy and she asks the most amazing questions, many of which stem from her background working in infant and perinatal health. There is also a single mum who comes every week because she says it's the only playgroup where she feels comfortable."

Simone has loved watching the children grow in confidence and build connections with each other. "Each week the children jump out of their cars and run up the ramp to greet each other. They genuinely miss each other if someone doesn't come. One of the girls proudly shares videos of her older sister doing Aboriginal dances. It is very special to see the way they have connected with each other and their culture over time."

Judith, Simone, and the team have great hopes for the future of the playgroup.

“Our hope is to build the service and connect with more families,” Judith says.

“Our goal is to get information about the playgroup out further afield, and to form a Memorandum of Understanding with Northern Sydney Local Health District to grow the group.”

In the meantime, it is all about the yarning, the shared joy, and the little moments of connection. "These little kids rock my world," says Simone. "It is very special being called 'Aunty Simone' by these guys."

A young man with dark hair and a light blue t-shirt is smiling and looking towards an older man. The older man has a grey beard and is wearing a blue and white striped t-shirt. They are standing outdoors in front of a red brick wall. The background shows some green foliage.

# THE LONG ROAD TO ADOPTION

David is a young person in CatholicCare's foster care program and we have been working with his family for over five years. The family have had their ups and downs, as most families do, and CatholicCare has walked alongside the family, as they have consistently and patiently cared for David.

Three years ago, with the support of CatholicCare, David's foster family made the decision to move toward adoption to ensure David would always be part of their family. Despite the commitment and enthusiasm of all involved, the string of COVID-19 lockdowns led to excessive delays in what is already a considerably lengthy administrative and legal process.

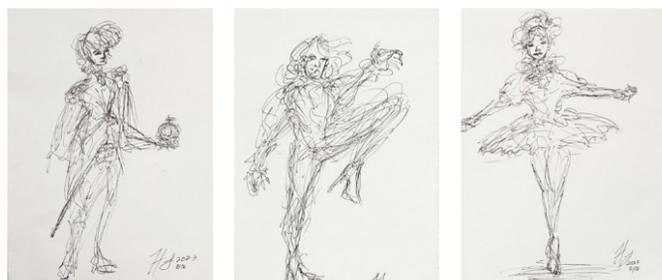
The family never gave up on the adoption goal and our foster care team shepherded them through the gruelling process. David's disability posed an additional complexity as the Court needed assurance that David understood what adoption was and that he was able to submit informed views to the Court. To achieve this, David's Case Manager developed a mini adoption curriculum complete with fun quizzes to ensure that David knew exactly what to expect and what adoption was.

Obtaining the consent and support of David's biological family was also challenging but David's Case Manager worked diligently to ensure that the views of his biological family were considered and to assure David's birth mother that contemporary open adoption is very different to what it was twenty years ago. The process also saw David reconnect with his extended family, which was a tremendous achievement given they had not been present in his life for many years.

Regular case management duties don't stop when a Case Manager is tasked with an adoption matter. The team had their hands full ensuring the family had all the required supports in place long into the future so that they would be supported post-adoption.

CatholicCare then worked tirelessly to draft the required court documents alongside the Department of Communities & Justice, support workers, assessors and David's family to manage the court process until happily this year David's adoption was at long last approved by the Court.

In addition to his Mum and Dad, David wanted one other person to be present to celebrate the special day, his CatholicCare Case Manager.



# MY MENTAL HEALTH CAN'T HOLD ME BACK FROM MY ART

"My mental health can't hold me back from my art," says Hannah who attends Boonah Creative Arts Centre. Boonah is an art studio that provides a safe and supported place for artists living with a disability. For Hannah, it is the lack of judgement and creative freedom she experiences at Boonah that keeps her coming back, "I can use pencil, pen, paint or whatever I choose. No one is judging me and that's a relief. I can be who I want here."

Hannah was four when she started drawing. "I doodled in my books all through school," Hannah says. Throughout her childhood, Hannah moved from Japan to England to Australia, and she never felt deeply rooted in one place. "The instability of my childhood impacted my mental illness and my ability to form deep connections," Hannah says. Art, however, was one aspect of her life that was constant.

"I like drawing faces, which is ironic because I have autism," Hannah says. "I am fascinated by people, and I find the human form so interesting. There is so much elegance in movement and muscle. The process of trying to draw a perfect hand, to depict someone dancing or simply someone holding a plastic bag gives me great pleasure and calms my mind."

Whenever Hannah enters Boonah's doors, she gives herself permission to be herself. "I feel safe here." Hannah says that she doesn't speak to too many people at Boonah as she likes to focus on her art, but she has built rapport with another artist called David. "He will make jokes and he's a bit of a tease," Hannah says. "We have fun."

David struggles with his memory and always asks me the same questions about what I'm drawing. I always give the same answers, but that's fine. He's part of what I love about this place."

Hannah believes that everyone can create art. "It frustrates me when people say I'm gifted at art, because art is something I've spent most of my life practicing. I've done some really crappy drawings, but I persisted. It makes me sad when people give up on their art, because I've seen how much happiness it has brought me by persisting."

Hannah is inspired by the tenacity and determination of her fellow artists at Boonah. "Some people who come here can't talk or are in wheelchairs, but despite their limitations they end up creating the most phenomenal artworks," she says.

Boonah Activity Leader, Peter says that Hannah's work has the 'wow factor'. "Hannah has a real emotional connection with her work, and she creates art that is insightful. People are drawn to the way she captures the human figure," Peter says.

Hannah is one of many artists whose work is showcased at Boonah's annual exhibition, held each November. "We have a real drive to get the works of our artists into exhibition," Peter says. "Our commitment to helping artists with a disability pursue their artistic passions makes us more than just a day program. We are constantly building and developing the skills of our artists and we support them to sell their works to the public."

Hannah says that one day she would like to be a famous artist. But for now, her goal is to keep creating art that is meaningful and unique.

Hannah has good and bad days, but art is something that fills her days, no matter what. "Even if I need to be in bed and cry, I can still draw," Hannah says. "I am sustained by my artistic pursuits and by the peace I experience every time I come to Boonah."



Boonah artist Hannah

# THE POWER OF ADVOCACY

Pregnant, homeless and terrified that the Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) would remove her unborn child, Lana called CatholicCare Case Worker, Naomie. Lana's two year old son had already been removed, and she was determined not to let it happen again.

Lana knew she needed somewhere safe to live if she wanted to keep her baby, but refuges would not take her due to her history of drug use. "She was desperate," said Naomie. "She wasn't the obvious fit for our crisis program, but I pushed and pushed until we had a place for her. I looked at her and thought, she's never had anybody back her. Had we not backed her and fought every step of the way, that baby would have been removed." Today, Lana is thriving as a mother.

"Lana has been referred to our service twice, initially because she was homeless and a victim of domestic violence," says Naomie. "We found out during the first service period that she was pregnant. She already had a little boy who was two, and a 12 year old son in kinship care with her sister. He had been removed due to violence." Eventually, her two year old son was also removed as they had been staying with the perpetrator.

A few months after Lana was discharged from CatholicCare for the first time, she called Naomie out of desperation. "She needed somewhere to stay but she had a terrible rental history because the perpetrator had damaged properties. They also hadn't paid their rent," Naomie said. "Lana had been to hell and back. She lost her mum a year before, and she had no family support." Lana ended up being accepted into CatholicCare accommodation at Jo's Place.

It became clear to Naomie and the team that following the birth of the baby in December, the best place for them would be the Flourish Women & Children's Program. The service is for women and children under age 6 where there are significant mental health concerns. "We had to advocate with DCJ to back Lana's referral because it's a highly sought after program," Naomie says. "We called DCJ many, many times and had case conferences to really push for DCJ's backing. I kept insisting that DCJ just needed to meet Lana and get to know her."



Eventually someone from DCJ did meet with Lana, and this was the catalyst for Lana's acceptance into the Flourish Program. "Lana has engaged so well at Flourish," says Naomie. "Initially, when she and her baby moved in, she participated in programs four days a week including counselling. She had a Case Worker and people would check in with her every day. She basically had supports 24/7 and Lana now gets to have longer periods of contact with her two year old and they are working towards restoration over a period of two years."

Lana has recently transitioned from Flourish's 24/7 contact program to a transitional program. "She has really good boundaries now," Naomie says. "She no longer sends the perpetrator money or answers his calls," Naomie says. "She prioritises her children, and the restoration goal is testament to her hard work. When we last spoke Lana said to me ...

“  
If you didn't believe in me  
and stick with me, I wouldn't  
have any of my kids right  
now.”

Naomie says that in some cases, like Lana's, you need to trust your gut feeling, "Her case wasn't a natural fit for our program, but I knew we had to help her. The three little ones are Aboriginal, so another motivating factor for me was that we don't need more Aboriginal children in care."

Lana's story is testament to the power of advocacy and the ability of a person to turn their life around with the right support.

# I JUST WANT TO BE WITH MY MUM

Brian's early life was tougher than most. Entering the foster care system quite young, he carried a profound sense of fear and anger after the trials of his early years. These strong emotions and the need for a sense of safety found their expression through Brian's interactions with adults and fellow children. Regrettably, for a child at the mercy of the foster care system, this often spelled the undoing of many well intentioned care arrangements.

Throughout Brian's childhood, he had crossed paths with a multitude of foster parents and even spent time in a residential care home under a different agency. Tragically, his life story was one of abuse and neglect, both preceding his entry into the care system and during his days within it. Notwithstanding these experiences, Brian wanted desperately to live with his family once more.

CatholicCare's Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) Program oversees community homes specially formed and staffed for children like Brian. Youth Workers support up to four young people in each home, with Case Managers and Therapeutic Specialists providing a focus on therapeutic care and permanency to support the young people toward life beyond care.

Once placed in the capable hands of CatholicCare's ITC program, Brian embarked on a transformative journey spanning several years. In the safety of group home settings as well as a dedicated 1:1 care arrangement, he finally found sanctuary and support, a realm of safety and unwavering attention essential for mending the wounds of his past.

The ITC team's efforts extended beyond Brian alone. They worked to forge deep connections with Brian's mother and siblings, fostering a gradual transfer of care responsibilities. It was a delicate arrangement, a task that required compassion, flexibility and dedication.

As time wore on, Brian's family took on more and more of his care, signalling a promising shift in the trajectory of his life. His family, now reunited in more ways than one, formed a robust support system, bound together by love and shared experiences. As we saw the commitment and potential for restoration

with Brian's family, we also recognised the resourcing challenges faced by many families struggling to make ends meet and responded with furniture and financial support. "CatholicCare have been the only people that have worked alongside us since the children came into care," Brian's mum reflects.

Today, Brian is standing on the edge of independence. He has matured, emerging as a resilient young man, capable of navigating the complexities of life with a newfound strength. CatholicCare's mission, beyond providing a safe haven for Brian, called for an unwavering commitment to his whole family. Our work extended far beyond the practicalities of care giving, encompassing the delicate art of relationship building and fostering connections that healed not only Brian, but also his family.

Brian's story serves as a reminder that with the right support, resilience and dedication, children from even the most troubled pasts can find their way back to the embrace of family and the promise of a brighter future. This is the story of CatholicCare's Permanency Support Program - rebuilding lives and rekindling hope in the hearts of those who need it most.



# CHEE CHANGES EVERYTHING FOR YVONNE

"To have someone as good as Chee, that's a miracle," says 78 year old Yvonne who receives in-home support from CatholicCare Community Support Partner, Chee. "She calls me her CC pill," says Chee. "I think she says so because she feels much better when she's having a visit from me. I don't know why I have been reduced to a pill! But this, of course, is a great compliment!"

When Yvonne began receiving support from us, she was quite disconnected from the community. "She often seemed withdrawn and depressed," says Chee. "Since then, she has become increasingly upbeat and more proactive socially and is exercising too!"

Chee says that in his experience as a support worker, it is not unusual to see seniors feeling lonely, which can easily lead to depression. "There is a lack of real social and interpersonal connections," says Chee. "It's the connection that makes the difference, be it a joke, shared laughter or a cup of tea while chatting about life. These are the things that help bring out the person from within, which is often hibernating. I think that might be why Yvonne appreciates the companionship so much."

Yvonne is convinced that Chee can take her pain away. "Some mornings I will wake up and think, 'Oh gosh, I'm in too much pain to go out today.' But by the time I have finished with Chee the pain has often gone."

When asked about what she most appreciates about Chee, Yvonne says it is the way he empowers her to make her own decisions. "He never takes over," Yvonne says. "When he comes with me to the podiatrist he will never interfere, but he will ask questions if he knows there is something I've forgotten to ask. He will regularly glance at me to make sure I am OK with what he is saying."

Yvonne also appreciates Chee's sense of humour and their shared cultural background. "I am part Chinese, so our shared culture is something that has helped our bond," Yvonne says.



Chee and Yvonne

Yvonne says that her only complaint is that Chee went to Canada on holidays for five weeks. "That's five weeks without my Chee medicine!" Yvonne says, jokingly. "It's a miracle I survived!"

But the real miracle, Yvonne says, is to have a Support Worker as good as Chee, "He's worth a million dollars."

# SALLY BUILDS MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Last year marked a significant and heartwarming chapter in our Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) team as we welcomed Sally into our care. Sally's story is one that reflects the transformative power of support and connection, especially for young people who have faced the challenges of long-term foster care. Her arrival brought both hope and hurdles, as transitions like these can be incredibly daunting for young individuals.

Sally's initial adjustment to life in our group home was not without its difficulties. She had to navigate a new environment, unfamiliar faces among fellow residents, and the presence of Youth Workers who were there to support her. However, our dedicated care team embarked on a mission to make Sally feel welcome, valued and understood and recognised the importance of building meaningful connections as a cornerstone of their work.

One of the pivotal moments in Sally's journey was the effort made by the care team to reach out to her family. Understanding the importance of family ties to a young person's life and identity, our case management team worked determinedly to reunite Sally with her loved ones. It was an emotionally charged endeavour, particularly given that Sally hadn't seen her father in many years. The team's commitment paid off when, after a relatively short period with CatholicCare, Sally had the opportunity to meet her father face-to-face.

This reunion was not a mere isolated event - it opened doors to an even more profound transformation in Sally's life when she embarked on an interstate trip to reconnect with her father and other extended family members. This experience not only provided her with a chance to rekindle bonds but also introduced her to an entire family she had never known existed. The regular, supported contact that followed has allowed Sally and her newfound family to build the kind of closeness that promises to endure well into the future.



# HEALTHIER, HAPPIER & TOGETHER UNDER ONE ROOF

When David moved to the Central Coast, he found himself isolated from his supports and with the mighty task of caring for his six children. Despite having all the right intentions, he found it overwhelming and almost impossible to meet the needs of his children, particularly those with significant physical and intellectual disabilities.

David was referred to CatholicCare's Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect (MST-CAN) program. The purpose of the program is to keep families together by providing practical skills and therapeutic support. This program, as it turns out, is exactly what David needed to get his family's life back on track.

Before his referral to MST-CAN, David struggled to get his children to medical appointments, of which there were many. The hygiene of the family home had been reported as an issue, and it had come to the attention of the Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) that his children had been missing many days of school.

When CatholicCare became involved, we set some goals in partnership with David and DCJ to increase school attendance, upskill David to be able to get all his children to medical and allied health appointments, learn new parenting skills to encourage positive behaviour and to improve the hygiene of the home.

For nine months, David was visited by an MST-CAN therapist three times a week. "We provided very active and intensive support for the family, particularly around school attendance," says MST-CAN Therapist, Yasmin.

"The therapist would come over in the mornings and support the children through a 'graded exposure' treatment, helping them adjust to school by adding a small task each morning. David was supported to take responsibility for the morning routine and to implement rewards and consequences for school attendance."



"If needed, the therapist would come over and coach David to help with getting plans in place," says Yasmin. "We used this method to support getting an organisational system in place for medical appointments and learning new parenting skills."

An MST-CAN Case Worker worked collaboratively with the family and the therapist to meet the family's goals. "This included getting the house organised and supporting the family's move into a wheelchair accessible home closer to supports," says Yasmin.

Today, David has an NDIS service in place, where support workers come each day to support the family.

Yasmin says that David has learned many new skills. "He has become a firmer parent with better boundaries," says Yasmin. "He can now say 'no' and follow through with it. His kids listen more and behave more positively as a result."

The MST-CAN program engages a multi-disciplinary team to support families, and David's story is a beautiful example of how practitioners can work collaboratively to keep a family together.

Today, David feels more confident in his ability to meet the needs of his children, and he has a greater sense of control over his daily life. He and his kids will often be found at the beach having a surf and enjoying quality time together. "David cooks a hearty meal for the family every night, and the kids help out," says Yasmin. Life is far from perfect, but they are healthier, happier, and most importantly, together under one roof.



## PEOPLE & CULTURE

We significantly improved planning for emergencies across our disability teams, delivering training at each site to build knowledge and ensure a safe and coordinated response.

Developed and implementing our First Nations Employment Strategy.

*Psychological Safety - Managing for Team Wellbeing* training provided to Managers across CatholicCare, facilitated by the Black Dog Institute.

Made improvements to our WHS Management System including an update to our WHS Policy, moving our focus now to injury management, consultation, manual handling and corrective action managements with training refreshers to follow.

## COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

Ensured a visible profile, clear purpose and trusted brand in the community.

Increased community, school and parish engagement opportunities across the Diocese.

Commenced the build of our new website due to go live December 2023.

Implemented Workplace as a new communication platform.

Selected a CRM platform for implementation in 2024.

Executed our annual Diocesan fundraiser, raising over \$90,000 to support our suite of unfunded homelessness services.

Hired an Aboriginal Community Engagement Manager, drafted our First Nations Engagement Strategy and actively built relationships with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities across the Diocese.

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Strengthened the IT team's skills through targeted recruitment and planning succession.

Collaborated with an external vendor to upgrade security defences through the implementation of SOC and SIEM services, enhancing overall system protection and governance.

Built data pipelines to connect legacy systems with new business dashboards for efficient data access and reporting.

Conducted a transparent RFP process to select a new service provider to manage our network infrastructure.

## SAFEGUARDING

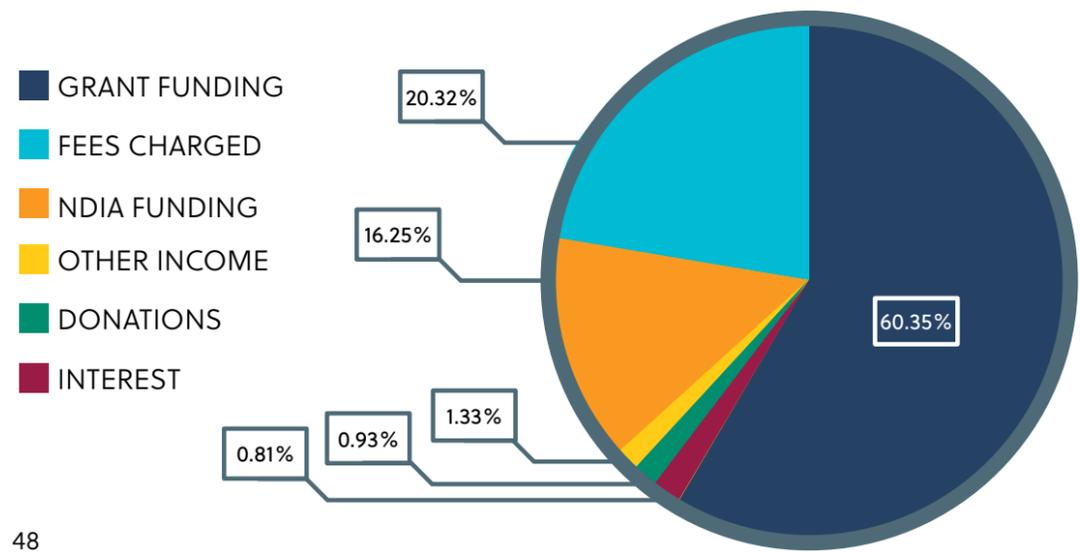
All staff are now required to complete induction training which includes safeguarding.

The Safeguarding Office delivered safeguarding training to 200+ staff over 17 sessions tailored to service areas on topics including incident reporting and recognising and responding to signs of abuse.

# FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

- Some normality was welcomed across most of our services in 2022/23, following several disrupted years due to the pandemic.
- We received support once again from State and Federal Governments with increased funding that helped maintain our operations during the year. We remain grateful for their support.
- The Permanency Support Program renewed its contract for Out of Home Care for a further 5 years and commenced a new contract in short-term emergency placement, increasing the overall funding in these programs. Financially, the operational requirements of these programs presented some challenges with the programs operating at a small deficit this year.
- Our Family Supports suite including domestic violence, homelessness, emergency relief and financial counselling programs benefited from continued State and Federal Government funding.
- An increase in donations and community support across the Diocese allowed us to maintain the financial stability of the unfunded drop-in services at Mary Mac's Place in Woy Woy and Dom's Place in Hornsby.
- Our Children's Services operations grew significantly during the year with the opening of 8 new Before & After School Care and Vacation Care programs in primary schools across the Diocese. Changes to the funding models resulted in the introduction of a small gap fee on these services to ensure their financial viability is maintained.
- Disability Futures programs returned to normal operation after several challenging years due to lockdowns. Our Supported Independent Living (SIL) programs continued strongly with an additional property at Wahroonga opening in December bringing the total number of residents to 16 across the 3 houses that we support. The service however, continues to operate at a deficit due to our day programs.
- Improved donations, interest earnings on our cash reserves and a positive Children's Services result allowed us to maintain an operating surplus for the year of \$1.1m.
- Whilst we continue to manage our costs in this challenging environment, we still recognise the need to continue to invest in areas that will keep the agency viable in the long-term. We completed the installation of our new HRIS system during the year, established a new Family Centre in Artarmon, invested in improvements at our Permanency Support Program offices in West Gosford, and replaced several new vehicles to continue to support our services.

## OUR INCOME SOURCES



## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (000's)

	%	2022/23	2021/22
<b>REVENUE</b>			
PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM	34	21,851	18,910
FAMILY SERVICES	25	15,902	14,397
CHILDREN'S SERVICES	22	13,947	11,088
DISABILITY FUTURES	17	10,785	7,276
SENIORS	1	942	893
OTHER	1	515	254

<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>		<b>\$63,942</b>	<b>\$52,818</b>
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<b>EXPENSES</b>			
PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM	35	21,982	18,482
FAMILY SERVICES	25	15,584	14,371
CHILDREN'S SERVICES	21	13,336	10,200
DISABILITY FUTURES	17	10,932	7,687
SENIORS	2	942	968

<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$62,776</b>	<b>\$51,708</b>
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<b>NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)</b>		<b>\$1,166</b>	<b>\$1,110</b>
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## BALANCE SHEET (000's)

	2022/23	2021/22
TOTAL ASSETS	31,271	28,749
TOTAL LIABILITIES	18,489	19,144

<b>NET ASSETS/TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>\$12,782</b>	<b>\$9,605</b>
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*This result represents the operating performance of the agency only for the financial year ended 30 June 2023. A full copy of our annual financial report is available on the ACNC website. The full financial results will differ to the operating results due to other accounting adjustments included in the annual financial report.*



# WE SERVE IN JUSTICE & LOVE

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