

EveryDay

CareSouth Magazine Issue Four

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new CEO**

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student
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ENTER



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Welcome

CEO's

“
I'm excited
about working
with you
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I have hit the ground running since taking on the role of CEO in December last year. My first few weeks (after learning how to successfully navigate the halls of the Berkeley office) were spent meeting staff and carers from the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. This was followed by a move away from the Coast to our regional and rural offices in Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Griffith and Deniliquin, including a side trip to the Deni ute muster!

A big focus for me has been meeting the wonderful staff and carers who provide services and support across our wide geographic footprint. Meeting our carers is high on my list of priorities and I have been fortunate enough to attend carer morning teas in Wagga Wagga, Nowra and Berkeley. One of the big projects I flagged early on when I started was the Carer Experience Project, a great opportunity for us to engage with our foster carers. We want to find out what makes a difference for our carers, and how we can support them in providing strong stable placements for young people in care.

To ensure we provide the best customer experience possible for our clients and carers, I have made several changes at the Executive and Senior Management level since taking the helm. These changes include the appointment of General Manager Greg Antcliff and Strategic Development Manager Jodie Hamblin. Greg has a background in child and family work and is committed to improving evidence-based outcomes for kids, young people and their families. Jodie is responsible for strategic project management and business development, with an initial focus on disability services.

Earlier in the year we had our first NDIS audit, a new initiative under the NDIS National Quality Standards to ensure agencies are demonstrating best practice. We passed with flying colours and it was really lovely to hear the auditor's feedback about how engaged, enthusiastic and committed our staff are to supporting people with a disability, and to upholding their rights in delivering quality services.

The key messages I am hearing consistently, from both internal and external stakeholders, since I started here at CareSouth is that first and foremost we are a child-focused organisation with passionate staff whose practices are trauma informed.

I was fortunate enough to share the wonderful work we do here at CareSouth with the wider community, including Families, Communities and Disability Services Minister Gareth Ward, and representatives from the agencies with whom we work, as host of the Business After Hours event in the Berkeley Community Hub.

It was fantastic to meet so many of our community supporters, including CEOs and representatives from our community partners, such as the IMB (who fund CareSouth's Health Hubs) and the Berkeley Sports Club (who fund the Homework Hub). It was humbling to see so many supporters at the event who are genuinely interested in finding out more about the incredibly important work we do here at CareSouth and how they can help.

Our vision and focus for the year ahead is based on three principles that will be used to prioritise workloads and make decisions as we move towards implementing a strategic business plan for the next 12 to 18 months. These key principles include:

1. providing more consistent services and ensuring we are much clearer about the way we work to provide a better understanding of our programs for our clients and carers.
2. simplifying and consolidating the work we do and how we prepare information for people that makes sense for them.
3. moving beyond compliance. The past few years have been all about meeting accreditation standards. I want us to begin thinking about the impact our work has on the people we support and put measures in place to help us understand how we are doing in terms of quality and outcomes.

I'm excited about working with you to bring about this vision for the future and look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas – staff, clients and carers – to deliver the best service possible.

Liz Forsyth
CareSouth CEO

Liz Forsyth

Dynamic New CEO Takes the Helm

One of the first things you notice about CareSouth CEO Liz Forsyth is that she is quick to laugh. Always willing to share a joke or funny anecdote (usually at her own expense), Liz grins widely when recounting the times she negotiated million dollar acquisitions for Northcott at “fancy pants” law offices in the city wearing Kmart ballet flats and a \$20 cardigan. It is a nod to her humility and ability to keep it real.

Add to that a no-nonsense, can-do attitude (she has built apps and websites as part of her operational management roles despite “not being taught that in social work school”) and she is, as CareSouth Chairman John Dorahy says, a “great fit for CareSouth”.

“Liz is passionate about our cause, has the skills to build on our services and is experienced at leading human service teams to get the best for our children and families,” said John.

Liz has squeezed a wealth of experience, in both field work and operational management, into a social work career spanning almost two decades.

After graduating from university with a social work degree, she started her working life at “the pointy end” of statutory child protection in Redfern. It was confronting and chaotic but she loved it. Her work in the sector included a stint as an inter-country social worker where she supported families in the child protection system separated across borders. She also worked as an adoption assessor, helping families adopt children from overseas, and supported adult inter-country adoptees looking for information and understanding about their birth families. She describes her work in the adoption space as “powerful, I was able to profoundly change people’s lives”.

It was a Sea Change to northern NSW in 2008, to be closer to her partner’s family when their son started kindergarten, which saw Liz move away from child protection into the disability sector.

“I thought I’d take a nice, part-time family support job in the country but it didn’t quite turn out as planned,” laughed Liz.

She did take on a family support role with Northcott, but the manager left soon after. Liz was asked to step up and was appointed regional manager.

For the next decade Liz worked across several operational

management roles for Northcott, including for Northcott Innovation and most recently General Manager - Supported Living, where she oversaw \$100 million worth of services and guided over 1000 staff through a “massive social reform and policy change” under the NDIS.

While CareSouth’s business portfolio and staffing numbers are smaller than that of her previous role, the CEO’s position was a step up in terms of the “breadth of responsibility”.

“I could do operational management,” said Liz. “But I actually wanted to work at a broader strategic level across a business. And this presented an opportunity where I could contribute what I’d learned and developed in disability but I could also go back to child and family work”.

Her cross-sector experience has given Liz a broad understanding of CareSouth’s core business – Early Intervention, Permanency Support and Disability – and allowed her to “bring together the two parts of my professional career which I’m equally passionate about”.

Liz is excited by the recent funding reforms under the Permanency Support Program, after working through similar changes in the disability sector and seeing the positive difference individualised funding makes to people’s lives.

“The changes in the child and family space, from block funding to the individualised nature of funding, is familiar to me,” said Liz. “It is a period of reform similar to disability under the NDIS and I’m hoping I can contribute and support the organisation to really be geared up to operate within a funding and contractual environment that is individualised.”

“We really need to think about how we build an appropriate response to the needs of each child we support. That requires us to not have a cookie-cutter approach. I have seen that work in disability and the impact that had, not only in terms of business transformation but also in terms of client outcomes.”

Liz is quick to point out that she “doesn’t have all the answers” and has always worked collaboratively with her teams. She has met staff from across all regions to discuss strategic planning and business development.

“My job is to create the environment where people can understand what they should be doing and why they should be doing it, and supporting them to do it in a way that’s



consistent with our purpose, our mission, our strategic direction and that minimises risk to everyone,” said Liz. “I don’t want to come in pretending I have answers and can solve the world’s problems for an organisation that’s clearly been running for a long time and doing really well. What I would like to do is continue the growth of the organisation.”

With a mischievous grin she reveals that her nickname in her former management role was ‘The Boot’.

“But not for the reasons you might think,” she said laughing. “During a team development day it was decided my personality type was that I was clear in my expectations so my team started calling me ‘The Boot’.”

She was given an old, weather-beaten boot as a leaving gift and it takes pride of place in her office, to which the door is always open.

“I’m not a power-hungry person so I think my approach (to managing people) might reflect that,” explained Liz. “My door is literally open, I didn’t want an office tucked away from everyone because no-one would come and say ‘hello’.

“I have been known to accost people in the corridor and say ‘don’t be afraid to come in and say hi’. I’m just a person, and I happen to have a role that has responsibilities that are pretty significant, but I can only do as well as I can with the help of all the people who work here and support me.”

Three things you might not know about Liz:

1 
She loves to sing, loudly.

2 
She’s secretly addicted to the reality TV bridal wear show ‘Say Yes to the Dress!’

3 
She has a 16-year-old son.



Goulburn has a new office and Community Hub

CareSouth recently celebrated the opening of its new Goulburn office, with staff, carers, CareSouth CEO Liz Forsyth and Goulburn Deputy Mayor Peter Walker attending the official event. The new office is a win for the Southern Region as it will allow CareSouth to run its successful Health Hub program in the new space.

The Health Hub model was rolled out in our Berkeley Community Hub three years ago. The community-based program, funded by the IMB Community Foundation for the next three years, is designed to make it easier for vulnerable families to access a range of health checks, including free dental, optical and hearing checks, as well as speech and occupational therapy assessments, in the one location.

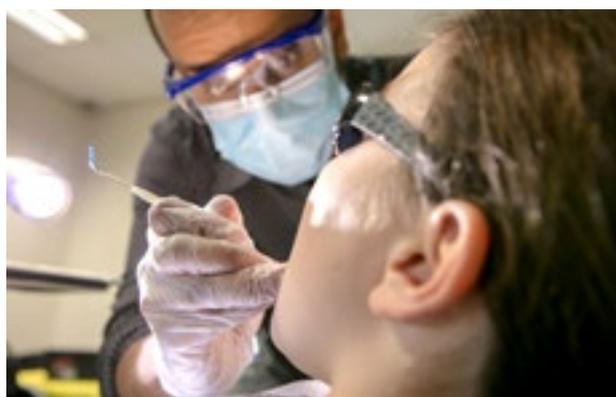
CareSouth's Community Hub Development officer Natalie Nicastrì designed the Health Hub model after recognising that accessing health care is difficult for families with

multiple children. Natalie decided to set up a one-stop shop so families could have all their free health checks, without worrying about the high cost of health care, or getting to and from multiple appointments with different providers.

"The Health Hubs make it easier for families to access all the services they need in the one spot," said Natalie. "Since the Health Hubs started, every session has been booked out. So there is obviously a need out there. The feedback from young people and their families who have attended the Health Hubs has been overwhelmingly positive, and in some cases life-changing."

Natalie cites the case of a young boy who had significant hearing loss that went undetected until he had an audiology check at a Health Hub session.

"His mother was quite shocked when he was diagnosed with significant hearing loss, but relieved that it explained some of his problems with school and could now be addressed," said Natalie. "The audiologist found that Australian Hearing, the largest provider of government-funded hearing services, was



within walking distance and could do a more thorough assessment. So he walked with the family to the office and arranged for the child to have follow-up treatment.

“Another example of how the Health Hub can change lives involved an 11-year-old boy who saw a dentist for the first time. He had been living with the pain of broken teeth for three years and needed nine teeth removed. His mother hesitated to get help because she was embarrassed. But the young person received the help he needed, free of charge, through CareSouth’s Health Hub.”

Due to the high demand for services Natalie has taken the Health Hub on the road, visiting CareSouth’s Shoalhaven and Goulburn offices. There are now plans to take the Health Hub to our Western Region in the near future.

“It is even harder to access health appointments for multiple children in remote communities where families might have to travel hundreds of kilometres,” said Natalie. “A one-stop shop Health Hub will mean that those in remote areas have access to all their health needs in one place, in one day.”



CareSouth foster carers Jody and Stan Mikolajski, who are based in Deniliquin, know how difficult it can be to juggle multiple appointments, particularly in remote locations. Asked if they would give any advice to prospective carers, Stan and Jody both talk about the importance of ensuring children have all their required health checks.

“If I had one piece of advice to a new carer it’s this: as soon as a child comes into your care go to the GP, dentist and optometrist and cross those off the list early,” said Stan. “This way you have a baseline so if you notice any changes in their health you can address it straight away.”

“It really pays to be proactive,” said Stan. “Taking care of health checks early on will make sure kids get all they need to thrive.”

The new office space in Goulburn and plans for new headquarters in Nowra will ensure CareSouth’s Health Hubs continue to meet the needs of the communities in which we work.

A \$5000 grant from the Kofi Foundation, via the government’s Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, will also mean CareSouth can hold Health Hubs in the Western Region.

A one-stop shop Health Hub will mean that those in remote areas have access to all their health needs in one place, in one day.





Photo credit: Deniliquin Pastoral Times.

Deniliquin carers lighting up kids' lives

“If they show me the spark, I’m going to give them the fire”.

It is a mantra that CareSouth foster carers Jody and Stan have lived by since they began their journey as carers a decade ago.

The Deniliquin couple have opened their home to more than 50 vulnerable young people over the past 10 years. They have covered the whole gamut of the Permanency Support Program – from long-term care and restoration to emergency, respite and short-term care.

Asked why they became foster carers Jody replied: “You could call it selfish on my part. I couldn’t have kids but we really wanted them, so foster care seemed like the next logical step. Our neighbours at the time were foster carers and they inspired us.”

“We were keeping up with the Jones’,” joked Stan.

But jokes aside it is the couple who are now inspiring the Deniliquin community as passionate advocates for vulnerable young people. They are often told how amazing they are for creating a loving family for so many kids in need. But the modest pair insist that there is nothing “special or superhuman about us”.

Their first experience as carers was supporting two sibling groups of three children, ranging in age from 15 months to seven. Soon after this they were asked to care for a baby. Nurturing seven children was a baptism by fire but they were up to the challenge.

“It was the Brady Bunch, plus one,” laughed Stan. “It helped us realise that we have a limit,” said Jody. The couple are now caring for five children, aged three to thirteen, from two sibling groups.

“We consider ourselves normal, everyday people, doing something we thoroughly enjoy,” said Stan. “Somebody has to support these children so it might as well be me or Jody. We genuinely feel that this has been our purpose in life for the past decade.”





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It's not a walk in the park, but it's worth every step

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“Becoming foster carers is a decision we certainly don't regret,” said Jody. “There's been a few heartaches along the way, where they go home or they have to go elsewhere. But you have to be realistic, not every child fits and we might not be able to give every child what they need. That's heartbreaking

but you do more harm to the child if you're not honest with yourself.”

Stan is quick to point out that the wins far outweigh the difficulties.

“The journey has had its ups and downs,” admits Stan. “But it's fair to say that the ups definitely outnumber the downs. The joy that we encounter when we see the children in our care develop and flourish is the best reward we could possibly ask for.

“We really try to identify, as much as possible, what each individual child really needs. They all need love and attention, they all need school. But you have to sit back and observe the children, listen more than talk, to find out what sparks their interest.”

The couple take turns telling a heartwarming story about a teenage boy who joined their family as a 14-year-old. The teen couldn't read or write and wouldn't speak. A year before coming into their care, he had been diagnosed with low functioning autism.

“He didn't know his alphabet and his short-term memory

was non-existent,” said Stan.

But when Jody and Stan discovered that the boy, an avid gamer, was desperate to learn to read so he could follow the instructions on his gaming console, they had their spark and set about lighting the fire.

“When he left us he was a 19-year-old who had completed Year 11 and 12 and was reading chapter books,” said Jody proudly. “Watching that light switch go on is what makes it worth it, you just have to keep encouraging them and find that interest.”

“For me that's the reason why I do this, the reward of seeing really positive outcomes,” said Stan. “You have to be prepared to go in to bat for these kids. This young fella, he was allowed to slip through the cracks right up until Year 8. But we finally found a wonderful school for him and a wonderful teacher and he progressed in leaps and bounds.”

Asked if they would give any advice to prospective carers, Stan and Jody both talk about the importance of cultivating positive relationships with birth families.

“Our philosophy is if we are able to have a relationship with the birth family, it certainly makes things easier when it comes to family contact,” said Stan. “Kids are quite perceptive, so a good relationship between carers and birth family can often be the difference when it comes to having a close, stable relationship with the children in our care.

“Several years back we had a sibling group of three young girls, aged six to eight. They were with us for four-and-a-half years before going back to family. We continue to have a relationship with their family to this day.”

The couple also stress that communicating with caseworkers is key to ensuring children and young people get all their needs met.

“We are very fortunate to be associated with CareSouth in Deniliquin,” said Stan. “They have been very supportive of us as carers, and have given us all the necessary tools and resources to be able to provide what these children need.”

Jody is honest when she points out that being a foster carer is not always easy.

“It's not a walk in the park,” said Jody. “But it's worth every step.”

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Shoalhaven Carers

Bond Over Baby



We all know that it takes a village to raise a child. But when you are a foster carer it is even more important to have a support network of people around you who can step up and lend a hand when needed.

Jan and her husband Ken have been short-term foster carers with CareSouth for the past five years. The Sussex Inlet couple are currently caring for a six-month-old baby girl who, like most children in care, had difficulty settling and forming attachments.

Jan and Ken were asked to care for the newborn after they had booked Grand Prix tickets for their son's 40th birthday in Melbourne. As the celebration drew closer Jan was reluctant to disrupt the baby's routine and newly formed attachment. So she insisted her husband attend, while she stayed home with the baby.

"The tickets were all paid for and then we got bubby," said Jan. "I decided not to go because I didn't want to disturb everything we had worked so hard to put in place. I kept thinking 'my son will understand'."

When the couple's caseworker Peter Johnston heard Jan was willing to miss her son's milestone birthday, so as not to disrupt the infant's routine, he and the Carer Recruitment team swung into action.

"Peter insisted that I go to Melbourne," said Jan. "He said to me 'No Jan, you can't miss this, it's too important, you need to take that time and spend it with your family, we don't want you to burn out'. And Peter was right."

"My son was so happy. He said to me afterwards that he would have really missed me if I wasn't there."

The Shoalhaven team reached out to Sanctuary Point respite carers Kirsty and Ian and introduced them to Jan and Ken and the baby girl.

"Peter is the most wonderful caseworker in the world. He and the Carer Recruitment team made all the plans to make sure bubby had the best care possible," said Jan.

The two couples then set about establishing a month-long transition where they would visit each other's houses in the lead-up to overnight respite care so Jan and her husband could fly to Melbourne.

"Everyone needs time out every now and then," said Shoalhaven Permanency Support Program Manager Chris Stubbs. "And in this case it was really important that Jan and Ken were able to focus on their own family. That's why it's so essential to have respite carers like Kirsty and Ian, who are willing to step up."

Kirsty and Ian, who became carers with CareSouth 18 months ago after moving from another foster carer agency in the ACT, said the transition to becoming respite carers for the baby girl "was the easiest one we have ever done".

"Babies don't come with a manual, but this little one did," said Kirsty. "Jan and Ken were so open and honest with her routine. They had a list of all the things they did, from the songs they sing to her at bathtime, to the way they wrapped her at bedtime. And because the baby knew they were her cues for sleeptime she settled in really well."

"We did a lot of meet and greets before the baby stayed over. It was a really smooth adjustment because we were able to establish a relationship over a period of weeks in the lead-up to having her overnight. Usually it doesn't happen like that, you get a phone call saying 'we need a carer quick'."

Kirsty and Ian continue to be respite carers for the six-month-old baby.

"We like having another little person in the house," said Kirsty. "And our 11-year-old daughter is an only child so she loves having another child around."

Jan said the respite care arrangement has been beneficial for everyone involved.

"The little one had a lovely few days with Kirsty and Ian and their daughter," said Jan. "She's clearly in love with them and gets so excited to see them. It worked out perfectly."

Photo credit: Josh Brightman

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come with a manual,
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CLINICAL SERVICES

Talking to Kids About What's in the News

The recent media coverage of the Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse and George Pell's guilty verdict has put the sexual abuse and grooming of children at the forefront of many conversations. But we may not be talking to the people who need to hear it most, according to CareSouth psychologist Christine Gregory. While sexual abuse and grooming is a challenging topic for parents, carers and staff to discuss with the children and young people we support, it is one that we need to have to help keep them safe.

Christine believes the media saturation of the Pell case gives adults an opportunity to open the lines of communication with young people about grooming, sexual abuse and protective factors that will help keep them safe.

"So many things in the news are devastating and as caregivers we try so hard to protect our kids from it," said Christine. "But sometimes when we try to protect them from it, we're avoiding it. If we're brave enough to have that conversation with them, it's a teachable moment where we can talk to young people, in an age-appropriate way, about how to protect themselves from grooming and sexual abuse."

Christine admits it can be difficult to educate young people about the dangers of grooming because it's so insidious and children and adults may be unaware it's occurring, particularly when it's online.

She points out that the difference between a positive relationship with an adult and a grooming relationship with an adult is the secrecy. Child sexual abusers are opportunistic and choose their victims based on whether they think they can get away with it. Often they do this by offering rewards that must be kept a secret.

“Grooming always starts out small,” said Christine. “It occurs when somebody is particularly nice to you, they pay extra attention to you, they say complimentary things to you but ask you to keep it a secret or do something in return that makes you feel uncomfortable. It can go on for years before any sexual abuse occurs and it’s often people that families know and trust, or someone online who we don’t know is an adult.

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We know that having a positive adult role model in your life is a major protective factor against grooming and sexual abuse.

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“We need to let kids know that if an adult tells you that this needs to be kept a secret, that’s the alarm bell moment,” said Christine. “We need to make sure that our kids know that having a friendship with an adult should never be kept a secret, and having friendships online should never be a secret.”

While it may be a challenging conversation to have with children and young people, it is a way to empower them by giving them the tools and a voice to keep themselves safe. These tools include ensuring children use the correct terms when discussing private parts and understand that their body is theirs and it is not okay for others to look at, touch or feel it.

“It’s really important to be age-appropriate,” said Christine. “For younger children you can talk about not allowing anyone to touch your private parts, you can explain that grooming behaviour might be buying you lollies but asking you to do something to get the lollies like touching private parts.

“With teenagers I would be pointing out that if someone shows you naked pictures and you haven’t asked for it that’s not okay, that’s considered a sexual assault.”

Findings from the Royal Commission into Institutionalised Sexual Abuse found children who have suffered trauma are over-represented as victims. But there are protective factors that can help to keep our kids safe and one of the biggest protective factors is providing children with a network of safe people around them.

“We know that having a positive adult role model in your life is a major protective factor against grooming and sexual abuse,” said Christine.

“Helping children to identify who those adults in their life could be is really important. Ask a child ‘who are the safe people for you?’ And if they make any disclosures always believe them and thank them for being brave and talking to you about it.

“If grooming or sexual abuse has occurred, young people need to believe that there is someone in their life that they can share that information with. And that’s where the responses of that person are so important.

“We need to let the child know that it is never their fault and we believe them. We need to have a measured reaction, stay calm and listen and ask questions, but not put words in their mouths.”

The Office of the Children’s Guardian has developed a protective behaviours program based on a series of books. The SAFE series books help children identify the parts of their body that are private, help them understand their feelings and encourage them to think about five people who they trust to help them if they feel scared, sad or upset.

For more information visit: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/safe-series. Young people can also call the Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800**,



Zen and the Art of a Calmer M



Around one in seven primary school-aged children and one in four high school-aged young people experience a mental health condition, according to research from Headspace and Youth Beyond Blue.

It is a sobering statistic, but one that continues to grow due to the prevalence of smartphones and social media and an inability to slow down and switch off. So how do we help our young people tune out from the 24/7 technology cycle and tune in to their thoughts and feelings so they can better manage them?

CareSouth psychologist Christine Gregory believes mindfulness and yoga may help vulnerable young people improve their emotional regulation by reducing their arousal levels.

“We all lead incredibly busy lives and children and young people especially find it difficult to switch off. Mindfulness teaches us how to slow down, focus on our breathing and listen to what is happening around us,” said Christine.

“When your arousal levels are high you have to train your brain to be able to bring them down. Mindfulness is a learned skill that can help us do that. In the same way we build physical muscle through practice, like playing a sport, we also build mental muscle through repetition of a task.”

Wollongong-based yoga teacher Kathy Gaudiosi agrees. She has been teaching yoga and mindfulness for more than a decade and for the past five years has been running sessions in schools. She recently led a

you add yoga to the mix you not only get the benefits of mindfulness and meditation but you get the increased strength, flexibility, coordination and balance. Through the practice of yoga, children and teens can feel more at ease with who they are.”

Yoga, mindfulness and meditation are increasingly being incorporated into school curriculums and Kathy believes it is worth asking teachers what programs they use, if any, to facilitate mindfulness in the classroom.

“Relaxation and breathing is something everyone can benefit from and many websites have guided meditation sessions,” said Kathy.

One of the most popular, and free, apps for mindfulness and meditation is Smiling Mind, used in hundreds of schools across the country. And there is evidence to back up its effectiveness.

In 2016 independent researchers evaluated the Smiling Mind Education Program and found it improved mental health, reduced classroom disruptions and benefitted at-risk students. Students’ sleep, wellbeing, ability to manage emotions, concentration and school behaviour significantly improved. Disruptive behaviour in the classroom and bullying decreased.

A 2014 study involving adolescents with psychological disorders found that mindfulness-based interventions were linked to reductions in problem behaviour, impulsivity, substance abuse, anxiety, anger and emotional distress. Clinicians also noted improvements in sleep and perceived quality of life. Adolescent participants reported that they were better able to recognise and label feelings and felt less anxious and reactive to difficult thoughts and feelings.

Based on this evidence there is a push by Smiling Mind to have mindfulness included in the national education curriculum by 2020.

Mind

yoga and mindfulness class for children and young people at CareSouth’s Berkeley office while carers enjoyed a morning tea.



“Yoga is a fantastic tool for children to learn how to regulate their emotions,” said Kathy. “The mindful practices incorporated into yoga, through the attention to breathing and sensing how your body feels during shivasana, (the relaxation at the end of a session) allows children to truly switch off and just be – something they desperately need in our modern world.

“Yoga works really well for kids who struggle to relax because the poses are active, they are moving their bodies, while also being mindful and focusing on their breathing.

“Alone, a mindfulness practice can increase a student’s ability to pay attention and regulate emotions. When

If you would like to try meditation at home find the free Smiling Mind app at:
www.smilingmind.com.au/

Here is a link to Kathy’s Top Five Tips for supporting children and teens with anxiety:
www.kinkouyoga.com/new-blog/2019/1/21/anxiety-amp-stress-in-children-amp-teens-and-what-yoga-and-mindfulness-can-do-to-help

For fun and easy kids yoga poses try:
www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga



NDIS

Kids in the Kitchen



Cooking is a skill for life, one which CareSouth believes all young people should learn on their path to independence.

In a bid to build capacity in our young people preparing to live independently, staff from CareSouth's Permanency Support and Disabilities programs joined forces to provide two eight-week cooking courses to a dozen students in our Permanency Support and Drop-In-Support programs.

"Between the ages of 15 and 18 years it is vital that our young people are equipped with skills in cooking, budgeting, hygiene and health," said CareSouth caseworker Sandy O'Halloran, who facilitated the cooking lessons with help from NDIS support coordinator Aimee Skeels and volunteers from the University of Wollongong.

The program was designed to teach young people basic food preparation and cooking skills. Young people learned how to plan and shop for a three-course meal on a budget, before testing new recipes in CareSouth's Berkeley kitchen each week. Recipes included old favourites like spaghetti bolognese, fried rice and pavlova.

A group of international students from the UOW's Community Volunteer Program helped develop and broaden the culinary skills of young people by showing them how to prepare and cook a range of recipes from across the globe. The chicken biryani was a huge hit, while the international students loved the pavlova the young people prepared for them.

"I got to learn how to cook lots of different foods, and also learned different ways of cooking," said one 16-year-old participant. "I liked meeting new people too."



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Our caseworkers are always looking for ways to build the confidence and knowledge of the young people we work with.
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Those in the program also learned event planning skills, through cooking for and serving more than 60 people at CareSouth’s monthly Meet and Eat community dinners.

The cooking program is just one of many structured workshops, outside of CareSouth’s core business, helping the young people we support gain vital skills for independence.

“Our caseworkers are always looking for ways to build the confidence and knowledge of the young people we work with to help them on their path to independence,” said Sandy.

The practical skills learned in the kitchen will also improve students’ access to vocational and work readiness programs while at school and future training and employment in the hospitality industry once they finish school.

Aimee said it is essential for young people, especially those with a disability, to develop and build skills that lead to independence.

“Our aim is to give young people the education and tools to overcome barriers and achieve their goals,” said Aimee.

“Programs like the cooking course not only build skills for young people with a disability but also link them in to community. Fostering positive, collaborative relationships with a wide support network in the community is part of CareSouth’s holistic approach to wellbeing for our NDIS clients”.



SYSS

A safe space for support

Naomi* had just started her final, and most important, year of school when she found herself homeless.

The 17-year-old was being subjected to verbal and physical abuse in the family home and her psychologist, who was treating her for bipolar and anxiety disorder, deemed it unsafe for her to remain in the house. Fortunately Naomi was referred to CareSouth's Shoalhaven Youth Support Services (SYSS) short-term Residential Program, which offers up to eight weeks accommodation for 16-24-year-olds. Naomi was linked in with SYSS caseworker Ash McHugh who helped Naomi identify and meet her needs and goals. Naomi then moved into the SYSS transitional property so she had a permanent place to stay while she focused on her studies. She continued to receive outreach support from SYSS for 12 months.

"Naomi was in Year 12 and about to begin her HSC at a local private school," said Ash. "It was a stressful time and she needed a safe place to stay while studying and continuing to get the support she needed for the complex issues she faced."

Ash and Naomi continued to work closely with the Community Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Naomi's school and private psychologist and specialised domestic violence support services to ensure that Naomi had all the specialised support she needed to gain her HSC.

"Naomi took every opportunity thrown her way," said Ash. "She maintained her school attendance and showed up to all her medical appointments. She joined extracurricular activities at SYSS, such as yoga and nutrition workshops, so she was focused and knew how to feed her mind and body. Naomi grew in confidence at SYSS and built some really strong, positive relationships with both staff and other residents."

Naomi graduated from high school last year. She is continuing her studies on her pathway to university and has found stable, private rental accommodation. She talked to CareSouth about her experience with SYSS and how it helped her overcome one of the most difficult times in her young life.

SYSS gave you a safe space to live so you could continue studying. How did this change your life?

SYSS drastically changed my life in many ways. Learning how to take care of myself and stay focused on the things that are really important to me was a big part of it but reminding myself that SYSS was a completely safe environment was an adjustment. I only had to look after myself which was something I wasn't used to.

The HSC is hard enough without the added pressure of not having somewhere to live.

How important is it to have a space to call your own?

Everybody needs a space to call their own. A space you can go to think, to not be bothered, or to completely forget about the world. Not having somewhere to live is the biggest weight on your chest. It follows you everywhere. It never leaves your mind.

You have been diagnosed with bipolar and anxiety, but you have overcome these challenges to complete your HSC. What would you say to other students struggling with mental health issues?

During my exam period my caseworker Ash found me crying because of how stressed I was. I was working two eight-hour shifts on the weekends as well as going to school full-time. She sat down with me and assured me that school is not the be-all-and-end-all and that stressing myself out wouldn't help anything. The only thing you can do is your absolute best, which is why my only goal for my HSC exam was to beat my trial results, which were quite low to begin with. Find a personal goal, not a goal that was set by someone else.

Did your wellbeing improve, knowing that you had someone like Ash to support you?

Ash was a constant support for me during my HSC year.

The biggest thing Ash did for me was be my voice when I couldn't use mine. If I was struggling and didn't want to say anything, Ash helped me figure it out.

Did yoga and good nutrition help you stay focused during the difficult days?

Good nutrition was definitely a struggle to afford, but CareSouth had a cooking class every Wednesday that taught us how to make quick and easy meals on a budget. I loved making stir fry or butter chicken for dinner, they were three ingredient meals that lasted me for two dinners and a lunch or two. I found exercise was my biggest release. Exercising in the afternoon was my way of working off all my emotions of the day. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, a friend and I would go to the gym (it was \$8 for a casual visit) and we'd work out together. Working out helped clear my head, I could run on a treadmill and think about the day then afterwards have a long cleansing shower and feel rejuvenated.

Where would you be now if it wasn't for SYSS? Would you have completed the HSC?

If it wasn't for CareSouth there is absolutely no way I would have completed Year 12, let alone taken the HSC exam. I would have moved in with my grandma six hours south in a small rural town. If I had moved away from all of my friends and the home town I'd lived in for 14 years, I never would have worked up the courage to go to school and make new friends, especially in the last year of school.

What are your goals now that you have finished the HSC?

After the HSC I wanted to take some time to get some practical things organised. I got my driver's licence, saved up for a car, picked up more shifts at work and moved out of CareSouth into a private rental. Because of the added stress during Year 12 my ATAR was nowhere near what it needed to be. But UOW College has a STEP (Special Tertiary Entrance Program) program for students who suffered disadvantages. I hope to complete a Bachelor of Nursing and possibly one day a Doctorate of Medicine.

*not her real name.

The startling facts about Youth Homelessness:

42%

OF AUSTRALIA'S HOMELESS POPULATION IS UNDER 25 YEARS OLD

Couch Surfing

IS THE FIRST AND MOST COMMON WAY YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

Over 65%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE THAT SYSS SUPPORTS HAVE A DIAGNOSED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE

34%

OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE SYSS SUPPORTS IDENTIFY AS ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

70%

LEFT HOME TO ESCAPE FAMILY VIOLENCE, CHILD ABUSE OR FAMILY BREAKDOWN

SYSS SUPPORTS **OVER 173**

YOUNG PEOPLE A YEAR FROM THE SHOALHAVEN LGA

28,000

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS AGED BETWEEN 12-25 ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS EVERY NIGHT



CHAMPIONS

Chance meeting changes lives

A chance meeting at a Nowra fast food restaurant, which led to a young boy joining CareSouth's Champions Program, has significantly changed the lives of two South Coast families.

Jimmy* and his grandmother, who has been his primary carer since he was five, recently moved to the South Coast for a fresh start after a difficult few years.

The pair have a close, loving relationship but Jimmy's grandmother did not know many people in the area and needed some extra support raising an active 11-year-old. An impromptu chat with a Champions caseworker led to Jimmy's grandmother getting a referral for Jimmy to join the early intervention program.

Around the same time Craig, a graphic artist, applied to be a part of Champions, which links a young person with a positive role model who will potentially change their life for the better.

Craig and his partner Carl had shifted from the Hawkesbury to a farm just outside of Milton in 2010. The change came after Carl had a stroke, only weeks before the well-travelled couple were due to set off on a trek along the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal.

The couple settled into the quiet farm life with horses, cattle and their trusty sidekick - a kelpie called Nova. Retirement in recent years left Craig with some extra

time on his hands, so he decided to give back by mentoring a young person.

Ulladulla Champions caseworker Maggie Jeffery needed a mentor for Jimmy and thought Craig might make a good match.

"Champions staff work closely with vulnerable young people, their families and potential carers when they link a child with a mentor so we can find the right match," said Maggie. "The assessment and matching process is meticulous. So when the relationship works it is a huge win for everyone involved. Sometimes it can take a while to see the positive results. But in this case the match worked well."

Craig became a volunteer with Champions because he wanted to make a difference to a vulnerable child's life. But he had no idea of the difference it would make to his own life and that of his partner.

"It has been wonderful to watch the relationship between Craig and Jimmy develop. Jimmy's grandmother and Carl have also developed a real bond," said Maggie.

"In summer Craig will take Jimmy to the beach while grandma takes Carl to the swimming pool and then they will all have dinner together. Having a child in





the house has brought a happy youthfulness to the farm for Craig and Carl. For all of them to find each other has been amazing.

“Craig loves to send stories of their exploits to us via email, and signs them off jokingly with ‘Jimmy & Craig’s Awesome Adventures Inc’, of which Craig is the Chairman of the Board and President and Jimmy is the CEO and Junior Vice President of Fun.”

Craig said when he and Jimmy spend time together “sometimes we do things old school”.

“We make milkshakes using my Mother’s Sunbeam Mixmaster, which is as old as I am,” laughed Craig. “I have a large home cinema and on Jimmy’s first visit to the farm I wanted to show him my favourite movie, Steven Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind. I first saw it with my Dad when I was 12, almost the same age as Jimmy is now. When I told Jimmy it was from 1977 he asked if it was in black and white!”

“On our third meeting we played Scrabble into the early hours. I saw a side to Jimmy that really impressed me. He is an intelligent young man with a keen mind.”

Jimmy also showed an interest in archery after trying it at a kid’s camp. Craig offered to take him to a range in Nowra for an Introduction to Archery certificate course and the pair participated in the class together.

“I love this sport because we can both be quiet and focused,” said Craig. “It is a great time out for both of us and we really love it.”

Craig said the Champions program allowed him to be a positive male role model. He provides boundaries, structure and will guide Jimmy on “that path to being the well-rounded respectable young man I know he can be”.

Craig has also learned some valuable life lessons and says Jimmy reminds him to live in the moment and allows him to “just be a big kid again”.

“When Jimmy is having a great time, his happiness is infectious,” said Craig. “He certainly brightens up the space around me that’s for sure, and when we are out I see other people noticing this when they smile too”.

“Jimmy and I have bonded together really well. We have had a lot of fun and have started to build trust and respect for each other in such a short time. And I have his grandmother’s full support, as well as her feedback.”

*Not his real name.



Fun in the Sun with Squadron Volunteers

What do you do when you have hundreds of hungry hordes to feed? Call in the army and navy of course! Each year CareSouth's Permanency Support Program teams host a day of fun in the sun for children, carers and caseworkers at Jamberoo Action Park.

This year more than 200 people came from as far south as Canberra and Goulburn, as well as the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, for the action-packed event. They not only enjoyed the park's rides but shared a relaxed barbecue lunch with CareSouth staff, including newly-appointed CEO Liz Forsyth.

Feeding hundreds of people is no easy feat but the crew from HMAS Albatross 723 Squadron made it look like a walk in the park. Squadron members, part of Albatross' helicopter training school for army and navy, cooked more than 20kg of sausages, stopping only for a quick dip in the wave pool after manning the hotplates for more than three hours.

Shoalhaven PSP Team Leader Marc Mergel said activities like the Jamberoo fun day are an important part of the support CareSouth caseworkers offer to the children, young people and carers with whom they work.

"The fun day is designed to give carers and young people



Volunteers

a chance to catch up with old friends and meet new ones,” said Marc. “And one of the busiest aspects of the day is the lunchtime rush. So it was great to have the squadron members on board to cook the barbecue.”

The squadron have been major supporters of CareSouth over the past 12 months.

The partnership began when Shoalhaven Regional Manager Michael Mason and PSP Shoalhaven manager Chris Stubbs talked to squadron members about the ways CareSouth supports vulnerable children and families.

A key aspect of the presentation was the huge difference positive role models and mentors can make in boosting the confidence and wellbeing of at-risk young people. The crew were quick to jump on board and help out.

“The squadron have always had a nominated charity and were looking for a local organisation to support,” said Michael. “When they heard what we do they selected CareSouth and since then we have explored ways we can work together.

“They have monthly barbecues and auction a VIP parking spot at the base to raise money for our support programs. They also host Bunnings barbecues and have raised thousands of dollars to help homeless youth in Shoalhaven’s SYSS program and at-risk youth in our Champions program, as well as volunteering for our community events like NAIDOC.”

As part of the partnership Michael and Chris also reached out to squadron members to help at-risk youth get their driver’s licence by taking them for driving lessons.

“Giving at-risk youth a sense of social connectedness, through mentoring, increases wellbeing and confidence.”



Photo credit: Jamberoo Recreation Park.

“Many of the young people we work with have no way of gaining the 120 hours needed for their licence. Driving lessons are too expensive and they often can’t rely on family members, so it’s difficult for them to get their required log book hours,” said Michael.

“The driver training has strengthened our partnership with the squadron and members not only support at-risk youth with practical driving skills, which means they then have more employment opportunities, but also help broaden their social networks.

“Giving at-risk youth a sense of social connectedness, through mentoring, increases wellbeing and confidence. The crew held an open day where a group of our clients visited the base, had a tour and got to fly the helicopter simulators.”



Shopping for school shoes is rarely an enjoyable experience. So when 18 children from CareSouth's Permanency Support Program were gifted beautifully packaged, quality leather school shoes from Bulli business ELOISE and HENRY it was hard to know who was more excited, the carers or the kids.

Antonia Irwin is the creative brains behind the ELOISE and HENRY brand (named after her school-age children) and generously chose CareSouth as a partner when she discovered the organisation shares the same values and vision.

"Our global vision is to support disadvantaged children to overcome adversity and flourish," said Antonia. "So we started locally and partnered with CareSouth to provide school shoes for children who might not get the joy of receiving beautifully packaged, quality shoes.

"We understand this is a small gesture, but hopefully from little things big things will grow and one day we'll be able to do more for those children who have simply had a start in life that no child should endure."

Antonia came up with the idea for the ELOISE and HENRY collection when shopping with her daughter for her first pair of school shoes.

Little Feet Carry

Big Dreams



“The excitement of buying our first pair of school shoes quickly turned to dismay when we saw the ugly lumps of poorly crafted leather on display,” said Antonia.

“As a mum, nothing on the shelves offered value for money and for Eloise, everything was either heavy, ugly or hot or often all three. Eloise refused to wear any of them and I refused to buy into an industry that overcharged for poor quality leather and outdated style.”



ms

“
We understand this
is a small gesture,
but hopefully from
little things big
things will grow...
”

So, in typical parent-as-problem-solver fashion, she took matters into her own hands and created the kinds of shoes she remembered wearing as a child. Antonia began sourcing craftspeople who could bring her vision to life – functional, comfortable, beautiful shoes with a vintage feel that were made to last using quality leather and sustainable practices.

“Our school shoes hark back to a time when they were made to last and promised parents value for money,” said Antonia. “Our shoes last the distance and are designed to withstand kicking balls and getting scraped on concrete.”

“Growing up in New Zealand I knew of a shoe crafting workshop still run by the same family. They put quality and children’s feet before marketing and agreed to work with us to produce a shoe that was light, good value for money and stylish.”

After 12 months of product development - learning about leather, sourcing buckles from Italy and discovering how unsustainable the fashion industry can be - ELOISE and HENRY launched their first collection in 2018. And the shoes flew off the shelf.

Sustainability and social inclusion are as important to Antonia’s business as comfort and functionality.

“I want Eloise and Henry to be proud of the company I have named after them,” said Antonia. “And part of that is ensuring that the environment doesn’t suffer for our profits. We achieve extremely low wastage (our insoles are the cut-offs from other styles) and a low carbon footprint.”

“We are also passionate about social inclusion. Our motto is ‘Supporting Little Feet Carry Big Dreams’ and we want to be able to do that for children from all walks of life, which is why we have partnered with CareSouth.”

For more information about ELOISE and HENRY shoes visit www.eloiseandhenry.com

Berkeley Sports boss passionate about education

Mark Wheeler, a former Roosters forward and now head of Berkeley Sports Club, knows the value of a good education. As a teenager Mark was footy-mad and devoted most of his time to training and playing the game he loved.

However Mark's parents made sure he balanced his passion for sport with academic achievement. Almost three decades on from his six-year stint as a professional footballer - a second rower for the Eastern Suburbs team - Mark is grateful that he made education a priority.

"Never underestimate the value of a good education," said the General Manager of Berkeley Sports Club. "It is a vehicle for social change and I have seen first-hand how a good education, along with a mentor who supports at-risk young people, can change lives for the better.

"We often have Roosters players come here to the club to have training and education days with young kids from the community and one of the things they always emphasise is 'love your footy but do your best at school as well.'"

Mark continues to be a passionate advocate for education as a long-term supporter of CareSouth's Homework Hub, a program which provides academic support for vulnerable students from CareSouth's Permanency Support and Early Intervention programs.

The club has donated more than \$40,000 to fund CareSouth's Homework Hub since it began four years ago. Funding from Berkeley Sports is used to provide healthy snacks, books, resources and training for volunteers to support and mentor up to 20 students each week.

CareSouth staff develop social change programs like the Homework Hub to create positive futures for the children and young people we work with. As well as academic help, the Homework Hub also builds capacity and self-esteem amongst students by building positive mentoring relationships with University of Wollongong and community volunteers who support students each week.

"As a not-for-profit community organisation we rely on the support of donors like Berkeley Sports Club and community volunteers to run activities, outside of our core business, that will enhance the lives of vulnerable children," said Homework Hub coordinator Danielle Woolage.

"We are extremely grateful for the support Berkeley Sports Club has given the Homework Hub over the years."

Windang School Teachers Dig Deep to Help Students

Windang Public School teacher Elena Dimoski has been teaching for more than a decade and knows the importance of creating a welcoming, inclusive and creative environment to engage students in their school community.

This is why Mrs Dimoski and her colleagues decided to donate hundreds of dollars' worth of books, stationery and learning resources to CareSouth's Homework Hub, in the hope this would help vulnerable students start the school year off on the right foot.



"Each year the teachers would do a Secret Santa and buy each other a small gift but last year we decided to instead collect the money that we would normally spend on each other and buy resources for a charity," said Mrs Dimoski.

"I came across the Homework Hub online and it sounded like a great idea to help vulnerable students. We wanted to contribute in some way to help them engage in school."

CareSouth Homework Hub coordinator Danielle Woolage said school engagement refers to a student's enthusiasm, curiosity, involvement and excitement in learning.

"When children and young people are engaged, they learn faster and more comprehensively, and can more easily cope with setbacks and obstacles," said Danielle.

Unfortunately children and young people in the child protection system are more likely to be disengaged at school and have poorer education outcomes compared to their peers.

A study by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) found children and young people in care achieved lower scores in literacy and numeracy tests compared to their peers, and can be up to three years behind in their learning.

CareSouth's Homework Hub was set up four years ago to address this learning gap by pairing vulnerable young people with mentors, including teaching, social work and psychology students from the University of Wollongong.

"The Homework Hub provides a safe, calm learning environment for vulnerable students," said Danielle.

"Mentors take into account the learning needs of each student and, through establishing a supportive relationship and positive role-modelling, improve a child's confidence and well-being, both socially and academically.

"Mentors have seen first-hand the difference a few hours a week of positive reinforcement and supportive learning can have on a student's confidence and ability. And having a wide range of learning resources available enhances these outcomes.

"We are grateful for the support of people like Mrs Dimoski and her colleagues at Windang Public School who, through the donation of books, games and stationery, help ensure our students have all the resources they need to be engaged learners."

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never
been
more
needed

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