CatholicCare
DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY

2025/26 ANNUAL REPORT



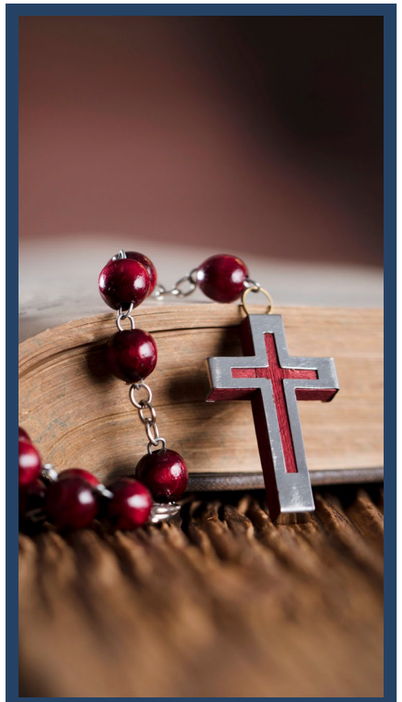
A series of
truly inspiring stories

In this annual report, you'll find reflections on our impact, stories of resilience and connection, and a celebration of the people - staff, volunteers, clients and community members - who make our mission possible.

We have changed the names and photos of some clients to protect their privacy.



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.



VISION

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

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.

VALUES

FAITH
Respect
EXCELLENCE
Compassion
Social Justice
COURAGE

CatholicCare
DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY

Guided by Catholic Social Teaching, we remain dedicated to upholding values that place people at the centre of our mission:

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.

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.

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.



Fr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator,
Diocese of Broken Bay

Reflecting on the year that has passed, I am deeply grateful for the dedication, compassion and professionalism demonstrated every day by the CatholicCare Broken Bay community.

This has been a year of significant transition and renewal for our Diocese and for CatholicCare.

In June, Archbishop Anthony Randazzo concluded his ministry in the Diocese of Broken Bay following his appointment to serve the Vatican in Rome. Archbishop Randazzo's leadership, vision and commitment to the mission of the Church have left a lasting legacy, including his steadfast support of CatholicCare and its important contribution to the lives of those most vulnerable in our communities. We give thanks for his service and offer him our prayers and best wishes as he takes up this new ministry.

At the same time, CatholicCare marked the conclusion of Tim Curran's six years of leadership as Executive Director. Since commencing in 2020, Tim has guided the organisation through periods of significant growth, challenge and change. His commitment to serving those who are marginalised and vulnerable has strengthened CatholicCare's mission. We thank Tim for his generous service and wish him every blessing in the next chapter of his professional and personal journey.

Yet amidst these changes there is constancy. What continues to inspire us is the way CatholicCare places human dignity at the centre of its mission. Beyond the delivery of services, CatholicCare creates communities of belonging, fosters hope where there is uncertainty, and offers practical support that enables individuals, families and communities to flourish. CatholicCare continues to embody the love of Christ in concrete action.

It is in the spirit of this commitment that an independent strategic review of CatholicCare was commissioned in this past financial year. The review represents an opportunity to discern how we can strengthen our commitment to mission, enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of our services, and position CatholicCare to confidently meet future challenges and opportunities. It is hoped that the outcomes of this strategic review will ensure that CatholicCare remains a strong, sustainable and innovative ministry of our local Church, equipped to deliver meaningful and compassionate support to those we serve for generations to come.

Despite the many challenges facing the social services sector, including cost-of-living pressures, increased demand for support services, structural reforms in both aged care and disability services, and evolving government funding arrangements, CatholicCare continues to respond with courage, innovation and compassion.

Every day, staff and volunteers accompany people experiencing hardship, homelessness, disability, family breakdown, mental health challenges, social isolation and disadvantage. Through this work, they bring to life the Gospel imperative to walk alongside those most in need.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to every member of the CatholicCare community, staff, volunteers, carers, donors, partners and supporters. Through your commitment and generosity, countless lives have been touched with compassion, dignity and hope. Your service reflects the very best of our Catholic tradition and is a powerful expression of God's love in our world.

As we look to the future, may we continue to build communities where every person is welcomed, valued and supported, and where hope remains at the heart of all we do.

With gratitude and every blessing,

Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator
Diocese of Broken Bay



Ted Wziontek
Advisory Council Chair

Every day, our teams strive to bring CatholicCare's vision to life - a world where people are safe, well and connected in inclusive communities, where all are treated with dignity and respect.

Over my 13 years with CatholicCare, it has been a privilege to support initiatives that make a genuine difference in people's lives.

As community needs continue to grow, so too has our response. With homelessness increasing, Dom's Place and Mary Mac's Place have provided greater support to those doing it tough, and efforts have been made to identify safer and more appropriate accommodation options for people experiencing domestic and family violence. Our disability services, including Boonah and Tarooki, continue to create opportunities for creativity, connection and inclusion, while our Children's Services have expanded into public schools. And our Permanency Support Program continues to support young people from challenging family circumstances, helping them gain independence and greater access to education and the community, including a service extension into Wagga Wagga this year.

Despite rising demand, increasing compliance requirements and ongoing economic pressures, CatholicCare remains well placed to strengthen its impact.

I thank the Advisory Council, Senior Leadership Team and staff for their commitment to improving the lives of those we serve.

From the Senior Leadership Team

It's been a big year - one of change, but just as much one of growth. A new Aged Care Act came into effect. In-home care was restructured through the Support at Home program. The NDIS moved through another round of reform. Major shifts, all landing in the same twelve months, all requiring our teams to learn new processes without pausing the work already in front of them.

At the same time, we were building. We opened new Out of School Hours Care services. We took our Permanency Support Program to Wagga Wagga. We opened the Dom's Place Coffee Cart and we launched our Support at Home program. We also piloted Crossroad Companions, a new end-of-life support service, so that individuals and families facing death have someone alongside them who can sit with the hard conversations. We didn't just adapt to what was happening around us, we kept expanding while we did it.

None of this happens on its own. It happens because a support worker sat down and explained a new funding model to someone who was worried about losing their care. Because an educator learned every new child's name in a new OSHC, and figured out which children needed a bit more time to settle in. Because we took the time to properly train Dom's Place visitors to make a good coffee, giving them skills that could open the door to employment. There are many, many examples of these important service moments.

That's the work we want to recognise here. It's easy, from a leadership table, to get caught up in reforms and big picture strategy - to talk about growth as an outcome on a page. But CatholicCare runs because our staff and volunteers show up day after day, often in rooms and homes the rest of us never see. To all our staff and volunteers at CatholicCare - we thank you.

We farewelled Tim Curran, our Executive Director who joined CatholicCare in July 2020 who leaves behind a lasting legacy that will continue to shape CatholicCare for years to come. Tim's extraordinary leadership guided CatholicCare from a $50m organisation to $90m. He was a visionary leader, never one to accept things as they were. He pushed us to try new things, different things, and better things for the community. He leaves CatholicCare stronger and braver. We thank him for his leadership, his compassion, and his unwavering commitment to our mission.

There's more reform on the horizon, and we hope, more growth to go with it. We're not daunted by either. This year, our people managed both at once and never lost sight of the person in front of them - and that's not something any policy or plan can guarantee.

You'll see all of this come to life in the stories that follow in this year's annual report. Enjoy, and be inspired.

OUR SERVICES

"Let us not grow weary in doing good."

Galatians 6:9

Every day across the Northern Beaches, North Shore and Central Coast, moments of hope unfold in ways both big and small.

A family finds support during a difficult season. A child takes their first confident steps into learning. A young person discovers a sense of belonging. An older person finds connection and companionship. These moments may only last a short time, but their impact can be life changing.

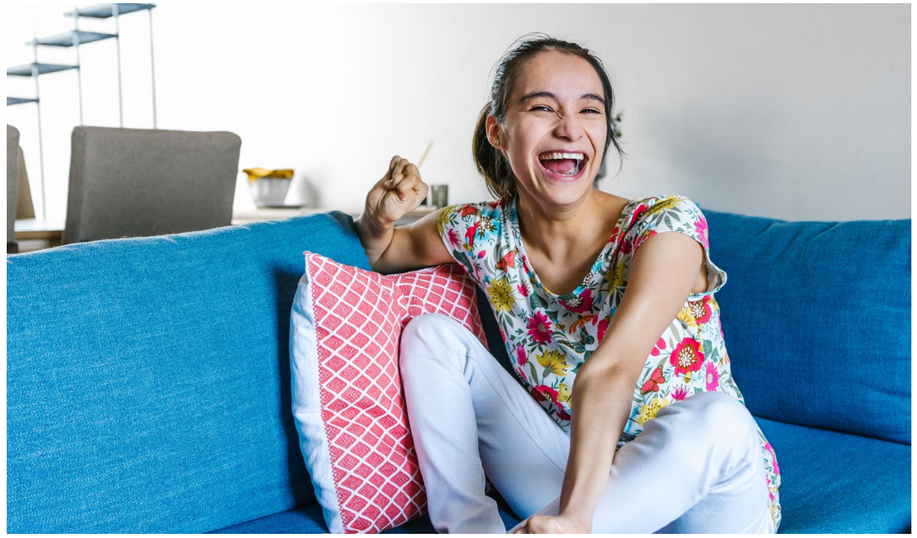
Behind every statistic is a story. Behind every service is a relationship. Behind every outcome is a person whose life has been touched by the care and commitment of our team at CatholicCare.

As the social care agency of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Broken Bay, CatholicCare exists to make these moments possible, inspired by the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching.

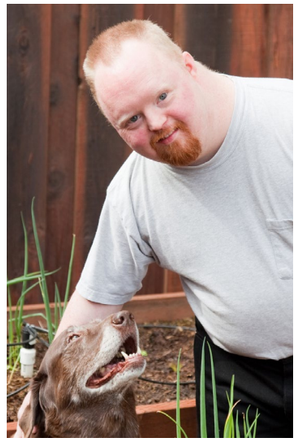
During the past year, we delivered more than $87 million in services, supported by government partners, generous donors and the dedication of almost 1000 staff who bring our mission to life every day.

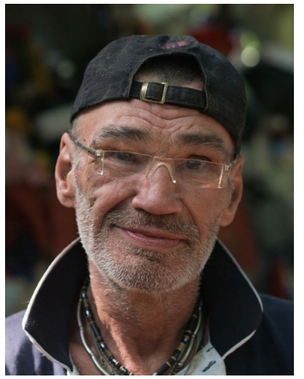
- **AGED CARE SERVICES**
- **SPIRIT DISABILITY SERVICES**
- **CHILD, YOUTH & FAMILY SUPPORTS**
- **THERAPY SERVICES**
- **CHILDREN'S SERVICES**
- **PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM**
- **DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORTS**
- **HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY & PASTORAL CARE**
- **HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS SUPPORTS**





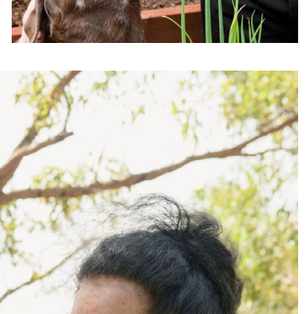






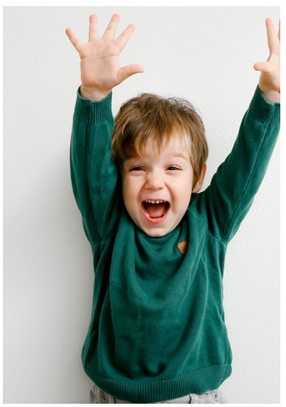
















WE CELEBRATE 2025/26

AGED CARE SERVICES

This has been a year of significant growth for our aged care services, marked by the successful launch of the Commonwealth Government's new Support at Home program. Our team is signing on clients quickly and already making an impact across the Diocese, supported by referral pipelines built with Local Health Districts, professional networks, parishes and the public.

Crossroad Companions, a non-clinical pastoral support service for people facing a terminal diagnosis - and for the family, carers and others around them - was also launched this year, open to anyone regardless of background.

Both services have strengthened our ties with local parishes, leading to a new partnership-based model of communal programs building stronger relationships and more referrals across the Diocese. At the same time, our Memory Innovations Centre expanded into new areas, and our Commonwealth Home Support Program, flexible respite and private billing services continued to grow.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

More than 30 Early Childhood Education & Care reforms have been rolled out across the sector this year, and we have taken a proactive approach, with the majority of these reforms already implemented across our services. To support our leaders, we launched a monthly Compliance & Quality Newsletter covering legislative updates, implementation progress and practical guidance.

Seven of our services went through an Assessment & Rating process during this period of change, and each achieved an overall rating of 'Meeting' against the National Quality Standard, with Woy Woy Early Learning Centre rated Overall 'Exceeding'.

We also grew. Lindfield OSHC increased its licensed places from 75 to 120, and MacKillop OSHC from 75 to 105. Vacation care launched at Epping OSHC and Kincumber Public School OSHC, and in April 2026 we took on operations of the Mount Ku-ring-gai Public School OSHC at the Department of Education's request.

Locally, Forestville OSHC's new *Cultural Cooking Club* is introducing children to different cultures through food, and Woy Woy OSHC's *Community Day* again brought families, children, educators and the wider community together.

DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICES

Our Domestic & Family Violence teams have faced sustained pressure on the frontline this year, as reported DFV crimes rose 8% (ABS) and death rates climbed at an alarming rate. We hold in our prayers and thoughts everyone who has lost their life, and everyone affected by that loss.

In our Diocese, we continue to work to keep women and children safe - through our safety action teams, primary prevention response, and intensive DFV services including women's and children's refuges and Men's Behaviour Change programs. Our refuges, casework and group programs remained a source of recovery and safety for many people this year.

Our Men's Behaviour Change program partnered with Western Sydney University on a formal service evaluation, which will help inform and share practice across the sector and highlights the strength of what our teams deliver.

HOMELESSNESS & FAMILY SERVICES

Under the State Government's Core & Cluster funding reforms construction began on two new refuges, with the first due to open in July 2027. Demand across Dom's Place and Mary Mac's Place kept rising this year, as a tight housing market and cost-of-living pressures push more people on lower incomes toward instability and homelessness. We delivered our inaugural Social Impact Report for Dom's Place, showing a social return of $2.90 for every dollar invested.

Alongside the Department of Communities and Justice's family preservation reforms, aimed at reducing the number of children entering statutory care, our family preservation services increased the number of intensive support packages available to families.

Our financial counselling teams also took financial capability workshops out to local women's refuges, providing critical support at a time of real need.

In partnership with Australian Catholic University, with endorsement from the Civil Chaplaincies Advisory Committee, we launched our inaugural Diocesan Pastoral Care course to welcome and support more pastoral care volunteers.

PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Across foster care, therapeutic residential care and supported independent living, the program supported more than 100 children and young people through a wide range of needs and circumstances - many progressing toward independence, starting employment or apprenticeships, gaining driver licences, strengthening family and community ties, and building the skills to move into adulthood.

We expanded beyond the Diocese of Broken Bay this year, opening new residential services in the Murrumbidgee region at the request of the Department of Communities and Justice - a reflection of confidence in CatholicCare's capacity to deliver safe, high quality care. We also concluded our Intensive Therapeutic Transitional Care service as part of a broader shift toward the new Interim Care Model.

More than 100 staff completed *Therapeutic Crisis Intervention* training this year, strengthening our trauma-informed approach to preventing crises and supporting children to regulate and recover.

We also prepared for accreditation under the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian and the new NSW Code of Practice, improving incident management, casework, governance and quality assurance along the way. A new quality assurance framework now gives clearer visibility of incidents, clinical care, risk and compliance - supporting stronger decisions and more consistent outcomes for children and young people as the sector continues to evolve.

SPIRIT DISABILITY SERVICES

This year we rebranded to Spirit - a name that reflects a person's personality and energy, and the belief that a person's worth isn't defined by ability or circumstance. It gives our service a fresh identity while staying true to our mission.

Building on the rebrand and last year's renovations at McAuley Place in Waitara, our Community & Day Programs located at the McAuley Place and Clarke Road Hubs have grown solidly. A restructure has brought one Senior Manager across the Waitara sites, Brookvale and Boonah, with Team Leaders now coordinating daily activities at each site.

With changes to the NDIS on the horizon, we'll be reviewing our Community & Day Programs to sharpen what sets us apart in an increasingly competitive market - building on strengths like our Boonah and Tarooki art studios, where successful annual exhibitions and a growing base of regular customers via our Shopify store continue to showcase our artists' work.

Our Supported Independent Living homes also grew, with a new property at Terrey Hills delivered in partnership with SDA provider Good Housing.

Artwork credit: Ingrid, Boonah artist



EXPANDING THERAPEUTIC CARE IN WAGGA WAGGA

In May, two brothers became the first young people to move into CatholicCare Broken Bay's new Intensive Therapeutic Care home in Wagga Wagga.

For Ethan, 12, and Jacob, 11, it wasn't about a new program or service expansion. It was about moving into a place that had been prepared just for them – bedrooms ready, routines waiting to be established, and a team committed to helping them settle after years of change.

Their arrival marked a significant step for our Permanency Support Program (PSP), which has established two Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) homes in the Wagga Wagga region to provide stable, therapeutic support for young people with complex needs.

Over the past few years, CatholicCare has worked towards establishing a presence in the Murrumbidgee region, where growing demand for out-of-home care placements and a shortage of foster carers have placed increasing pressure on the system. Today, two ITC houses are operating in the region, with further growth planned in the years ahead.

For Ethan and Jacob, however, the significance of the moment was much simpler - it was the beginning of a place to call home.

"They're good kids – really active, love being outside," said Program Manager Matthew.

> **"If you give them footy, fishing, anything outdoors, they're straight into it."**

CatholicCare's approach focuses on building small, therapeutic residential homes that provide consistency, structure and daily support for young people who have experienced trauma and disruption in their lives.

In the lead up to the first placements, significant groundwork was carried out to prepare the homes. Properties were secured, staff were recruited and inducted in stages, and care teams were established to ensure everything was ready from day one. By the end of May, a second ITC house had also opened in the region.

"We wanted to make sure everything was in place before young people moved in," Matthew said. "The priority was creating something stable and safe from the very beginning."

The model of care centres on building relationships and predictable routines – key factors in helping young people who have experienced multiple placement disruptions.

For Ethan and Jacob, the transition has been about adjusting to that stability – establishing everyday routines, reconnecting with interests they enjoy and having space that feels consistent and secure.

The decision to place the brothers together was intentional, allowing them to remain in a familiar sibling relationship while adjusting to a new environment. They have also continued to maintain contact with family, including regular time with their grandparents.

"They've been through a lot of change, but they're really resilient," Matthew said. "When things are steady for them, you can see them settle and thrive."

Alongside the two ITC houses now operating in the region, CatholicCare is continuing to plan additional PSP programs, with the aim of strengthening local capacity and reducing the need for young people to move away from their communities to receive care.

For Matthew, who is based locally, the focus remains on building something sustainable. "It's about giving young people stability and the chance to build a future," he said. "That's what this work is really about."

A few months into operation, the homes are beginning to find their rhythm. Staff are building rapport with the young people in their care, daily rhythms are emerging, and the houses are becoming places that feel lived in rather than newly established.

For Ethan and Jacob, life is beginning to settle into something steadier than what came before.

OPENING EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

For many people, finding a job is more than writing a resume or attending an interview. It's about confidence, stability, and the right support at the right time.

That's why, over the past year, CatholicCare has focused on strengthening partnerships with employment service providers - helping create more opportunities for people to access practical support, build skills, and move toward employment and greater independence.

Through collaborations with organisations including Ability Options, WISE Employment and Global Skills, CatholicCare has brought therapeutic support directly into employment service settings. These partnerships are making it possible for people to access counselling, assessments, and group programs in places they already know and trust.

"The really powerful thing about this work is that we're providing therapeutic, solution focused support to people who would otherwise not be able to access it," says Counselling & Allied Health Operational Lead, Shane. "In another walk of life, they just wouldn't be able to walk through the door and get that level of support."

By working alongside employment providers, CatholicCare clinicians become part of a broader support network, collaborating closely to help people overcome barriers that may be holding them back from engaging in work or study.

"Our role isn't to find someone a job," explains Practice Manager Jodie. "It's the psychological counselling and assessments that sit alongside that. We support people to build confidence, manage anxiety, and develop the skills they need to take those next steps."

For many clients, the barriers are significant, ranging from long-term unemployment to mental health challenges or unrecognised disabilities. Through these partnerships, CatholicCare is able to provide tailored, therapeutic support that meets people where they are.

Importantly, these services are delivered at no cost to the client.

"These clients often wouldn't be able to afford counselling, even with a mental health care plan," Jodie says. "So we're removing that financial barrier. And not only that, we go to them. They're already attending these centres, so we're also removing the barrier of transport."

This accessibility is key. By co-locating services and working in partnership, support becomes not only more available, but more effective.

"It's really integrated," Shane says. "When our team is onsite, they become part of the employment service team.

> **"We're working together toward the same goal, supporting someone to move forward into employment in a sustainable way."**

The partnerships have grown steadily since first beginning as a pilot program in 2022, with increasing demand and expanding reach each year. New group programs, such as *Stages of Change*, are now being delivered to help clients build readiness, confidence, and wellbeing alongside their employment journey.

Beyond immediate outcomes, the impact of this work is long-lasting. For some, it means gaining the confidence to attend their first interview in years. For others, it means receiving the right assessments to access more appropriate supports, or simply being given the time and space to rebuild.

"It's about working alongside people," Shane reflects. "Giving them the support they need to take those next steps, steps that might not have been possible otherwise."

Through these partnerships, CatholicCare continues to expand its reach and respond to the needs of the community, ensuring that support is not only available, but accessible, integrated, and centred on each person's journey.

A MINISTRY EXPERIENCED FIRST-HAND

For many years, Owen Casey has been a strong supporter of the Church's mission in the community.

As the bookkeeper at Kincumber Parish for the past 18 years, he has contributed to countless parish initiatives, fundraising appeals and ministries. Owen is an acolyte in his parish and, along with his wife Joan, are members of the RCIA and Alpha teams.

Much of his parish involvement has focused on helping others. In 2024, however, Owen and his family found themselves receiving support during one of the most difficult periods of their lives.

His son-in-law, Jason, was admitted to Gosford Hospital after collapsing at home. His condition deteriorated rapidly and Jason was transferred to intensive care. At his bedside was his wife Joanne, Owen's daughter, along with other family members praying for signs of improvement.

"No one expected that he would die," Owen recalls. "He was a robust man who loved life and was very devoted to his family. He loved his footy and was a passionate South Sydney Rabbitohs supporter."

When Jason was admitted to hospital, he and Joanne identified him as Catholic on the admission paperwork. At the time, it was simply one of many questions asked during the admission process. Later, the family would come to appreciate how important that decision would be.

Because Jason's faith was recorded, the Hospital Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care team was notified. Volunteer chaplain Greg had visited Jason on the ward just before he was transferred to intensive care.

"Within half an hour of Greg's initial visit, Fr Peter D'Souza was there and Jason had been anointed," Owen says. "The response was incredible."

For Owen, what stood out most was the speed of that response and the reassurance it brought to the family during an uncertain and frightening time.

Over the following days, members of the chaplaincy team continued to visit Jason and support Joanne as she remained by her husband's side, as well as the wider family. They offered prayer, companionship and reassurance throughout Jason's time in hospital.



During one visit, CatholicCare's Pastoral Care Practitioner Peter Brown mentioned that he was a parishioner at Kincumber Parish. Joanne replied that her father was Owen Casey, and the connection quickly became apparent.

Yet Owen is quick to emphasise that the support they received had nothing to do with his own involvement in parish life.

"The connection was only worked out afterwards," he says. "They didn't come because they knew me. They do this for everybody."

After ten days in hospital, Jason passed away surrounded by his family. In his final days, family members, clergy and the chaplaincy team gathered around his bedside. Looking back, Owen says one of the greatest comforts was knowing that Jason had received the sacraments and was accompanied spiritually throughout his final days.

"The Hospital Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care team brought the Lord to my son-in-law when he was at death's door," he says.

The support was especially valuable for Joanne. "She knew that from a faith perspective that Jason was in good hands," Owen says. "The team stepped up and took care of that part. I think it took away some of the worry."

For Owen, one of the most important aspects of the ministry is not only the availability of the sacraments, but the presence of people willing to sit alongside families during difficult moments.

"These are the people who are there when families are facing some of the hardest days of their lives," he says. "They were there supporting Joanne, sitting with Jason and helping us through what was happening."

The chaplaincy team's support did not end with Jason's death. The family were offered ongoing pastoral care and grief support, along with the reassurance that help remained available if they needed it. Reflecting on the experience, Owen says it gave him a deeper appreciation for a ministry he had long supported through parish life.

Having witnessed it first-hand, he now understands more fully the role Hospital Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care plays for patients and families facing serious illness and loss. "Knowing there were people there to look after Jason's anointing and accompany him on his journey to heaven brought enormous comfort to our family."

GABBY'S STORY OF TRUST & RECOVERY

Gabby's life had been shaped by violence for so long that safety felt unfamiliar, even uncertain. Reaching out for help wasn't something she did lightly. It came only after serious injuries and a crisis that made it clear things could not continue as they were.

It was through NSW Health that she was referred to CatholicCare's Integrated Domestic and Family Violence Service (IDFVS), after she arrived at hospital one day with serious injuries. That hospital visit became a turning point - the point where urgent, ongoing support became unavoidable.

When IDFVS Case Worker Paris first met Gabby, she was living in a unit complex known locally as the "Ice Palace", where drug use and criminal activity were part of everyday life. Gabby described feeling trapped there. The violence in her relationship had become constant, and she was also relying on substances and self-harm simply to get through each day.

"Gabby was extremely reserved and reluctant to disclose details," Paris says, describing how she initially presented - shut down, cautious, and carrying a deep distrust of services. Over time, it became clear she had grown up with the belief that "seeking help was a weakness" and that involving police meant being labelled a "snitch."

Gabby didn't open up straightaway. In the beginning, it was just regular contact - shared walks, coffee in the community, brief check-ins. Nothing formal or pressured. Slowly, that consistency made space for trust.

> **"Building rapport and trust became the primary focus," Paris explains.**



It was through this steady, informal engagement that Gabby eventually began to talk about her childhood, parenting, and what she had been living through.

It also became clear Gabby had never fully understood her ADVO due to low literacy. Once the conditions were unpacked with her in plain language, she was able to recognise the repeated breaches and, in the words of Paris, "that the ongoing violent behaviour was unacceptable."

From there, support could shift into safety planning and education, always led by Gabby's pace and readiness.

Gabby didn't feel able to go into a police station or speak directly with police. That was respected. Instead, IDFVS worked alongside a Special Victims Liaison Officer, meeting her in a quiet café over several months until she felt comfortable enough to give formal statements.

Practical supports were put in place as well, including a personal safety device and a security audit of her property. While seemingly small things, they helped her feel a bit more in control.

The person using violence against Gabby was eventually charged and incarcerated. But the pattern of harm didn't stop there. She was later targeted by another man during a vulnerable period. He also used violence and control, causing serious injuries to her and her dog. Following repeated incidents, he was arrested and remains in custody.

After more than seven months of sustained advocacy, she was approved for a housing transfer and moved into a new home away from places tied to trauma and violence.

She was also supported to replace basic household items linked to past assaults - things she had been living with because there was no other option.

Slowly, some things began to change. Gabby reduced her substance use. Self-harm became less frequent. She started attending weekly counselling, something she once said she would "never" be able to do.

There is still more work ahead, including dental support and transition into CatholicCare's Clinical Care team for ongoing care.

What has changed for Gabby is not just safety on paper, but the steady return of control over ordinary parts of life - housing, health, routine, and the ability to make decisions without fear driving them.

"This case demonstrates the importance of trauma-informed practice, relationship building and collaboration with [other] services to achieve the best outcome for the client," Paris says. "This is a case that could not be rushed and one that we are extremely proud of."



THE FRIDAY BREE ACCEPTED HELP

It was late on a Friday in April when the call came through to CatholicCare's KEYS Young Parents Homelessness team.

Across the community, many people were beginning to wind down for the weekend ahead, thinking about kids' sport on Saturday morning, weekend getaways, catching up with family and friends, or simply enjoying two days of rest. But for Bree, a 16-year-old who was 17 weeks pregnant and sleeping in an abandoned building, that Friday was the day she decided to ask for help.

Bree was living in a vacant property with her 22-year-old partner. There was no reliable electricity, no hot water, and little sense of safety or stability.

For a long time, Bree and her partner had avoided services altogether. Previous experiences connected to child protection had left them deeply distrustful of support systems and wary of the people within them. By the time Bree contacted CatholicCare, they were used to handling things on their own.

"The information that came through was that the caller was young, pregnant, and living in an abandoned building," Case Worker Kristy recalls. "They'd been sleeping rough for a long time."

Once the call came in, CatholicCare staff moved quickly.

While Rachael began working with housing partners to find any available accommodation option before the weekend, Kristy stayed focused on Bree - talking through immediate safety concerns, organising transport, and trying to build trust over the phone with a young person who had very little reason to believe services would help her.

"In situations like this, transparency is really important," Kristy says. "We want young people to know we're here to support them, not frighten them away."

There was no guarantee accommodation would be available at such short notice. But within hours, staff identified an unexpected vacancy in one of CatholicCare's Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA) properties. Taxi vouchers were arranged and Bree and her partner were transported to the property that same afternoon.

Later, Bree sent a message to staff saying she'd finally been able to have a hot shower.

Kristy says what struck her most was how normal instability had become for the young couple. "They were very reserved and didn't expect that we'd be able to help them, certainly not immediately," she says. "Their expectations were incredibly low."

Even after moving into accommodation, Bree initially didn't mention to staff when the property lost hot water for several days. "She just said, 'Oh, we've got no hot water,' like it was normal," Kristy explains. "Because where they'd been living before, they didn't have electricity or hot water anyway. They were used to just dealing with it."

Since entering CatholicCare's support, Bree has gradually begun engaging with a range of services focused on housing stability, pregnancy support, and long-term wellbeing. Staff have continued working alongside the young couple as they navigate systems that once felt unsafe and inaccessible.

Now, only weeks after that first phone call, Bree and her partner have been accepted into a community housing property in Newcastle through Home in Place and are preparing to sign a lease.

For Kristy, the work now is less about crisis response and more about helping them settle into a very different stage of life.

"They've experienced a lot of trauma," she says. "Now it's about helping them settle into their new home, linking them with local supports, and helping them move forward with their lives."

What stayed with staff most was not just the urgency of Bree's situation, but how normal hardship had become for her. Going without hot water, sleeping in unsafe places, expecting no immediate help - these were things she had simply learned to live with.

The phone call Bree made that Friday afternoon did not solve everything overnight. But it marked the first time that she allowed people to step in and help - and for two young people and their baby, that changed what the next chapter could look like.



MADDIE GETS BACK ON THE DANCE FLOOR

For a whole year, Maddie sat at the edge of the dance class and watched. She knew every song. She had choreographed routines for this very group. But when her mum died in May 2025, dancing - the thing that had always brought her the most joy - was the first thing to go.

Then one day in June 2026, it came back.

"Suddenly, she just got up and danced," says Community Programs Team Leader Natasha. "It was one of those moments."

Maddie has been part of CatholicCare's community for 17 years, splitting her week between Clarke Road Day Program three days a week, and the Boonah Creative Arts Centre one day a week. At Clarke Road, her days are full - gym, cooking, dance, and regular visits to local nursing homes where she sings for residents and plays board games with them. "She brings so much happiness to everyone here," says Natasha. "And when Maddie is happy, we are all happy."

Maddie is one of eleven children. "They are a lovely family and all very close," says Natasha. She lives with her dad, and before her mum's death she would visit her regularly at her nursing home. When her mum died, the team at Clarke Road came up with the idea of Maddie visiting other nursing homes - a way for her to contribute to her community and find purpose through the thing she loves most. "I sang *Wicked* and *Anastasia* for the people there," Maddie says.

When her mum died, the dancing stopped too. Maddie kept coming to Clarke Road, kept turning up to her Zumba class at Waitara - but for a year, she watched instead of joining in. Her mental health struggled.

What brought her back was time, and the knowledge - deep and long-held - that dancing is where she belongs. The *Barbie* movie has a special place in her life - she once choreographed and taught one of its songs to the Clarke Road dance group, and she shares something with the film's star. "I have the same birthday as Margot Robbie," Maddie says, "and we were even born in the same year."

Maddie is about to turn 36, and at Clarke Road, that is not a quiet occasion. "We celebrate every day that week," Natasha says, "with multiple cakes and celebrations."

Natasha has watched the full arc of the past year - the loss, the long stretch of sitting on the sidelines, and then the afternoon in June when Maddie simply stood up and danced again. It was not a dramatic declaration. It was just Maddie, ready.

THE PRICE OF PROTECTING HER CHILDREN

By the time Ingrid found her way to CatholicCare, she had already survived the hardest part - leaving. What she hadn't escaped was the bill for it.

A single mother of two teenagers with high support needs, Ingrid had spent years building a case to keep her children safe from their father, a man whose abuse had defined much of her life. Family Connect and Support referred her to CatholicCare's financial counselling team. What they found was a record of everything it had cost her to keep her kids out of harm's way.

"Ingrid had accumulated over $10,000 in unpaid family law fees and $40,000 in a personal loan, to support her case to prevent her abusive ex-husband from having unsupervised access to the children," says Financial Counsellor James. Two debts, neither born of bad decisions, both born of trying to keep her children safe.

The cost wasn't only on paper. "The stress of the abuse and eventual separation led to a mental health episode and she had to leave her full-time job as a registered nurse," James says. A career built over years, gone almost overnight. In its place, she took on part-time work as a carer for an NDIS support service, a deliberate choice that gave her the flexibility to manage her own recovery while still being there for her children.

By the time Ingrid sat down across from James, the law firm and the personal loan provider were both actively pursuing her. "When Ingrid came to financial counselling she was being chased by the law firm and personal loan provider and was overwhelmed by her inability to make payments to the creditors," James says. There was no spare income to offer either of them, only a mounting sense that the system she'd turned to for protection was now the thing threatening to undo her.

Together, James and Ingrid built a money plan, mapping what came in against what went out. "The money plan showed she was able to meet her living expenses but not able to make repayments on her debts," James says.

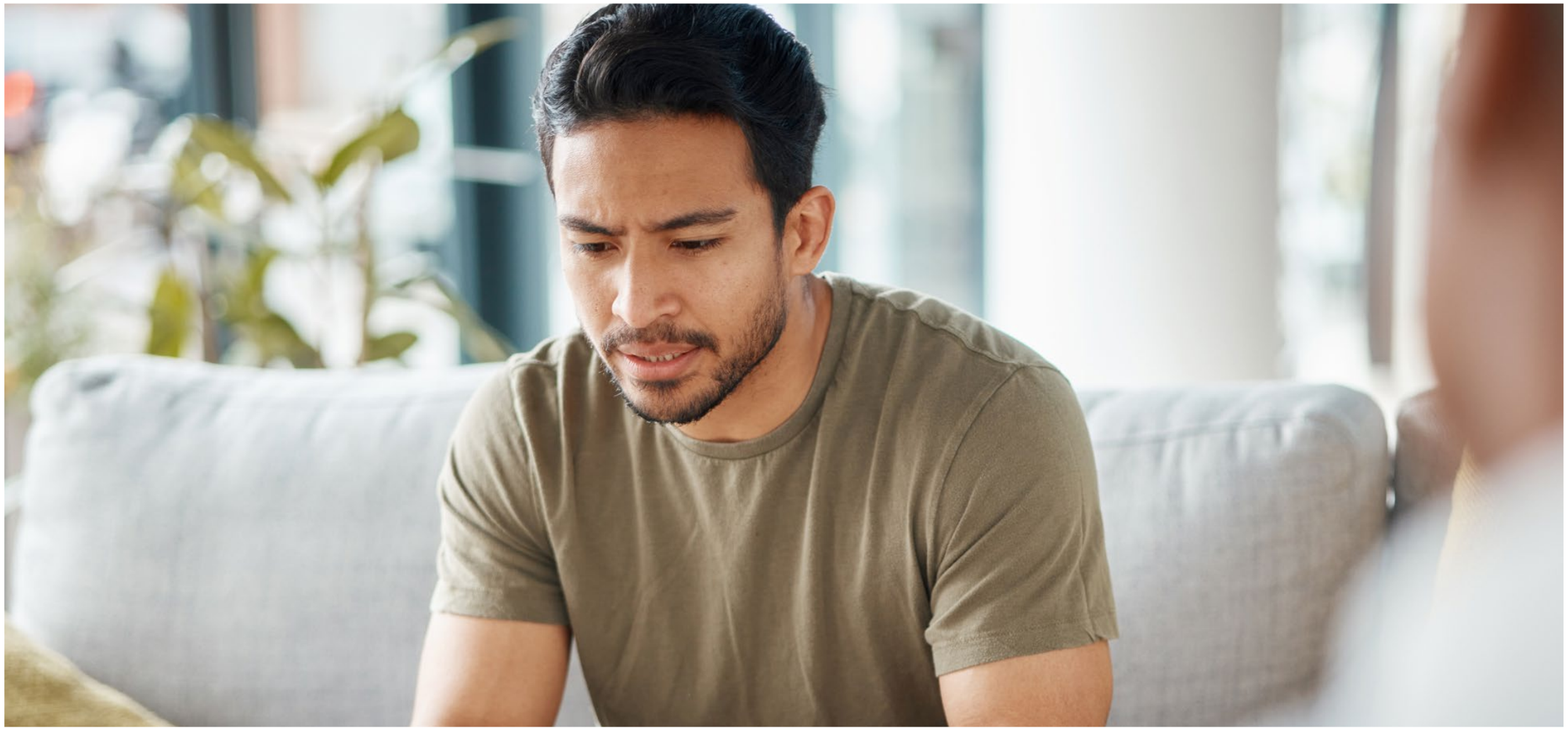
So, James didn't negotiate a smaller debt. He advocated against the debt itself. Pointing to the family violence, the legal costs incurred defending her children, and the mental health toll that followed, he was able to have both the legal debt and the personal loan debt waived on compassionate grounds, in full.

"Ingrid was able to significantly reduce her financial stress and focus on her children and her own mental health recovery," James says.

Fifty thousand dollars of debt didn't just disappear from a balance sheet. It disappeared from her evenings, her sleep, her conversations with her kids. In its place - extra shifts at work, taken by choice this time, and therapy sessions her children could finally access.

The debt waiver didn't erase what Ingrid had survived. It just stopped her from paying for it twice.





THE ASSESSMENT GAP & HOW WE ARE CLOSING IT

For many families, a diagnosis can feel like a door finally opening - an explanation that unlocks the right support, the right pathway, the right kind of help. But for too many people, that door remains out of reach, blocked by long waitlists, specialist shortages, and costs that simply aren't manageable.

It's a gap CatholicCare has been working to close.

Over the past year, the organisation has significantly expanded its assessment and support services for children and NDIS participants, driven not by strategy alone, but by what Shane and his team were hearing directly from the community.

"There's a significant demand for assessments, and they can be incredibly expensive and hard to access," Shane says. "We were seeing that need come through strongly - both from the community and within our own services."

Assessments for ADHD, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities are among the most sought after, and among the most difficult to obtain. Families can wait months and pay thousands of dollars, often at the very moment they are most in need of answers.

CatholicCare's response was practical and people focused. Rather than continuing to rely on a single specialist to meet that demand, the team partnered with experienced clinician Kat to train and upskill a cohort of provisional practitioners, building internal capacity to deliver assessments across a broader range of needs.

"We've moved from having one person providing assessments to building a team of three or four practitioners who can deliver this support," Shane explains. "That's a really exciting space for us, because it means we can reach more people, sooner."

Affordability has been just as central to the expansion as capacity. Aware that cost is one of the most significant barriers preventing families from accessing assessments, CatholicCare has structured its fees with accessibility in mind. Through partnerships with employment service providers, some participants are able to access assessments at no cost at all - funded through employment programs and removing financial barriers entirely.

> **"We've been very mindful about offering assessments at a rate that is accessible for the community," Shane says.**

"And through the employment providers, participants don't even have to pay themselves, which makes a real difference."

That difference is already bettering lives in tangible ways. One client had struggled with challenges consistent with ADHD their whole life but had never been able to get an assessment - the cost was too high and the process too difficult to navigate alone.

A referral through one of CatholicCare's employment service partners changed that. A CatholicCare practitioner based onsite took on the case, guiding the client through the entire process from start to finish. The assessment was completed far more quickly than it would have been elsewhere, and without any of the usual financial stress. For the first time, the client had a formal report in hand - a clear explanation of their experiences and what support they needed. It opened doors to programs and services they had never been able to access before. Something that had once felt completely out of reach had become a turning point.

The impact is being felt not only by external clients, but across CatholicCare's own programs. Teams throughout the organisation are increasingly drawing on the expanded assessment service, creating a stronger, more connected response to the needs of the children, young people, and families already in their care.

> **"We get a lot of internal referrals and enquiries from our different teams," Shane notes.**

"So this growth is helping us better support the people already connected with our services."

At its heart, the expansion is about making sure that a family's ability to get answers is not determined by what they can afford or where they live.

As Shane puts it, the goal is simple. No one should miss out on the support they need simply because it is too hard to access.

For the children, young people, and families now finding their way through those once-closed doors, it is a difference that will be felt for years to come.

SIOBHAN BUILDS A LIFE WORTH STAYING SOBER FOR

Yasmin, MST-CAN Clinical Supervisor, has worked with a lot of families trying to get free of methamphetamine. Most stumble somewhere along the way - a slip, a missed session, a step back before the next one forward. Siobhan didn't.

> **"She didn't relapse once across the whole nine months. That's quite unusual, actually," Yasmin says.**

Siobhan had arrived from Melbourne not long before, having fled a relationship marked by serious domestic violence. Methamphetamine had become the way she managed the fear, the exhaustion and the grief of starting again with three kids. When she was referred to CatholicCare's MST-CAN program, the Department of Communities and Justice was involved, and her children's day-to-day needs had slipped further than she wanted to admit.

"I think she really saw the impact that was having on her kids," Yasmin says. "And she made that choice to engage with us and to stop using."

What followed was nine months of reinforcement based treatment, a model that helps people build a life worth staying sober for. "It's about helping someone build a life that's more reinforcing than drug use," Yasmin explains - routines, community, connection, whatever that looks like for the person in front of her. Siobhan had three urinalysis tests a week, and every clean screen earned a voucher, redeemable for something that was hers alone. "We encouraged her to use the voucher for something just for her, like getting her nails done or a nice day out," Yasmin says.

Getting clean didn't undo what her children had learned to expect from her. Her son had built a whole repertoire for getting a reaction - yelling, throwing things, upending the house - because for a long time, that reaction, however harsh, was the only proof he had his mother's full attention. Siobhan learned to change how she responded, meeting the outbursts with calm instead of escalation.

"Once Siobhan understood the meaning behind the behaviour, she was able to build in one-on-one time - special time before bed, activities just for the two of them on weekends," Yasmin says. "She could sit with the big tantrums with so much more patience once she knew why they were happening." Within weeks, the meltdowns had eased.

Her daughter had a struggle of a different kind - school. Mainstream education didn't fit her, and no amount of pushing changed that. What changed it was Siobhan listening rather than insisting - hearing that the problem wasn't motivation but mismatch - and advocating for a place at an alternative school instead. There, she started building the kind of relationships with staff that gave her a reason to walk through the door. Attendance still isn't perfect, but it's heading in the right direction.

Some of the hardest work was learning to set boundaries with men. Siobhan still had an ongoing connection with her children's father, who was struggling with his own substance use. "She would almost think of him as the fourth child," Yasmin says. "We helped her see that pattern, work out what boundaries she needed, and plan exactly how and when to raise it with him."

That same skill showed up again, later, with someone new. He seemed like a good match - steady, no substance use, no trouble with the law. But something about the relationship felt off to Siobhan, and she said so before her clinician even had to raise it. "By that point, she had learnt to put her kids first," Yasmin says, and she ended the relationship.

Today, Siobhan still struggles to hold firm boundaries with her kids, and she carries guilt about the years she wasn't fully present, but nobody on her care team sees that as a failure.

"We're not here to make perfect parents," Yasmin says. The goal was a mother who could stay, see clearly, and keep choosing her children - and five months into sobriety, with a graph on the fridge that kept climbing, that's exactly what is happening.



LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN COMMUNITY

There's something special about Michael. Even after only a few minutes with him, you notice a radiant warmth in the way he connects with people and carries himself. "Michael is the heart of the community here," says Amanda, a team leader in CatholicCare's Supported Independent Living (SIL) program. "He looks out for everyone."

Two years ago, Michael was living a full and active life with his wife, Veronica, when he was diagnosed with dementia. The news changed the course of their lives, but it didn't change who Michael is.

Today, he lives in one of CatholicCare's Supported Independent Living homes in Toukley, where he has built strong connections with the people around him.

> **"We all look after each other here," Michael says. "It's a wonderful place to live."**

Sitting on Michael's kitchen table is a bowl of fresh capsicums. "I grew these myself," he says with unmistakable pride. Michael has learned skills in growing vegetables and preparing nourishing meals. "My wife, Veronica is the cook in my family," Michael says, smiling, "so living here I've had to learn a bit!" Amanda explains that dementia can sometimes affect Michael's memory around food preferences, so cooking and mealtimes often involve a bit of experimentation and flexibility. Still, Michael approaches it with humour and a willingness to keep trying new things.

Amanda smiles through tears as she describes the care that Michael puts into preparing cheese and meat platters to treat the people who support him. "We've had many chats over his beautifully prepared platters," Amanda says. "That's just who Michael is – he's always looking for ways to look after people."

Michael has now been living here for over a year, and during that time he has continued to build confidence and independence in everyday life.

Support workers assist Michael with shopping, cooking, cleaning and medications, while encouraging him to remain actively involved in the routines of the home. Together, they work through shopping lists, meal planning and household tasks, helping Michael maintain his independence and continue developing practical skills.

"He's learning new things all the time," Amanda says. "Cooking, cleaning, managing medications, he's really embraced it."

Michael says that learning new skills has given him confidence and purpose. "It's nice to be able to show someone something you've made or grown, and you feel kind of proud," he says.

Amanda says Michael has a natural way of building community.

"He opens the gate for people, offers to help staff carry things in and checks in on everyone," she says. "As soon as I pull up, he'll say, 'Hey boss, do you need a hand with anything?'"

Outside the home, Michael enjoys swimming at Shelly Beach and walking along the ocean. He also continues spending weekends with his wife, Veronica and their sons. "We catch up with each other all the time," Michael says. "I stay with them from Friday to Sunday."

Amanda says maintaining those close family connections while also building independence has been incredibly positive for Michael's wellbeing.

"Veronica told me she knows he's happy here because he starts packing early on Sundays ready to come back," Amanda says with a smile.

Over the past year, Michael has built a life that is active and connected. The support he receives is practical, but it has also created space for him to keep learning, contributing, and making decisions about his everyday life.

Michael brings joy to the people around him. Whether he's playing guitar and harmonica, sharing stories around the kitchen table, or simply knowing how to make someone smile, he has a way of making everyone's day better. Spend even a short amount of time with Michael and it's hard not to catch his joy - it's completely contagious.





DARCY FINDS HIS PLACE AT SCHOOL

For six-year-old Darcy, school used to feel like the hardest part of his day.

Darcy has been in foster care with CatholicCare since he was just five months old, and today he is thriving. He is safe, settled and deeply loved by the foster family who have raised him from infancy. But getting to this point took determination, advocacy, and a willingness to think outside the box.

"He is very settled. His family love him to bits, and he's very much just a part of their family," says his CatholicCare Case Manager, Cordelle.

Living with autism, ADHD, and a communication and language disorder, Darcy found the structure of a mainstream classroom overwhelming. Despite best efforts, the school wasn't able to meet his needs, and he was increasingly excluded from class.

> **"He really struggled with the structure of the school environment," Cordelle explains.**

"The school just couldn't meet his additional needs. They were sending him home, excluding him, and eventually they said they couldn't safely keep him at that school, which was really disappointing, for the carers and for Darcy."

For a while, Darcy had one-on-one support in the classroom, but even that wasn't enough to help him settle.

Rather than accept this as the end of the story, Darcy's carers and CatholicCare worked together to find a better path, enrolling him in a school designed specifically for children with autism. The transition involved sourcing funds and building a plan that would support him not just for now, but for the long-term.

CatholicCare also advocated for support through the NDIS. "The NDIS funding was really, really important for Darcy," Cordelle says. "His carers are going to be adopting him, and they need to make sure that when we're no longer in the picture, they have all the support they need."

The difference in Darcy since starting at a school built for children like him has been remarkable.

"He was getting a negative association with school," Cordelle says. "But now he's in an environment where they understand him, they understand what his additional needs are and how to manage those. And he's with other children who also have additional needs, so there's that understanding there too."

Beyond the classroom, Darcy is flourishing. "He's very outgoing, he's confident, he's active," Cordelle says. "He loves to climb and swim, and he gives everything his best shot and tries really hard." He is especially drawn to topics that capture his imagination - drones and steam trains among his current favourites - diving in with intense focus.

At home, Darcy shares a close bond with his foster brother who has become one of his favourite people in the world, and he is embraced by a wider extended family who know him simply as one of their own. "He does refer to them as mum and dad, and his brother," Cordelle says. "He's very much loved and accepted by the wider family too - grandmas, aunties, uncles, cousins."

Importantly, Darcy's relationship with his birth family has also been carefully nurtured. His carers have taken on the role of managing contact themselves, ensuring Darcy continues to know and feel connected to where he comes from, even as he builds his life with the family who are raising him. It's a relationship built on generosity and trust - his foster family making space for Darcy to hold both families in his heart, rather than choosing between them.

Darcy's carers are now in the process of adopting him, ensuring the stability and love he has found will carry him into adulthood. With NDIS supports firmly in place, Darcy has the foundation he needs to keep growing, learning, and being exactly who he is - steam trains, drones, and all.

It's a story about what's possible when the right support meets a foster family willing to go the extra mile for a child.

“Every day, staff and volunteers accompany people experiencing hardship, homelessness, disability, family breakdown, mental health challenges, social isolation and disadvantage. Through this work, they bring to life the Gospel imperative to walk alongside those most in need.”

Fr David Ranson

CAMILLA'S ART TRAVELS ACROSS AUSTRALIA

For artist Camilla, creating art is all about happiness, creativity and connection. Now, her artwork is bringing those same feelings to someone on the other side of the country.

In an exciting milestone for Boonah – CatholicCare's studio for artists with disability - Camilla recently became the first artist from the studio to make an online interstate sale. After discovering her work online, a buyer from Western Australia was so captivated by her art that they asked to see more pieces before selecting an artwork to purchase.

For Camilla, affectionately known as "Millie" by staff and friends, the news was exciting and unexpected.

A passionate creative, Camilla loves art, music, singing, dancing, jewellery and fashion. When she's not creating artwork at Boonah, she enjoys singing ABBA songs, participating in karaoke, spending time with friends and going out for meals.

Coming to Boonah gives Camilla the opportunity to combine two of her favourite things - making art and connecting with others.

"I like seeing my friends and doing art," she said.

Staff describe Camilla as a gentle and softly spoken artist whose creativity shines through every piece she produces. Known for her patience and attention to detail, she carefully builds her artworks using delicate watercolour techniques, gel pens and fine line illustrations.

> **"Millie works slowly and thoughtfully, taking great care with every artwork she creates," said Boonah Activity Leader Cadence.**

"She has a unique artistic style and isn't afraid to experiment with different techniques, from watercolour and pen work to collage and acrylic painting."

The artwork chosen by the Western Australian buyer featured one of Camilla's favourite subjects - flowers - and incorporated colourful collage elements that reflected her joyful approach to art.

Creating art is something Camilla finds both enjoyable and calming.

"What I enjoy most about making art is that it allows me to have fun and feel calm," she said.

One of the highlights for Camilla was writing a personalised note to accompany the artwork on its journey to Western Australia.

> **"Camilla was very excited and enjoyed writing a special message for the buyer."**

While the sale was an exciting achievement, it also highlighted the growing opportunities for Boonah artists to connect with audiences beyond their local community.

"It's amazing to think that someone on the other side of Australia connected with Camilla's artwork and wanted to see more," Cadence said. "It reinforces the importance of sharing our artists' work and achievements online. Their creativity and stories can reach people far beyond the studio."

The experience has encouraged the team to continue exploring new ways to showcase and celebrate the talents of Boonah artists.

When asked how she feels knowing her artwork is now hanging in another state, her answer is simple, "I am proud."

And she hopes it won't be the last time her artwork finds an audience somewhere new. "I want to show people everywhere."





A LIFE OF GIVING, A SEASON OF RECEIVING

Most of what Moya has done in her life, she has done for other people.

Eighteen months ago, the rhythm of her life changed completely. Her husband Harry - the man she met at nineteen, married in 1975, and shared a life with across two continents and four children - died suddenly. Harry had assisted with the domestic work in their household, so his death didn't just leave grief. It left a practical hole in her daily life, on top of an autoimmune condition that flares up without much warning.

> **"It's a big adjustment becoming one after sharing your life with someone," Moya says.**

Some of Moya's family members suggested she look into a Support at Home package, and that's how CatholicCare came into her life. Moya was one of the first to join the program after CatholicCare launched its Support at Home services this year. "We know that as we age, and whether we like it or not, our bodies deteriorate and performing daily tasks becomes increasingly more difficult, painful and burdensome," says Michael, CatholicCare's Clinical Care Manager.

What Moya needed, it turned out, was help with physical tasks, like cleaning, that her condition now makes risky or too demanding. Her support worker, also named Harry, comes weekly. He talks about his two kids sometimes. There's a human element to it that Moya notices and values.

For most of her adult life, Moya was the one organising help for others. She studied nursing as a young woman and went on to raise four children across two continents. For forty years, she was a member and eventually the President of the Catholic Women's League, contributing to domestic violence reform, social justice submissions to government and the slow, unglamorous work of advocacy. In 2016, that work was formally recognised - a Medal of the Order of Australia, and in the same year, a papal honour.

For Michael, there's something fitting about Moya now receiving support from the very institution she spent decades serving. "Although Moya is new to CatholicCare, Moya's story demonstrates how Support at Home can significantly improve an individual's quality of life, especially when support is provided by the Catholic Church, an institution Moya is a part of, which she has proudly served," he says.

Independence, for Moya, was never about doing everything herself. It was about remaining as the author of her own life - choosing where she lives, how her home runs, and what role her children play in it. "I have children who are caring and who I know I can call on," she says, "but I like that I don't need to rely on them in a carers capacity. I want to share in their family life, and I want my home to be a place where they can visit and stay, and not in the role as a carer."

Moya's faith underpins all of this. "When life has thrown curve balls, I am fortunate to have had my faith," Moya says. "That's not to say I wasn't angry or resentful at times. But we all have a path that we are journeying along through this life – some are shorter than others but it is what we contribute that matters. That's what I live by."

These days, Moya has joined the social committee at her residence. She still attends to the things she always attended to - community, connection, the people around her.

Moya's message to others is to accept the help that is available. "We all have limitations and we all need to acknowledge that at some point in our lives we will need help," Moya says.

Coming from a woman who spent decades making sure other people got the help they needed, it's advice she's now living out herself.

KU-RING-GAI OSHC IS A TRANSITION TO BE PROUD OF

When Michelle heard that the Out of School Hours Care service where she worked was changing providers - that CatholicCare would be taking over - her first reaction was not excitement.

"I experienced a mixture of worry, apprehension, and uncertainty," says the Mount Ku-ring-gai OSHC educator. "I had concerns about the change and the unknown aspects of the transition process."

Michelle had been part of Mount Ku-ring-gai Public School's OSHC community before CatholicCare arrived, and she wasn't sure what that change would mean for her, her colleagues, or the children in their care. Several months on, she is still there - and her experience of the transition could not have been more different from what she feared.

The groundwork for a smooth handover began months before CatholicCare opened the doors. Benjamin, brought in as the incoming Centre Coordinator, spent three months working across the organisation to make sure everything was in place - regulatory documentation, a vacation care program for families, a stocktake of what was needed, new displays on the walls. CatholicCare also visited the school before the transition, giving parents a chance to ask questions and put faces to names.

"The extra effort put into making connections with the school really helped ensure parents could ask questions about the transition," Benjamin says. "To summarise, it was relationships and compliance."

For Michelle, the turning point came at a training day at CatholicCare's Head Office in April.

"The training day at Head Office was warm, welcoming, and informative," she says. "We had the opportunity to meet key CatholicCare staff members, including the Executive Director, the General Manager and our incoming OSHC Coordinator. All the team members were approachable and willing to answer questions and address concerns openly. Their presentations provided valuable information about CatholicCare itself, its values, its background, and this helped build confidence and understanding. It put my mind to rest that everything was going to be okay."

Since then, the culture at the service has made an impression on Michelle.

> **"Our coordinator regularly encourages me to share opinions, ideas and asks for feedback," Michelle says.**

"This provides opportunities to share ideas and make a personal contribution to the service, along with the feeling of being valued as part of the team."

The children have settled in well too. "Parents have reported their children now want to come to OSHC more due to the activities offered," says Benjamin. The children have thrown themselves into chess and new outdoor games, and on one Friday morning the whole room erupted when a child set a personal record in a game of helicopter jump rope - 21 consecutive jumps!

Looking ahead, Benjamin has plans for a garden and sustainability program - connecting children with nature and eventually getting what they grow onto the menu.

For Michelle, the future looks nothing like the uncertainty she felt when she first heard CatholicCare was taking over. The worry has gone. What replaced it, she says, is straightforward "I feel totally supported."





TAILORING MEN'S BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FOR MEN WITH COGNITIVE & LEARNING CHALLENGES

By the time Jake commenced CatholicCare's *Every Family* program, the cumulative impact of family violence and ongoing mental health challenges had taken a significant toll. An active Apprehended Violence Order and a chronic mental health condition affected nearly every aspect of daily life, making it difficult to concentrate, process information and keep on top of everyday responsibilities.

Every Family is an adapted Men's Behaviour Change Program for men with cognitive impairment who have used violence or coercive control in relationships. It is designed for men who may struggle to engage with standard talk based programs, using structured one on one sessions and visual, hands-on tools. CatholicCare delivered a two year pilot of *Every Family* and has submitted an application for continued funding, with a decision expected soon. As Men & Families Counsellor Hayden explains "For some men who use violence, attending a mainstream group doesn't meet their learning needs. Through one on one sessions we can really tailor support to the individual."

Over time, the structure of the program began to have an effect on Jake's engagement. Progress was not linear, but staff noticed moments when Jake slowed down, reflected on what had happened in his relationships, and began thinking more clearly about what he wanted to do differently in the future.

This became particularly evident in session 13. Using therapy cards and small figurines, Jake was asked to represent what his life looked like when he first entered the program. He arranged the figures slowly, naming the key people in his life at that time, including his parents, and spoke about conflict and instability in the home.

When the focus shifted to the present, there was a noticeable change in how he spoke. Using a second set of cards, Jake described the person he was trying to become. He used words like kind, loving, respectful and spoke about rebuilding trust with his parents and wanting his behaviour to reflect those values.

To help him think about what would support that change, he worked with "value stones", creating a pathway for himself. Each stone represented something he believed would help him stay on track - supportive people, positive routines and personal reminders that encouraged him to slow down and make different choices.

In the room, what stood out was not a sudden shift, but his willingness to stay with the exercise and keep talking through it, even when it required him to sit with uncomfortable parts of his past and present.

As Men's Behaviour Change Case Manager Specialist Gayle explains:

> **"Working with men with cognitive impairment requires an approach that is flexible and creative to ensure accountability is clear, practical, and consistently applied in everyday situations."**

Jake's participation in *Every Family* showed how adjusting pace, format and communication style can change how a program is experienced. For him, the repetition of ideas, the physical tools, and the one on one structure made it possible to stay engaged long enough to reflect on his behaviour and consider what needed to change next.



CENTRING CHILDREN IN FAMILY DISPUTE RESOLUTION

When a family goes through separation, the conversations that follow - about where children will live, who they'll spend holidays with, how their days will be shaped - are almost always held by adults, about children, without children.

CatholicCare's Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) team has long believed that's not good enough.

''The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear - children have the right to have a say about what happens to them,'' says CatholicCare's FDR Specialist Lead, Melanie. ''Child inclusive practice exists because of that. It's about making sure kids know their voice matters.''

For several years, CatholicCare's FDR team has offered child inclusive practice by partnering with Uniting, whose specialist child consultants would meet with children from families in mediation - gently exploring how life felt for them at that time, and feeding key themes back to their parents. The results have been striking.

Agreements reached alongside child inclusive practice tend to be more robust, more responsive to each family's specific needs, and better for children's long-term wellbeing.

But this year, the team took a significant step forward.

All three of the team's permanent Family Dispute Resolution Practitioners undertook specialist training to become accredited child consultants themselves, bringing the entire process inhouse for the first time.

> **"It's a huge responsibility to meet with children," Melanie reflects.**

''And because it's an unregulated space in Australia, we wanted to make absolutely sure we were doing it properly.''

The training - one of only two programs of its kind available nationally, and deliberately chosen for being the most rigorous - covered two core components.

The first focused on how to meet with children - the activities and tools used to help children express how they're feeling, without ever placing them in a position where they feel responsible for outcomes or decisions. ''We don't ask kids to make choices,'' Melanie is careful to explain. ''We make observations and we take those observations back to their parents.”

The second component addressed how to deliver that information sensitively to parents who are often in conflict, and who may not be speaking to each other at all. ''We have to be so careful,'' she says. ''Parents can go home and ask their kids what they said, and that can make everything worse. So, the way we deliver this information has to be respectful, considered, and safe for children above everything else.''

Team members also undertook a supplementary self-paced course to further strengthen their practice.

Under the new model, the child consultant who met with the children will remain present throughout the entire mediation as a dedicated child advocate - reminding parents and the mediator of what they heard, and offering a grounding perspective when needed. What do you think the children would feel about this arrangement? Can you see a difficulty with this for them?

> **"We know that where mediation happens alongside child inclusive practice, outcomes are significantly better," says Melanie.**

''Kids cope better. The agreements are more durable because they actually reflect what that family, and especially those children, need.''

The team began offering the fully inhouse service in May. For families coming to CatholicCare for mediation, children's voices are now part of the process from the very beginning - no referrals, no handovers, just the same trusted practitioners alongside them for the whole journey.

A CIRCLE OF CARE SUPPORTING ELSIE & JULIAN AT HOME

At Harmony House, eight-year-old Elsie spends her afternoons drawing pictures of Peppa Pig, scooting around the backyard and turning the living room into a make believe world with her dolls and toy animals. Her older brother Julian, 12, is usually close by, cracking jokes and finding small ways to play tricks on the people supporting him. For both children, these simple, familiar moments of childhood sit against a much more complex journey to get here.

Just two years ago, the children's lives changed forever when their parents were tragically killed in an accident. Before they died, their mum and dad ensured the family home would remain in their children's care through a trust arrangement. Today, that home - now known as Harmony House - remains the centre of the siblings' lives, with CatholicCare building a highly specialised circle of therapeutic care and community support around them.

When CatholicCare was asked to take on the placement in August 2025, the urgency and complexity was clear from the start. Julian, 12, lives with cerebral palsy and severe epilepsy. As a toddler, he underwent major surgery after suffering more than 200 seizures a day. Even now, multiple seizures an hour can still be normal for him.

"His parents absolutely loved the kids and were taking amazing care of them," says ITC Area Manager Angie. "When the parents passed away in an accident, the children were moved into a care arrangement, but when further support was needed, CatholicCare stepped in."

For Angie and her team, keeping the children connected to their home, community and routines was critical. "Keeping them in the family home, surrounded by their memories and community, has been incredibly important," she says.

Caring for Julian involves around-the-clock support. Alongside his epilepsy, he requires PEG feeding, stoma care and constant monitoring, with staff trained to respond quickly if his condition changes.

"We had to pull together a team really quickly," Angie says. "It's very intensive care, but the team has been amazing. We've worked hard to keep the staff group small and consistent so the kids feel secure and supported."

But beyond the medical charts and appointments, Julian is still very much a 12-year-old boy.

At a recent neurologist appointment, he bit through his shaker bottle, spraying water over everyone in the room - including the specialist - before bursting into laughter.

"He thought it was hilarious," Angie says. "Seeing him still be playful and mischievous is really special."

While Julian's needs are significant, Angie says the team has been equally determined to make sure Elsie never gets lost in the background.

That focus is paying off. This year, Elsie transitioned into a mainstream supported learning environment and has made enormous progress, particularly with communication and independence.

"Her speech has improved drastically," Angie says. "She's starting to have a much bigger vocabulary now."

At home, Elsie's personality is everywhere. Her drawings cover the fridge, and she's constantly playing and imagining. "She's funny, creative and so caring with her brother," Angie says.

The support surrounding the children stretches far beyond CatholicCare staff. Family members remain closely involved, while a dedicated group of volunteers continue a tradition that began after the children lost their parents. Every month or so, volunteers gather at Harmony House for a "working bee", helping maintain the property before sitting down together for a barbecue with the children and their extended family. "It's honestly such a beautiful thing," Angie says. "These people give up their Saturdays just because they care about the kids."

For Angie, it's that combination of professional care, consistency and genuine connection that has helped the children settle and thrive.

"We've only had them for a relatively short time, but they're doing so well," she says. "The team has done an outstanding job balancing both children's needs and making sure they both feel safe, supported and cared for."



HOW ONE REFERRAL BECAME A LIFELINE

Every morning, Anu woke with a sense of dread. Before the day had even begun, she was already calculating how to keep the peace. She never knew what mood her husband would be in or what might trigger the next argument. Sometimes it was money. Sometimes it was how long she had been out of the house. Sometimes there was no obvious reason at all.

Arguments often stretched late into the night, fuelled by his heavy drinking and constant accusations that she was cheating. Anu describes hours of questioning about where she had been, what she had spent and who she had spoken to. Some nights, he would keep fighting until dawn, refusing to let her sleep.

Her daughters - 16-year-old Naraa and 12-year-old Sanai - had learned to live cautiously too. They avoided being alone with their stepfather whenever they could and spent much of their time trying not to draw attention to themselves inside the home.

Originally from Sri Lanka, Anu had moved to Australia with her daughters and new husband two years earlier with hopes of building a better future for her family. She was studying for a Masters degree in Marketing while working long hours as an Airbnb cleaner to help cover living expenses and university fees. To people around her, she appeared hardworking and determined. Few saw how isolated she had become.

Anu was referred to our Family Connect and Support program by a school psychologist concerned about the family's financial hardship, social isolation and the wellbeing of her youngest daughter, Sanai. At the time, there was no indication that domestic violence was occurring within the home.

But during Anu's first meeting with a Case Worker, the extent of what the family had been living through slowly emerged.

Anu disclosed that her husband had slapped her so hard her eardrum ruptured. She had sought medical attention at the time, but had been too afraid to say how the injury happened. About a month later, during another argument, he deliberately threw a mop at her, striking her on the head.

Alongside the physical violence was an ongoing pattern of control and humiliation. Anu described constant verbal abuse and belittling behaviour directed at both her and the girls. Her husband regularly threatened to send the children back to Sri Lanka and monitored Anu's movements, spending and daily routines.

What frightened her most, however, were her concerns for Naraa. Anu told the Case Worker she believed her husband was sexually grooming her eldest daughter. She described sexualised messages and inappropriate content he had shared, along with disturbing online material he viewed at home. Anu said some of the images resembled her daughter. Both girls later disclosed they no longer felt safe around him and intentionally avoided ever being alone with him.

A domestic violence risk assessment identified the family as being at high risk. From there, the focus became how to leave safely.

Over the following days, safety planning began while referrals were made to police, domestic violence services and immigration support. Anu was supported to attend the police station to apply for an AVO to protect herself and her daughters, while a referral was made to the Immigration Advice & Rights Centre (IARC) to explore having her husband removed from her visa. A referral was also made to WDVCAS to provide ongoing support through the AVO application process.

Finding emergency accommodation took time, which meant Anu had to continue living in the family home while preparing to leave without raising suspicion. During that period, she gathered passports and important documents, opened a bank account in her own name and packed belongings discreetly while trying to maintain normal routines for the girls.

Then came the day they left. Anu waited until her husband had gone to work before collecting Naraa and Sanai from school and travelling directly to refuge accommodation. The move happened quickly. There was little time to process what they were leaving behind - only relief that, for the first time in a long time, they were somewhere safe.

But even then, the danger had not fully passed. A few days later, it was discovered the family's location had been unknowingly tracked through a pair of AirPods one of the girls had brought from home. The refuge was compromised and the family had to relocate urgently once again.

Now life looks very different. Naraa and Sanai have remained at school and are receiving counselling. Anu continues to study for her Masters degree and is beginning to rebuild stability and independence for herself and her daughters.



CHANGING OUR APPROACH TO DEATH

It was a Wednesday afternoon at Tommy's Cafe in Gosford, and the chairs filled slowly. Baristas worked through coffee orders, sandwich platters sat out on the tables, and the familiar buzz of a Central Coast café settled over the room. Except this wasn't an ordinary afternoon out. This was a death cafe - and as people trickled in, you could feel it, a hesitancy, an unsureness, the particular kind of quiet that settles over a room when everyone is wondering whether they're allowed to say the thing they came to say.

It's an odd concept on paper. A cafe, for talking about death. But maybe it's only odd because we've made it odd - because somewhere along the way, death became the one certainty in every human life that we agreed not to mention. Sterilised, scheduled and spoken of in euphemism. CatholicCare's first Central Coast Crossroad Conversations event set out to do the opposite - to make space for the thing none of us can avoid, and to do it over coffee, in conversation, together.

Jackie and Ashleigh, two of CatholicCare's end-of-life doulas who facilitated the afternoon, opened with an Acknowledgement of Country and an explanation of what a doula actually does - a steady, human presence alongside someone as they walk toward death. Then they handed the floor over and asked people what had brought them there.

The first to speak were a couple who'd lived through six deaths in the past year alone - sisters, babies, nephews, gone through suicide, accident and stillbirth. They weren't looking for sympathy. They wanted, simply, a place where they could say all of that out loud without anyone flinching or changing the subject.

An older man came searching for something more existential. "I just want to know what is going to happen when I die," he said - not rhetorically, but as an actual, open question he was hoping the room might help him sit with. A Church of England minister was there. So were café regulars who'd seen the event advertised and wandered in, and staff from the Broken Bay Chancery. There were different beliefs and different reasons, but the same plain hunger to talk.

Jackie and Ashleigh put a few questions to the group - What does a good death mean to you? And, how has losing someone shaped the way you live?

There was a consensus that once you lose someone close to you, you don't go back to being who you were before. Loss doesn't fade so much as it relocates inside you. And in a room full of strangers from entirely different walks of life, there was a surprising solidarity. Two elderly people who'd never met before found themselves bonded over the same simple, aching wish - to be held in their mother's arms again when their own time comes.

It's hard to describe a sacredness that happens in a cafe, between people sipping coffee over sandwiches. But it was there.

This is the first of what will become a regular rhythm. CatholicCare now runs death cafes regularly - each one facilitated by doulas who, over the past 12 months, have trained to become Crossroad Companions, CatholicCare's newly launched end-of-life support program.

Crossroad Conversations is the public, communal side of that work - the open door, the coffee order, the permission to ask the question out loud. Crossroad Companions is what happens next, when someone needs more than a conversation in a cafe, a non-clinical, pastoral presence that walks alongside a person and their family from the moment of a terminal diagnosis onward.

A Crossroad Companion doesn't try to fix anything or make decisions on anyone's behalf. They sit with the fear, the hope, the unfinished business and the questions that don't have tidy answers - and they support the families and carers travelling that road too. You don't need to be Catholic, or religious at all, to be matched with one.

"Our newly launched Crossroad Companions program is now open and taking on clients," says Team Leader Vanessa. "When you reach out to us, I'll be the person you speak to. We'll have a conversation about what you need and make sure we find the right companion for you. We have a broad range of companions, so finding a good fit is something we take real care with."

If Wednesday at Tommy's Cafe showed anything, it's that people are not afraid of talking about death - they're afraid of doing it alone. Crossroad Companions exists so that no one has to.



FROM A CHRISTMAS LUNCH CONVERSATION TO A SAFE BIRTH

The annual Mary Mac's Christmas lunch is a celebration of community. Each year, hundreds of people gather to share a festive meal and experience the warmth and welcome that Mary Mac's Place is known for. Volunteers move between tables, Christmas decorations fill the room and people from different backgrounds sit side by side as they chat over lunch.

At one table during the lunch last year, CatholicCare's Aboriginal Community Engagement Manager Judith Murray sat opposite a young couple who introduced themselves as Alison and Chris. As they chatted over lunch, Judith couldn't help but notice that Alison was heavily pregnant.

"As usual, I was being a bit nosy," Judith laughs. "I was asking questions and talking to them about what was going on in their lives."

As they spoke, Judith learned that Alison and Chris were living in a tent in Woy Woy. Alison was just days away from giving birth. She and Chris were facing the prospect of welcoming their baby into the world without stable accommodation or basic baby supplies.

"I was just so concerned," Judith recalls. "Alison was heavily pregnant and only a couple of weeks away from giving birth. Chris was worried too.

> **"It was going to be their first baby, and they had no baby equipment and nowhere safe to stay."**

Judith knew the couple were familiar faces at Mary Mac's Place, where they had been accessing support and services. But hearing the details of their situation brought a renewed sense of urgency.

After speaking with Mary Mac's Place Manager Sally and learning more about the couple's circumstances, Judith immediately connected them with our homelessness team.



Led by CatholicCare's Practice Manager Bridget, a coordinated response was quickly mobilised across CatholicCare, Safelink Alliance, Housing and Coast Shelter, working in partnership to ensure Alison and Chris could enter parenthood safely and with dignity.

Despite Alison being 38 weeks pregnant, securing accommodation was not straightforward. CatholicCare staff and partner agencies spent days advocating on the family's behalf, determined to find a safe outcome before the baby arrived.

After extensive advocacy, Alison and Chris were moved into short-term accommodation, and Alison gave birth safely in hospital.

"It was a community effort," says Sally. "Everyone came together to make sure this family got the support they needed."

Sally says that stories like this are becoming all too common amid a surge in homelessness on the Central Coast. "Not long ago, we might have had four or five people who were homeless at any one time," she says. "Currently, we have 24."

The growing need is reflected across every aspect of Mary Mac's Place. Staff and volunteers now serve around 120 people each day and distribute between 200 and 250 food hampers every month. "Rent, the cost-of-living – it's a lot," Sally says.

Looking back, Judith still thinks about that conversation over Christmas lunch. "I was just being nosy," she laughs. But asking a few extra questions helped connect a young family with the support they needed at exactly the right time.

SAFETY, STABILITY & A NEW DAILY RHYTHM

For Freya and her three children, life at home had long been shaped by domestic and family violence that sat in the background of everyday life. The house never felt quite settled - there was a constant sense of being on alert, of having to anticipate what might happen next, and of carrying a level of tension that didn't switch off.

Alongside this, Freya was raising three children with autism and ADHD. Mornings were often the hardest point of the day - getting everyone up, dressed, fed, and out the door could take hours, and just as easily fall apart before school had even begun. Once the day started, Freya was managing sensory needs, behaviour support, school expectations, medication routines, and emotional changes that could shift quickly and without warning.

Even basic tasks like grocery shopping or returning phone calls had to be carefully worked around the children's needs and whatever was happening in the moment. Financial pressure added another layer, with little flexibility when something unexpected came up.

When CatholicCare's Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) team became involved, there were significant concerns regarding safety, limited financial resources, and Freya managing complex needs without consistent support.

"A coordinated approach was implemented," IFP Case Worker Holly explains. "We connected the family with a range of services including domestic violence supports, Start Safely, Leaving Violence Payment, Victim Services (including payments and counselling), and Legal Aid to assist with court processes."

Practical supports were also introduced to ease daily pressure. The family was linked with in-home care, financial counselling, and community services providing food and essential items during periods of need. Advocacy with the children's school led to private school fees being waived, reducing a significant ongoing financial burden.

The children's NDIS plans were also reviewed and updated, resulting in more appropriate supports that better reflected their needs at home and school. Over time, this helped bring more structure and predictability to daily routines.

> **"A good outcome of the intervention was the successful establishment of a 5 year ADVO with an area exclusion, which significantly improved safety for the family," Holly explains.**

As supports built around her, Freya was able to begin focusing more on day-to-day routines with her children. The household remained complex, but the intensity of constant crisis reduced. School attendance improved, routines became more consistent, and both Freya and the children engaged more steadily with supports.

By the end of the six-month intervention, the changes were most evident in the day-to-day. Mornings didn't always run smoothly, but they no longer threw the whole day off track. School became part of the routine rather than something that needed constant problem solving. Meals, routines, and appointments were more consistently maintained instead of breaking down when pressure increased.

With safety improved and supports in place, the case was successfully closed with DCJ. Freya demonstrated she was able to independently engage with supports, a significant shift from the level of day-to-day coordination required at the start of the intervention. Supports that were initially brought in to manage immediate pressure are now part of the family's daily rhythm and everyday life.



I KNOW NOW I CAN DO ANYTHING

High above the ground at TreeTops Adventure Park Central Coast, Christie (pictured) paused for a moment. 31-years-old and harnessed into the black course - one of the most challenging routes in the park - she looked down through the trees and took a breath. "I have a fear of heights," she said earlier that morning. "When I look down, everything is further than it looks." But she kept climbing.

Below her, a group of women watched on, cheering her forward. Some had met only hours earlier, but already there was a sense that this day was about far more than ropes and obstacles.

Each month, CatholicCare runs our *Empowerment Climb* for women who have experienced domestic and family violence. The day brings together survivors for connection, challenge, reflection and healing in the calm of the bushland at Wyong.

When the group first arrived, a van carrying women from The Glen Centre, a local drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility, pulled into the carpark. There was nervous laughter as everyone checked harnesses and looked up at the courses above them.

Some were excited. Some were terrified.

At the beginning of the day, the women gathered in a circle beneath the trees. It was National Reconciliation Week, and CatholicCare's Danielle Habib invited anyone who wished to offer an Acknowledgement of Country.

Bec spoke first. A proud Dunghutti woman from Kempsey, she shared her determination to stay strong for her children and for the generations coming after them. One by one, everyone introduced themselves. Together, the small group realised they were parents to 39 children. Danielle paused on that number, acknowledging the strength it takes to raise the next generation while carrying stories of hardship and survival.

For many of the women, there was something healing about simply being among the trees. "You really feel at one with the land," one participant reflected. "You feel light."

But healing also came through challenge. As Bec moved through the course, she found herself becoming overwhelmed with fear. "As I got further into the course, I was so scared and found myself in a heightened state," she said. "Normally when I am in that state, everything descends into chaos. But today, I was able to come down safely out of that heightened state, and everything was OK. I learned to trust safe fear."

For Christie, a mum of five children aged between five and sixteen, her journey to that treetop platform had been anything but easy. "Last year when I was living in Queensland, I was going through a rough patch," she shared. "My kids and I got kicked out of our place." She moved to New South Wales with her children, first staying with her sister before experiencing homelessness.

"My friends and family turned their back on me," she said. "We stayed in abandoned places just to put a roof over our heads."

Christie reached out to agency after agency for help.

> **"I decided I would prove everyone wrong."**

Eventually, she fell into addiction, and her children were removed from her care. "I didn't think I would ever get my kids back and lost hope," she said.

Then something changed. Christie applied for rehabilitation programs across the state. "I put my name down at nine or ten rehabs, and The Glen were the first to accept me." Now in recovery, she said opportunities like the *Empowerment Climb* were helping her rediscover confidence in herself and her future.

"I wanted to do the black course today," she said before beginning the climb. "If I can get through that, I can do anything."

As she moved through the obstacles suspended high among the trees, Christie became completely focused on the next step and the next platform.

"You forget everything in that moment because you are so focused on the course," she said.

> **"It's a good thing for your mental health. This is a beautiful place to let it all out."**

Back on the ground after the climb, the group gathered again beneath the canopy.

John, a former police officer who now volunteers regularly with CatholicCare, led the women through a meditation using a sound bowl. Laying on yoga mats and looking up through the branches, the group listened quietly as the bowl echoed through the bush alongside birdsong and rustling leaves. John had spent the day climbing alongside the participants, offering encouragement and reassurance on the courses.

During a closing debrief circle, Danielle asked the women how it had felt having a man in the group. Several women responded immediately that they could not have completed the day without his support. The conversation turned to trust, safety and the reminder that there are good men in the world too.

By the end of the afternoon, hugs were being exchanged like old friends saying goodbye. "It felt like a community," one participant, Nat, said. "I will remember this day for the rest of my life."

And Christie? She completed the black course. Stepping back onto solid ground, she was beaming - exhausted, emotional and proud. "I know now," she said, smiling, "I can do anything."





BUILDING FIRST NATIONS CONNECTIONS ON THE NORTHERN BEACHES

For many First Nations people living on Sydney's Northern Beaches, community wasn't something they could easily access.

While the region is home to a growing First Nations population, there were few opportunities for people to regularly gather with others who shared their culture, experiences and connection to Country. For some, that meant travelling significant distances to attend community events. For others, it meant missing out altogether.

Judith Murray, CatholicCare's Aboriginal Community Engagement Manager, had been hearing the same message for some time - people wanted a place to come together. Rather than making assumptions about what that should look like, Judith started by listening.

"We took the idea to community through yarning circles and asked people what they needed," Judith said. "The strongest message was that people wanted an opportunity to connect with other community members."

People spoke about wanting a local space where they could meet others, share information, talk about challenges and stay connected to community without leaving the Northern Beaches. The conversations led to the creation of CatholicCare's Northern Beaches First Nations Connection Service, which commenced in September 2025 at the Gawura Learning Centre at Brookvale TAFE.

A range of possibilities were explored in the yarning circles, including separate groups for men, women, young people and families. In the end, they chose something broader. "The decision was that we would open it up to everybody," Judith said.

Held every second Thursday, the gatherings provide a space for people to catch up, seek support, share information and connect with services when needed. Representatives from organisations such as NDIS and Close the Gap services have attended to answer questions and provide advice directly to community members.

But some of the most meaningful outcomes have come from the conversations that happen around the table.

During one gathering, one woman spoke about her long running efforts to have flagpoles installed at the Dalwood Spilstead Service site, formerly known as Dalwood Children's Home. The site holds particular significance for many First Nations families. Aboriginal children removed from their families during the Stolen Generations were once housed there, making it a place connected to loss, separation and intergenerational trauma.

For years, the community member had been advocating for the installation of flagpoles so that the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags could be flown together at the site. Despite her efforts, little progress had been made. When she shared her story at the Connection Service, someone from the local health sector happened to be in the room.

"Someone from Northern Sydney Local Health District was there that day and said, 'We can help with that'," Judith recalled.

The conversation led to action. The flagpoles were installed and an official flag raising ceremony was held, attended by around 80 community members and representatives from local organisations.

For those involved, the moment carried a significance that extended well beyond the flags themselves. At a place where Aboriginal children were once separated from their families and culture, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags now fly permanently and visibly, acknowledging both the site's history and the enduring presence of First Nations people in the community.

> **"Someone raised an issue that mattered to them, and because the right people were sitting together, something was able to happen," Judith shared.**

Since then, the group has continued to thrive. During National Reconciliation Week, participants hosted their first community event, inviting local organisations and community members to a morning tea and presentation exploring the history and significance of reconciliation.

Less than a year after it began, the Northern Beaches First Nations Connection Service is already proving the value of something many community members said was missing - a place to gather, to be heard and to build connections close to home.



DANIELA BECOMES THE PARENT SHE WANTED TO BE

The first thing that CAFS Case Worker Isabel noticed when she met Daniela was how carefully guarded she was. She was watchful and measured in a way that told Isabel this wasn't someone who trusted easily, or without reason.

"There was a clear sense of uncertainty and some mistrust," says Isabel. "She seemed unsure of what to expect, not just from me, but from the service."

Daniela had been referred to CatholicCare's Targeted Early Intervention program for parenting support and help with her young daughter's developmental delays.

She also disclosed a history of trauma, that she was not enjoying parenting, and that she had considered giving up care of her child altogether.

The work ahead would take twelve months. In those first sessions, Isabel focused on making the space feel safe. She explained her role, was transparent about mandatory reporting, and listened without pushing, knowing that Daniela had avoided services before because of exactly that fear. "Being upfront in a respectful way appeared to help her feel safe," Isabel says.

By the third visit, Daniela was a little more relaxed and a little more willing to stay in the conversation. Sessions took place at home and at the Artarmon Family Centre, always beginning with a check-in before anything more structured. Having Daniela's daughter present in most sessions meant Isabel could watch how they interacted, notice what Daniela was doing well as a parent, and name it back to her - because Daniela rarely saw it herself.

"She often struggled to see what she was doing well," Isabel says. "Taking the time to acknowledge and celebrate those moments became an important part of building her confidence."

Daniela's cultural background shaped how she understood discipline, what she expected of herself and her child, and how she responded when she felt judged.

Isabel approached this with deliberate curiosity. "It reinforced for me just how important it is to be patient, flexible, and culturally responsive," she says. "There is no single definition of good parenting, and a one size fits all approach simply doesn't work."

The shift came when Daniela recognised that her own childhood was part of what she was dealing with. To become the parent she wanted to be, she would need to look at that directly.

> **"She began to understand how deeply her past had shaped her - not only as a person, but in how she showed up as a mum," Isabel says.**

"So she made the brave decision to engage in trauma counselling."

Isabel also supported Daniela through a paediatric assessment for her daughter, who had limited vocabulary, difficulty forming sentences, frequent tantrums, and challenges with eye contact and emotional regulation. The assessment connected the family to targeted support, and over time the changes became visible - more words, more engagement in play, more smiles, and fewer, less intense outbursts.

One session stayed with Isabel. She had been showing Daniela how to respond to her daughter's emotional cues when Daniela quietly observed that watching Isabel do this had shown her what good emotional responsiveness looked like - something she hadn't seen modelled in her own childhood.

Twelve months after that first guarded meeting, Daniela told Isabel she was enjoying parenting.

"Her eyes lit up and she had the biggest smile - it was so genuine," Isabel says. "It wasn't just words. It was something she truly felt."

For Isabel, what stood out wasn't the moment itself but the work behind it - the painful parts of her past Daniela had chosen to examine, the vulnerability she had allowed herself and the consistency of showing up even when it felt hard. "She was the hero of her own story," Isabel says. "The real strength and change came from her."

Her daughter's speech and social development have progressed significantly. And Daniela, who at the start of all this had considered stepping away from parenting, now talks about her child with pride.

For Isabel, this is what early intervention looks like when it is given enough time and consistency. "It is not about quick fixes," she says. "It is about walking alongside families, building trusting relationships, and providing the right support at the right time." This, she adds, is a lovely story of resilience, love, and hope.





CONNECTIONS THAT HELP CHILDREN THRIVE AT WOY WOY ELC

On the very morning that Woy Woy ELC was being assessed for its National Quality rating, a grandmother arrived at the centre carrying a large paddleboard. At Woy Woy ELC, visits like these are a normal part of daily life, with parents and grandparents regularly coming in to share their hobbies, cultures and experiences with the children.

"She had just popped in with a massive paddleboard and wanted to do a bit of a talk with the children and a demonstration of one of her hobbies," Centre Director Kiara said. "It was completely unorganised, and she said, 'Do you mind if I have a moment with the class to talk about this?' The educators replied, 'Absolutely - come in, you can do it right now.'"

The visit happened during the centre's assessment and rating process, which later resulted in Woy Woy ELC achieving an "Exceeding" rating under the National Quality Standards.

For Kiara, this moment reflected the strong sense of belonging families feel at the service. "Families really do feel a sense of belonging here," she said. "They feel comfortable enough that they can just pop in and share things that are meaningful to them."

Recently, one family member came in to cook a traditional yoghurt cake recipe with the children, preparing recipe cards for each child to take home afterwards. Another family shared Spanish dancing and cultural traditions with the centre.

"Families love to come in and share their experiences, their cultures and their talents with the children," Kiara said.

That sense of connection also extends into the broader community, with educators creating experiences designed to support children's confidence and social development.

One upcoming excursion will see a small group of children visit a local café owned by one child's father. Kiara said educators believe the experience could help build the child's confidence by giving her an opportunity to share an important part of her life with her peers. "She's going to feel very proud to take her friends to her dad's café," Kiara said. "It will create a continuity between home and the centre and give her something meaningful to connect with her peers about."

Kiara said experiences like these can give children natural conversation starters and help strengthen friendships and communication skills. The same philosophy shapes the centre's *Bush Kindy* program, where children engage in child led outdoor learning experiences guided by their own curiosity and interests.

"It's an opportunity for children to engage with nature and appreciate the world around them," Kiara said.

Before each Bush Kindy session, children gather for an Acknowledgement of Country, recognising the Darkinjung land on which they play and learn.

"They'll hold each other's hands, pay their respects and talk about the land they're on," Kiara said.

The centre has two Bush Kindy locations, including a nearby reserve where children take short walks before exploring and playing in nature.

"It's the most amazing thing to see," Kiara said. "Children engage in carefree exploration and have the autonomy to explore the world around them at their own pace."

Educators have seen the benefits flow through many areas of children's development.

"It definitely sparks creativity and imagination," she said. "They come up with so many ideas and ask so many questions. It really builds inquiry based learning, which is so beneficial for their overall holistic development."

For Kiara, the centre's "Exceeding" rating reflects the relationships built every day between educators, children, families and the community.

"We want to build children's connection with the environment and with community," she said. "These are our strong beliefs that we really try to embrace at the centre. I truly believe that it's a wonderful centre, where children feel safe to be themselves," Kiara added. "The educators do incredible work every day, and we definitely deserved this rating."



OUR CENTRAL SUPPORTS

PEOPLE & CULTURE

Our team supported organisational performance through workforce planning, employee wellbeing, talent development and proactive HR business partnering. Working closely with leaders, we provided trusted advice on people matters, helping strengthen leadership capability, people management practices and alignment with organisational objectives. The launch of Fitness Passport expanded our employee wellbeing offering, while enhancements to people systems improved the employee experience and streamlined workforce processes.

A significant focus was placed on workforce capability and continuous learning. A new Learning & Development Strategy established a framework for identifying capability needs, supporting employee growth and strengthening organisational performance. The appointment of a dedicated Learning & Development Manager, together with new role specific training modules, enables more targeted development opportunities. Leadership capability was further enhanced through development programs, while increased visibility of internal opportunities supported retention and career progression.

Looking ahead, several initiatives introduced late in the reporting period will further strengthen our people and performance frameworks. The Learning Hub, our new Learning Management System, will provide a centralised platform for learning and professional development. A revised Performance Appraisal & Goal Setting Framework will create a more consistent approach to performance management and strengthen alignment between individual objectives and organisational goals. The reintroduction of centrally coordinated face-to-face training will complement online learning and support capability building across the organisation.

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT

We played a key role in strengthening CatholicCare's visibility, engagement capability and foundations for future growth. A major focus was modernising our digital and customer engagement ecosystem through significant enhancements to our Salesforce CRM including investment in improved lead capture and client journeys, implementation of the Raisely fundraising platform, and the successful launch of the new Spirit disability brand. These initiatives have positioned the organisation to better engage clients, supporters and community stakeholders while supporting long-term growth objectives.

The team continued to elevate CatholicCare's profile across the community through partnerships, stakeholder engagement and brand awareness initiatives. We supported the launch and promotion of both new and existing services, expanded our digital marketing capability, and delivered campaigns designed to increase awareness, enquiries and service uptake.

Internally, the team drove a renewed focus on staff engagement and leadership visibility. This included the introduction of new communication channels, town hall meetings, senior leadership content and initiatives designed to improve organisational connection and information sharing.

We also partnered closely with operational teams across the organisation to support service growth, community impact and innovation, while actively exploring opportunities to leverage emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, to improve effectiveness and future readiness.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Over the past six years CatholicCare Broken Bay has grown from $50m to $90m in annual revenue, alongside more complex client needs, compliance requirements and reform activity - putting real pressure on our systems.

Project Eve was commissioned to address this for our Permanency Support Program and Integrated Services teams, now more than 450 staff combined. Eve is designed to support better client care, stronger data and more efficient processes. The build progressed substantially through 2026 and has drawn a strongly positive response from leadership, management and frontline staff as features have been shown. Eve is on track to go live for Permanency Support Program late 2026, with the Integrated Services implementation to follow in 2027.

Other key ICT work this year included input into the NetSuite implementation for Finance and the Learning Management System implementation for People & Culture, alongside an upgrade to the Elker incident management system, ahead of more substantial improvements planned for 2027.

QUALITY, RISK, COMPLIANCE & SAFEGUARDING

We introduced a new Quality & Risk Governance model this year, giving us a clearer way to review compliance, practice quality and service outcomes by drawing on service data, trends and feedback.

Across the sector, safeguarding, care quality and client rights continue to come into sharper focus. We supported teams across children's services, aged care, disability support, out of home care and counselling to translate current reforms into everyday practice, staff learning, and policy and procedure updates.

We also expanded safeguarding learning for frontline staff and management across all programs, strengthening shared understanding of the Catholic Safeguarding Standards and the Diocese Safeguarding Charter, and reinforcing safe, respectful, person centred practice. We recognise concerns early, responding to risk appropriately, and working in culturally safe ways.

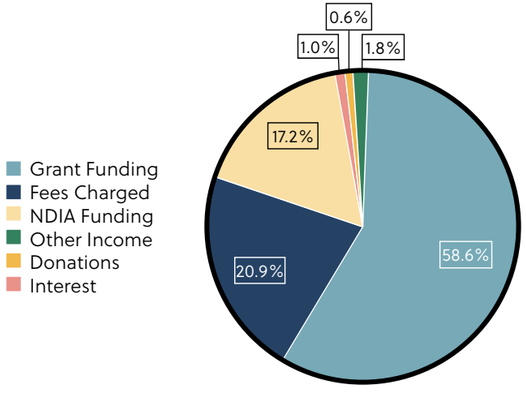
Our family services achieved advanced accreditation under the Australian Service Excellence Standards, reflecting the professionalism of our teams and their shared commitment to client rights, safety and positive outcomes.

Artwork credit: Camilla, Boonah artist

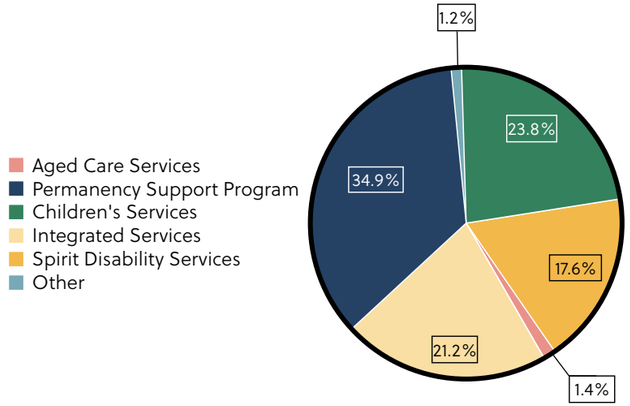
FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

- CatholicCare experienced another year of growth in 2025–26, with income increasing by $5.4 million, representing growth of 6%.
- We continued to receive strong support from State & Commonwealth Governments, alongside the generous contributions of non-government donors and supporters.
- Our Permanency Support Program (PSP) continued to expand in response to growing need, with additional care homes established across Northern Sydney and the Central Coast, while also undertaking several Intensive Case Management (ICM) arrangements during the year. We also responded to a request from DCJ to assume out of home care operations in Wagga Wagga.
- Our Family Supports programs, including domestic violence, homelessness, emergency relief and financial counselling services, benefited from ongoing State & Commonwealth Government funding to deliver these essential services to the community. Generous support from the Diocese and wider community also enabled 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. During the year, work also continued on the development of new refuges planned to open in late 2027.
- Our Children's Services operations continued to perform strongly in a challenging operating environment. During the year, we successfully commenced management of two additional NSW Government school services.
- Spirit Disability Services continued to provide day programs at Waitara and Brookvale while navigating ongoing challenges in the NDIS environment. Our existing Supported Independent Living (SIL) homes stabilised during 2026, and a new site was opened at Terrey Hills.
- A significant increase in workers compensation premiums, together with challenging financial results within the PSP program, contributed to a deficit for the year of $3 million. While this required the use of reserves during the current year, our reserve position remains strong and continues to support the long-term financial sustainability of our organisation and mission.
- Despite a financially challenging year, we continued to invest in capital assets, including renewing parts of our vehicle fleet and commencing a significant new IT project that will strengthen operations within PSP and our Family & Community Support programs.

INCOME BY SOURCE



INCOME BY PROGRAM



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (000's)

	2025/26	2024/25
REVENUE		
OPERATING REVENUE	87,680	83,256
OTHER INCOME	3,758	2,653
INTEREST INCOME	920	1,013
TOTAL REVENUE	**$92,358**	**$86,922**
EXPENSES		
STAFF AND AGENCY COSTS	77,788	66,846
PROGRAM AND ACTIVITY COSTS	3,926	4,025
OCCUPANCY COSTS	2,039	2,051
DEPRECIATION AND AMORTISATION	3,961	3,431
OTHER EXPENSES	7,674	7,741
INTEREST EXPENSES	250	283
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$95,388**	**$84,094**
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	**($3,030)**	**$2,828**

BALANCE SHEET (000's)

	2025/26	2024/25
TOTAL ASSETS	43,822	43,355
TOTAL LIABILITIES	30,238	26,740
NET ASSETS/TOTAL EQUITY	**$13,584**	**$16,615**

A full copy of our annual financial report is available on the ACNC website.

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