MARY MAC'S PLACE
WOY WOY

CatholicCare
DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY

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Evaluation Report
Mary Mac's Place



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1. Executive Summary

This evaluation examined the role and impact of Mary Mac's Place, a community-based outreach and support service operating in Woy Woy on the Central Coast of NSW.

Mary Mac's Place is a Catholic service in both origin and character. Its work reflects long-standing Catholic commitments to hospitality, human dignity, solidarity, and practical care for people experiencing hardship.

The service provides food relief, showers, laundry access, referral support, and community connection for people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, financial hardship, loneliness, trauma, and broader social disadvantage.

What we delivered in the last 12 months

- 20,000+ meals
- 4,000+ showers
- 8,000+ laundry services
- 2,000+ food hampers

Plus referral pathways, informal advocacy, emotional support and broader community connection.

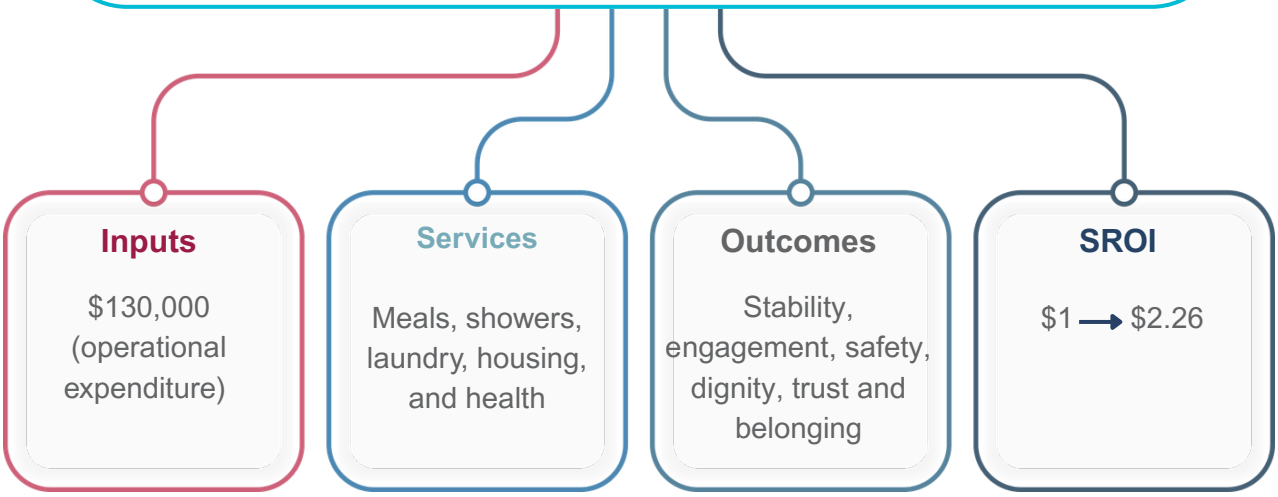
Social Return on Investment

Mary Mac's Place generates approximately $2.26 in measurable community value for every $1 of direct operational expenditure.

The calculation adopted a deliberately conservative approach and did not fully monetise broader outcomes such as dignity, belonging, emotional wellbeing, reduced loneliness, or social connection.

Why it works

Clients consistently identified safety, dignity, trust, and belonging as the conditions that enabled engagement. Basic supports opened the door and relationships sustained the next steps into housing, health and stability.





2. Background & Context

Homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, and social isolation have become major features of contemporary Australian society. Increasing numbers of individuals and families are now living with housing insecurity, financial instability, poor mental health, social disconnection, and chronic economic stress despite remaining partially connected to employment, temporary accommodation, or informal support networks. These pressures have intensified in recent years due to rising housing costs, rental shortages, inflationary pressures, insecure employment, and broader cost-of-living increases across Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2024).

This evaluation examines the role, impact, and effectiveness of Mary Mac's Place within the Central Coast community.

KEY FACTS

Homelessness in Australia

122,494 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness on Census night 2021.

Young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and older women are disproportionately affected.

ABS (2023), Estimating Homelessness: Census, 2021; AIHW (2025), Specialist homelessness services annual report 2023–24.

Structural drivers of homelessness in Australia

- Housing costs and supply
- Health and mental health
- Income and cost of living
- Family and community safety
- System barriers

3. About Mary Mac's Place

Mary Mac's is a place of welcome, support and connection for anyone doing it tough. Every person who walks through the door is met with kindness, respect and a genuine sense of care. People from all walks of life come here, men and women, families, young people and older members of the community, each carrying their own story. What they find is more than a meal. They find connection, conversation and a sense of belonging. From Monday to Friday, a nutritious lunch is shared in a warm and friendly space, served by volunteers who give their time with genuine care and compassion. For many, it is the highlight of their day, a chance to sit down, feel safe and be treated with dignity. But the support does not stop there. Mary Mac's offers practical help that can make a real difference, including access to showers, laundry facilities and connections to vital services such as legal support, homelessness assistance and healthcare. With the support of community partners, guests can also take food home, helping to ease the pressure beyond the day.

What we do

Pathways

- Housing assistance (applications & advocacy)
- Health (GP & mental health links)
- Financial and legal referrals

Immediate supports

- Meals
- Showers and laundry services
- Food hampers

Community and trust

- A safe space where people feel known, heard and connected

Volunteers

- Skilled and supported contributors who extend capacity and community reach

Who we serve

- Adults and young people experiencing homelessness or housing stress
- People with chronic health or mental health conditions
- Those navigating domestic and family violence
- Individuals facing unemployment, debt, or social isolation, and
- People seeking reconnection and belonging

> *The cost of living has changed the whole picture.*

> *Someone told me they went stir crazy from not having any human interaction at all.*

4. The Evaluation

We used a mixed methods evaluation to capture activity, experience, and value:

- **Service data:** volumes of visits, meals, showers/laundry, and pathway supports (housing, health, financial and legal referrals).
- **Stakeholder interviews:** clients, staff, and volunteers, exploring what enables engagement and progress.
- **Economic modelling (SROI)**: inputs, outcomes, financial proxies, deadweight and attribution assumptions, and sensitivity testing.

We triangulated these sources to test whether the story the numbers tell aligns with what people experience. The answer was yes: quantitative outputs and qualitative themes converged, explaining how practical supports and relationships combine to produce outcomes.

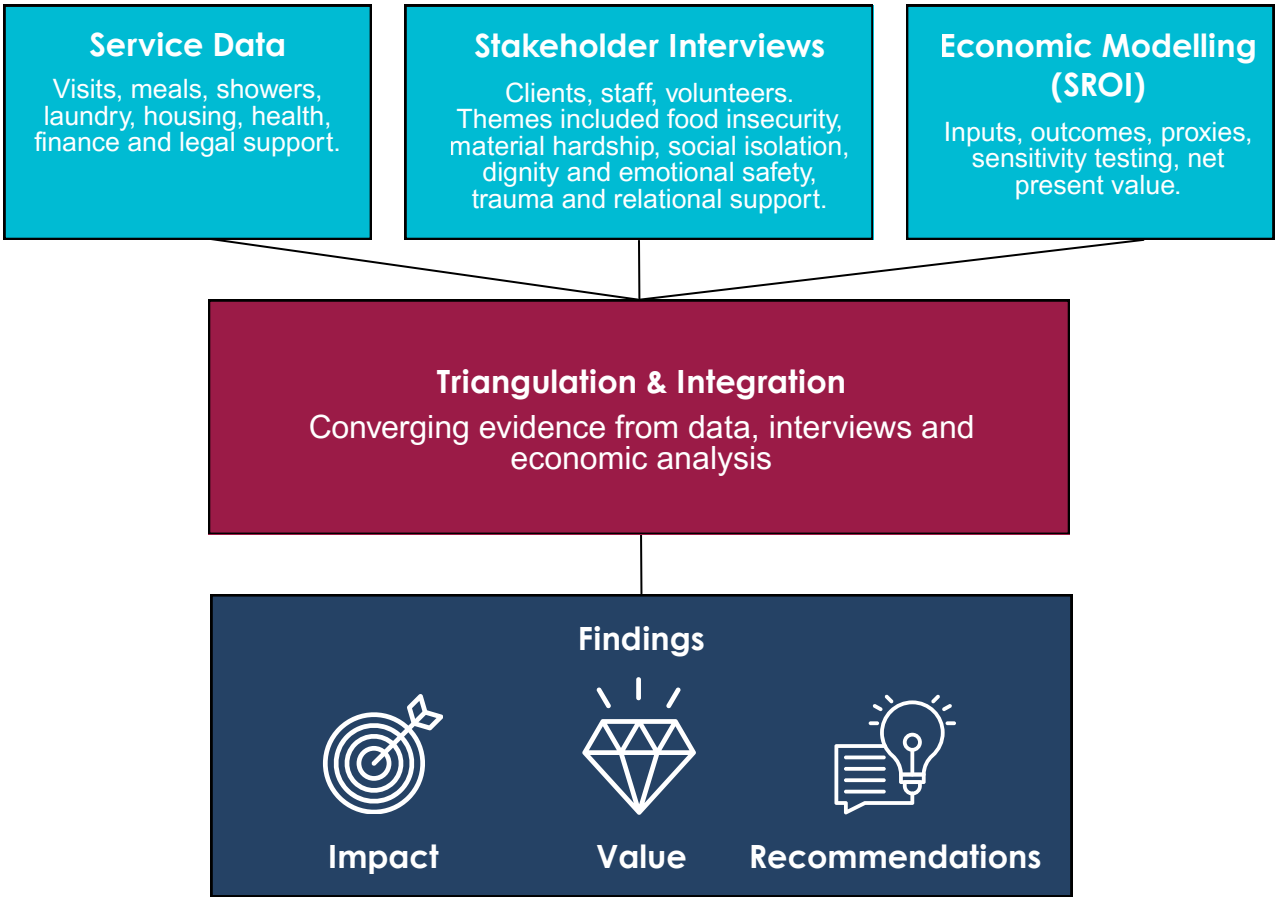
What is SROI?

Social Return on Investment (SROI) translates outcomes into monetary value using transparent assumptions and published proxies. It accounts for what would have happened anyway (deadweight), the contribution of other services (attrition), and the risk of over-claiming.

An SROI of 1:2.26 means $2.26 of value is created for every $1 invested.

(Social Value International, Standards & Guidance; Social Value UK, Starting Out on SROI)

Mixed methods evaluation overview



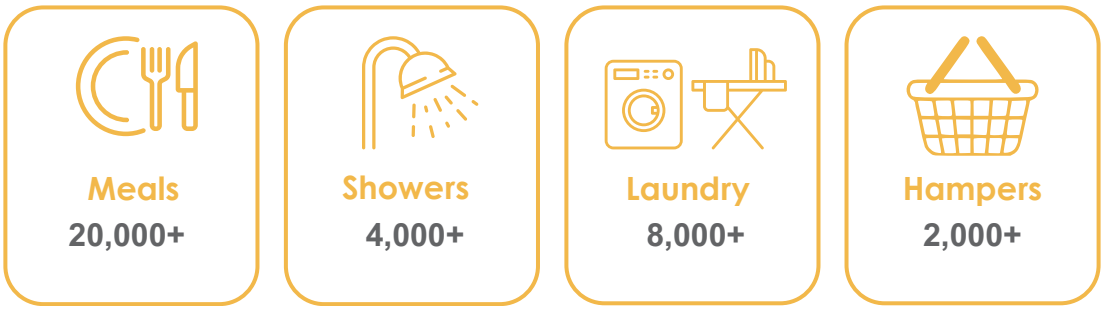
5. Service Reach & Activities

The numbers tell the scale - the service tells the story.

Over twelve months, Mary Mac's Place provided basic services at volume while maintaining capacity for deeper pathway work.

These services matter.
Basic supports build daily stability, while trust and community create pathways for change. This mix is what makes the model effective.

Basic supports (immediate needs)



Pathway supports



The quantitative data further demonstrated that Mary Mac's Place was responding to a broad spectrum of needs extending beyond food insecurity alone. Program records documented levels of engagement relating to housing support, mental health assistance, financial stress, social isolation, and referral activity. Available service data indicated that hundreds of housing related interventions, mental health supports, and wellbeing interactions occurred throughout the evaluation period.

Volunteer Contribution Summary

Volunteer Indicator	Estimate
Approximate number of active volunteers	40
Average volunteer hours per week	6 hours
Estimated annual volunteer hours	12,480 hours
Estimated volunteer labour replacement value	$436,800

6. Client Experience

Clients consistently described Mary Mac's Place as a safe and welcoming environment.

They emphasised that they felt respected and at ease from their very first visit, often contrasting this with past experiences of feeling judged or excluded in other services.

Safety

Predictability and a non-judgemental culture reduce anxiety and make it possible to return.

Dignity

Being treated as a person of value - staff and volunteers remember names, ask before advising, and honour choices.

Trust

Follow-through on small things leads to confidence in bigger steps like housing or health referrals.

Belonging

Community connection rebuilds identity and the motivation to keep going.

> *I've been up and down, and my son's gone to prison, and I've been in mental institutions. And every time I come here, they put me back on the rails.*

> *You build relationships. You worry if somebody doesn't turn up. You celebrate little wins with them. It becomes part of your life.*

7. Economic Impact

HEADLINE RESULTS

Inputs $130,000
Operational expenditure

Gross Value $566,800
(including volunteer contribution)

Net Benefits $293,760

SROI Ratio

Based on the investment and outcomes, CatholicCare Broken Bay generated an SROI Ratio of:



For every $1 invested in Mary Mac's Place, **$2.26 of social and economic value** is created.

What's included?

- Valued outcomes with reliable benchmarks (health, housing stability, reduced risk, volunteer contributions).
- Adjustments for deadweight (what would have happened anyway) and attribution (the contribution of other services).

What's not over claimed?

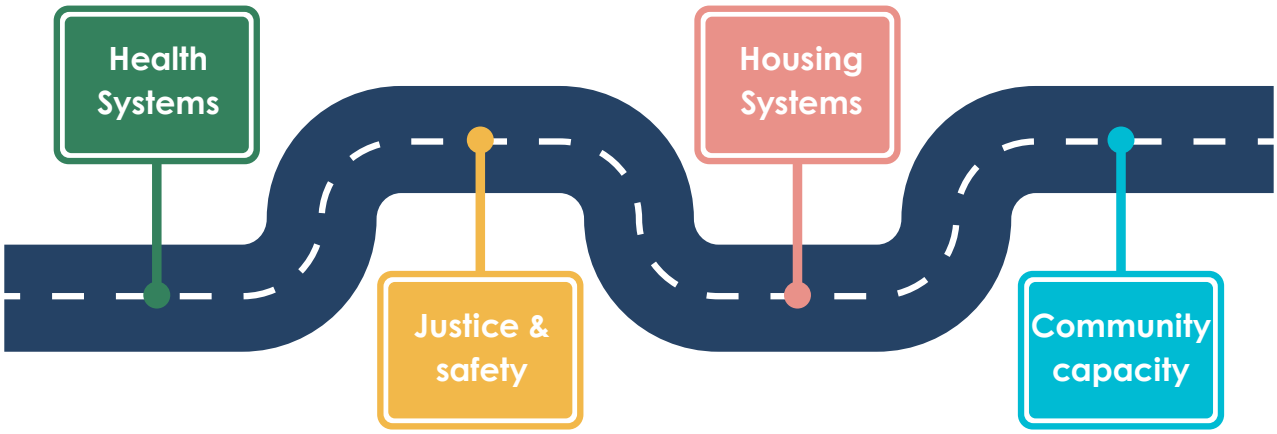
- Intangible but essential outcomes like dignity, belonging, and community connection were described in the findings but not monetised, keeping estimates cautious.

Sensitivity testing

- Even under stricter assumptions (higher deadweight or lower attribution), the ratio remained above 1:2, confirming the robustness of value creation.

8. Wider Benefits

Mary Mac's Place creates ripple effects beyond the individual



Health systems

A lower risk of avoidable emergency presentations through earlier support and coordinated referrals.

Justice and safety

Reduced risk of behaviours and contact with the justice system through stability and connection.

Housing systems

Fewer returns to crisis accommodation, and better tenancy sustainment when people are supported in the community.

Community capacity

Volunteers gain skills, civic participation grows, and stigma decreases as community members engage meaningfully.

9. Recommendations

The findings reinforce the importance of maintaining Mary Mac's Place as a low-barrier, relationship-based community support environment. The effectiveness of the service appears closely connected to its informal atmosphere, accessibility, consistency, volunteer culture, and emphasis on dignity and relational engagement. Future planning should therefore prioritise preserving these characteristics as the service continues to grow and respond to increasing community demand.

Continued development of service partnerships

Strengthening relationships with housing providers, homelessness outreach services, healthcare programs, mental health supports, legal services, and government agencies may improve referral pathways and provide more coordinated support for companions experiencing complex or long-term disadvantage. Maintaining strong partnerships with food rescue programs and community donors will also remain important for operational sustainability.

Volunteer sustainability

Given the substantial operational and relational contribution made by volunteers, ongoing strategies should be developed to support volunteer recruitment, retention, training, supervision, and wellbeing.

Strengthen data collection and outcome tracking

More consistent recording of referral pathways, housing outcomes, repeat engagement patterns, wellbeing indicators, and service utilisation trends would improve future evaluation capacity and support stronger evidence-based planning. This would also strengthen future grant applications, partnership development, and program advocacy.

Advocacy

Companions repeatedly described experiences of hardship that remained largely invisible within broader public discussion. Mary Mac's Place is well positioned to contribute informed community advocacy grounded in direct lived experience and frontline engagement.

10. Conclusion

This evaluation found that Mary Mac's Place plays a vital role in responding to disadvantage across the Central Coast by providing practical support, social connection, emotional safety, and a welcoming, non-judgemental environment for people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, financial hardship, trauma, and isolation.

While meals, food assistance, hygiene facilities, and referrals remain essential services, companions consistently highlighted the importance of dignity, routine, belonging, and human connection.

The findings demonstrate that Mary Mac's Place contributes to improved wellbeing, reduced isolation, greater stability, and support during times of crisis. There was no evidence that the service fosters dependency - rather, it provides essential support within the context of broader social and economic challenges.

Volunteers and community partnerships were found to be critical to the service's success, helping sustain both service delivery and its relational culture.

With an estimated Social Return on Investment of $2.26 for every $1 spent, Mary Mac's Place delivers significant community value and remains an important source of support and stability for vulnerable people.





> *This evaluation demonstrates that modestly resourced wraparound homelessness services can deliver outcomes that are personally transformative and systemically significant.*

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