



annual report 2020-21

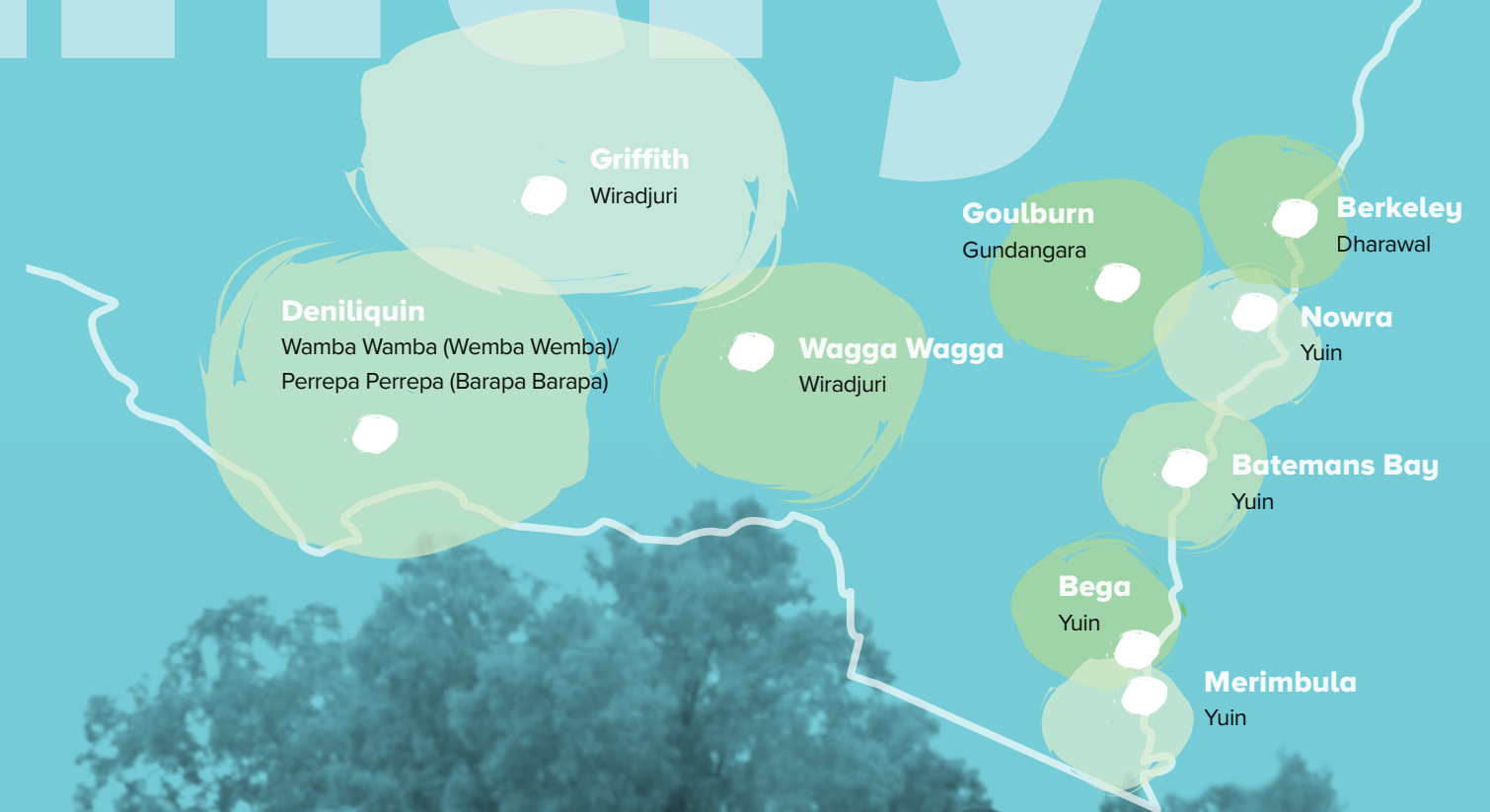
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CareSouth **EVERYDAY**

Acknowledgement of

country

CareSouth acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work. We recognise their strong and ongoing connection to land, waterways, and sea and their contribution to society as one of the oldest living cultures in the world. We are privileged to work with and alongside our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, community, and families and show our honour and respect to Elders past, present and future.



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Chairperson's welcome

On behalf of CareSouth's Board, it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the wonderful work being carried out across the organisation's wide geographic footprint as we continue to grow and reach more vulnerable communities. Building better communities, by supporting children, young people and their families, is at the heart of the work carried out by CareSouth's dedicated team of more than 400 staff.

As the organisation grows, the challenge will be to not lose sight of our values: Respect, Accountability, Compassion, Integrity and Inclusion. The core of our business is to provide exceptional care and support to young people and families, along with maintaining a business that is sustainable and financially sound. CareSouth is committed to investing in the future of our communities by providing opportunities and programs that build capacity for society's most vulnerable.

At no time has this work been more important, given the difficulties our communities have faced over the past 12 months with restrictions, lockdowns and the impact this has had on mental health, education and economic growth. Staff have continued to provide the highest level of care for those they support by thinking outside the square and developing creative solutions in the face of adversity.

Throughout this difficult time the Board and I have been honoured to witness the dedication and hard work of CareSouth's staff and carers to ensure the wellbeing of those they support is at the forefront of each decision made and action executed. CareSouth's client-centred model – which gives participants a voice and ensures they are heard – and its focus on capacity building, has allowed participants, with the help of their caseworkers, carers and support staff, to build their skills, confidence and community networks so they can become as independent as possible.

The Board's commitment to capacity building and giving children and young people a voice is evident in our support for a three-year strategic growth strategy for the rebranded Champions program. The Board this year voted to return its name to Aunties & Uncles, CareSouth's foundational program which began in 1992, and focus on its expansion from Shoalhaven, Illawarra and Ulladulla into our southern and western regions.

Another initiative I was extremely proud to be involved in is CareSouth's inaugural Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), a developmental framework to increase and support our growing number of Aboriginal staff. Launched in May this year, the AES cements CareSouth's commitment to a diverse and inclusive workforce, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are critical to our success as an organisation. As an employer in rural NSW, we are well placed to recognise the significant value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples add to our workforce and are committed to exceeding our previous target of 2% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. We currently sit at 7.25% Aboriginal employment and plan to increase this figure every year.

CareSouth and the Board strongly believe that the children entrusted into our care should maintain their links to Culture, Kinship and Country and the AES is integral to achieving this. I would like to thank the CareSouth employees involved in developing the inaugural AES as we continue to work towards a more equal community for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and for all Australians.

CareSouth has also continued to deliver its successful Health Hubs, providing free health checks to vulnerable children and the wider community, within COVID Safe guidelines. The quarterly Health Hub initiative is one of the organisation's most successful and fastest growing services and the Board was exceptionally pleased to see the program run in our western region, where access to healthcare can be difficult due to the tyranny of distance. These free, all-inclusive health checks are open to the wider community and review a child's hearing, vision, speech and hand-eye coordination.

Support

Another key growth strategy this past financial year has been the development of CareSouth's Head Office at South Nowra. After many years of planning, construction began in June last year, with the purpose-built facility scheduled for completion in the 2021-2022 financial year. The development includes offices, meeting rooms, training facilities, a 24/7 call centre and family contact rooms, as well as CareSouth's Community Hub, a dedicated space for the wider community. The project was made possible by a \$1.5 million federal government grant under the Regional Jobs and Investment Package, creating a raft of employment opportunities in the region.

We look forward to welcoming our staff, participants and community into our new, improved space.

The Board acknowledges and thanks our Executive Officers, staff, carers and volunteers. Responding to the significant challenges faced over the past 12 months which required commitment and resilience so that CareSouth could continue to make a difference in the lives of young people in our care.

I would also like to personally thank my fellow Directors for their dedication and willingness to give their time each month to oversee the governance of CareSouth.

Christine Cook
CareSouth Chair

Executive Officers' welcome

family

CareSouth has expanded significantly over the past several years, increasing our ability to deliver quality supports to children, adults and families in areas of identified need. We now have offices in Deniliquin, Griffith, Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Nowra, Berkeley, Batemans Bay, Merimbula and Bega. Our expansion also includes the construction of a new head office in Nowra – The Jim McEwan Community Hub – scheduled to be completed early next financial year.

Due to community need, our workforce, services and locations have increased. Our measured, strategic growth has resulted in a significant increase in our operational surplus over the past 12 months. Despite the challenges of operating an essential, face-to-face service during the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, we have responded to the needs within our community.

CareSouth's growth during what has been a difficult financial year for all has been underpinned by considered planning and the development of robust systems and processes, including the strategic acquisition of new properties to provide stable housing to vulnerable young people and adults. Our response to support siblings to remain together and aid children in therapeutic homes has resulted in growth in both areas of need. We believe

the best model of care for children and young people is to stay together as a family unit.

CareSouth has also increased its service delivery in Supported Independent Living disability accommodation. In the past 12 months, CareSouth has created more than 50 new job opportunities across NSW in the disability support and carer support space to provide care to those living in homes assisted by CareSouth staff. This increases independence and breaks down barriers in isolation.

The wellbeing of those we support – society's most vulnerable – is at the heart of our strategic planning decisions, along with inclusive practices and capacity building to ensure our clients have a voice and are heard. We have achieved this in a number of key areas:

- CareSouth recently launched its Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), a framework to increase and support our growing number of employees who identify as Aboriginal. The AES provides clear strategies on how to achieve this through four key areas: attraction and recruitment, workplace environment, career development and retention.
- Provision of SafeCare, an early intervention parenting program for families with children aged 0 to 5 years

old at risk of or identified as experiencing neglect or abuse. CareSouth is the first officially accredited SafeCare agency in the state and recently began working alongside an Aboriginal Community and Children's Service in Newcastle to provide training and coaching to staff to deliver SafeCare.

- Expansion of CareSouth's Aunties & Uncles program, which has grown to service the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Ulladulla regions in the past 12 months. The focus for the next 12-18 months is expansion of Aunties & Uncles into regional areas in southern and western NSW.

Our business development strategy is simple: provide therapeutic support services in areas of need and duplicate our services in the regions in which we are geographically placed. This strategy means we can lead in the sector through collaboration and practice development.

The expansion of our service delivery has resulted in an increase in staffing, with up to 100 new staff employed as support workers in the past financial year. This has been an integral part of job creation in the region, as many staff have retrained as Community Support Workers after losing previous jobs due to the impact of COVID-19.

COVID-19 also placed additional pressure on carers and caseworkers to support vulnerable children and young people. As a result, CareSouth provided ongoing training, supervision and support to an ever-growing workforce. Carers in our organisation completed online Trauma-Informed Practice training, which was accessible to everyone at a time of their own choosing.

We invest in systems, training, and reflective practice to ensure that our staff have the necessary tools to provide high levels of support to our clients, while always meeting best practice guidelines. Being responsive to the needs of individuals, families and the community sector is a key feature of our ongoing business development strategy.

CareSouth's focus for the future is to ensure our decisions are based on providing the best outcomes for the people we support, whether they are participants, children and young people, local communities, as well as our carers and staff. We continue to strive to be an employer and provider of choice.

Tracy Mayo and Renee Knight

CareSouth Executive Officers



strong

Our commitment to reconciliation

In 2017 CareSouth formed the Buwanha Aboriginal Collective. The group, with staff representatives who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander from across the organisation's footprint, was tasked with developing CareSouth's inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The purpose of the Buwanha Aboriginal Collective is to strengthen, review and monitor the way CareSouth supports Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities, ensuring the organisation meets the cultural needs of First Nations peoples.

CareSouth's vision for reconciliation is to ensure that the

voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, Elders and communities are listened to and that they contribute to the organisation's decision making to create a positive future for First Nations peoples.

Since its inception almost five years ago, Buwanha has been instrumental in delivering two RAPs, with the most recent in 2020 cementing CareSouth's commitment to reconciling the past by creating an inclusive workforce that recognises and supports the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

CareSouth's Buwanha Aboriginal Collective was also the driving force behind the organisation's Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) to increase and support our growing number of staff who identify as Aboriginal. The AES was launched in May 2021 and outlines workplace

best practices in attracting and recruiting Aboriginal staff, providing a safe and inclusive workplace, career development and staff retention, as well as cultural awareness training for all staff. The AES also includes a two-year traineeship position and several identified positions across our footprint.

Engaging staff and stakeholders and piloting innovative strategies to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is another key focus of CareSouth's commitment to reconciliation.

In July 2020 CareSouth provided Winangay Kids Say training as part of its commitment to developing and strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Winangay Kids Say uses 48 cards designed to give children and young people a voice in decision making. The resource is evidence-based, culturally safe and uses the trauma-informed practice model, enabling staff to work in stronger and safer ways

with Aboriginal children, families and communities. CareSouth staff, and carers, also attended cultural awareness training with Curiyo in the past financial year.

Throughout 2020-2021 CareSouth has worked with Wandiyali, the Parenting Research Centre and the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to co-design the Permanency Practice Framework for Restoration. CareSouth staff have provided input and expertise on their experiences of restoration and helped to shape the direction of the framework.

CareSouth is proud of its commitment to building strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities and making a genuine and positive contribution to the reconciliation process. CareSouth's RAP and AES allows the organisation to become a more culturally safe and understanding workplace, promotes staff diversity and, most importantly, provides better service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This commitment to work alongside those CareSouth supports ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a voice within the organisation.



Aboriginal Employment Strategy

identity

CareSouth has over 600 staff and carers and supports hundreds of young people across our wide geographic footprint, many of whom identify as Aboriginal.

CareSouth has worked alongside many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations in its nearly 30 year history. We strongly believe that those with whom we work and those entrusted into our care deserve to be supported by staff with strong links to culture.

It is for this reason that CareSouth has developed its Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES): a framework to increase and support our growing number of Aboriginal staff. The strategy outlines workplace best practice in capacity building on the skills of our existing Aboriginal staff, as well as cultural awareness training for all CareSouth staff to support Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities.

The AES provides clear directions on how to do this through four key areas: attraction and recruitment, workplace environment, career development and retention.

“CareSouth has 31 staff members who identify as Aboriginal,” said our Aboriginal Community Development Officer (ACDO), Rashelle. “Several of these roles are identified positions, which means that they must be filled by an Aboriginal person who has the specific skills in working with the Aboriginal community or services. We want to continue to grow that number by making CareSouth an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The AES ensures that we recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who can best support children and young people to maintain their links to Culture, Kinship and Country.”

Strategies set out in the AES include supporting Aboriginal employees to access development opportunities for career progression and encouraging networking, mentoring, support and retention of our Aboriginal employees.

“It is exciting to see CareSouth make this commitment with the AES to improve our practice in recruiting, career development and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees,” said People and Culture Advisor, Mel. “The AES informs how staff can best support our current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Working with Buwanha – CareSouth’s Aboriginal collective – has been invaluable in understanding how we can execute this essential employment strategy.”

Buwanha meets monthly to discuss strategies to strengthen, review and monitor CareSouth’s practice with Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities. The group makes recommendations to inform policy and practice decisions and develops ways to better reflect the needs and culture of First Nations peoples. Buwanha’s major achievements include publishing CareSouth’s Reconciliation Action Plan in March 2020, and more recently the AES, both key documents in developing respectful relationships and creating meaningful opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CareSouth has also been a sector leader in advocating for Aboriginal children to stay on Country.

“We acknowledge that there is still much work to do in closing the very real and destructive gap that exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in particular the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Out-of-Home-Care,” said CareSouth Chair, Christine Cook. “Creating this framework is a step towards closing this gap.”

The AES includes employing an Aboriginal trainee and providing employment and study pathways over two years. The pilot program has been rolled out in our Berkeley office with our first trainee beginning her new role earlier in 2021.

“When I came across the Aboriginal traineeship with CareSouth I knew I had to jump on this amazing opportunity and run with it to kickstart my career in community services,” said the trainee. “Since starting at CareSouth, I was welcomed with open arms by all my co-workers and have loved every moment. I am so grateful for the chance I have been given here.”

Key service provision

An early intervention service for families with children 0 to 8 years – Brighter Futures – with

205

families participating to enhance their parenting skills for better long-term outcomes. Brighter Futures caseworkers supported

1060

individual clients.

3

Interim Care Model services.

9

residential care services for young people with disabilities and those at risk.

59

community volunteers trained to provide quality time, support and mentoring to vulnerable children aged 3 to 12 and their families in the Aunties & Uncles program across the Shoalhaven, Illawarra and Eurobodalla.

Providing NDIS supports to

170

individuals within our communities in the areas of:

- ♥ Community Support
- ♥ Support Coordination
- ♥ Financial Plan Management
- ♥ Clinical Services
- ♥ Supported Independent Living

Supporting

290

foster care placements for children and young people, providing long-term, short-term and respite care in the Shoalhaven, Illawarra, Batemans Bay, Queanbeyan, Deniliquin, Wagga Wagga and Griffith regions.

A short-term stay youth homelessness service – Shoalhaven Youth Support Service – helped

70

young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with outreach support or emergency accommodation.

The Family Connections Program in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven provides Family Time, supervised contact, transport, mentoring, respite and youth support services to CareSouth's Permanency Support Programs, the Department of Communities and Justice, other non-government agencies and private family law clients. Family Connections provided more than

10,000

hours of support services in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. Our other regions also provided thousands of hours of these services, including Family Time, where trained workers support children spending time with their birth families.

Year in review

July 2020

After years of planning, construction of CareSouth's Head Office development at South Nowra began. The purpose-built facility includes offices, meeting rooms, training facilities, a 24/7 call centre and family contact rooms, as well as the Jim McEwan Community Hub, a dedicated space for the wider community. The project was made possible by a \$1.5 million federal government grant under the Regional Jobs and Investment Package, creating a raft of employment opportunities in the region.



CareSouth provided Trauma-Informed Care training for all carers and Winangay Kids Say training for all frontline staff.

The CareSouth Podcast launched, featuring interviews with staff, carers and expert practitioners from across the organisation's footprint.

CareSouth sponsored a drive-in movie at Kembla Grange in

a bid to provide entertainment for families after three months of lockdown.

CareSouth passed SafeCare accreditation for the second year, making us the first organisation in Australia to do so.

August 2020

Dr Kylie Evans-Locke, CareSouth's Research and Practice Manager, undertook a robust program evaluation of 19 young people in CareSouth's Aunties & Uncles program, their family, carers and caseworkers to determine if the program improved social connections, time spent outdoors, physical activity levels and positive impacts on children and young people. Research findings were published this month in the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*: Using participatory methods to evaluate the impacts of an early intervention program on children and young people.

The Illawarra Permanency Support Program (PSP) team, CareSouth's Practice Improvement Quality Manager, the University of Wollongong and the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) collaborated on a research project to develop a training package to use with carers and caseworkers in the area of Ambiguous Loss for Children in Care. This is the first research of its kind in Australia.



CareSouth's IT system moved to the cloud, transforming our IT back-end infrastructure and systems into a complete robust solution. This offered improved scalability, reliability, security and innovation.

September 2020

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, planned celebrations for Foster Care Week 2020 had to be cancelled. Carers across all regions were sent a care pack to show our appreciation for all the hard work CareSouth's carers and families do to support children and young people.

CareSouth is a long-term supporter of the Kids in Care Cup (KICC), an annual Foster Care Week event. However, COVID-19 restrictions meant the event could not proceed.

October 2020

Funded by the DCJ, the Adulting 101 program was run by Shoalhaven Youth Support Service, in

collaboration with Southern Cross Housing, Headspace, Legal Aid and Mission Australia's Transition to Work. The program featured a series of educational workshops for young people aged between 16 and 24 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Workshops focused on mental health, access to housing, employment obligations and entitlements, financial literacy, and education and training opportunities.

CareSouth partnered with other community services organisations across NSW to work alongside the University of Sydney on the Lifelong Connections Project. This project, funded by the Australian Research Council, is investigating the practices and activities NGOs undertake to support Family Time and build connections between children and young people in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) and

their birth families. CareSouth's Illawarra PSP team have been attending regional action groups and trialling specific practices as part of the consortium; they are the only consistent team who have remained in the three-year research project.

CareSouth's clinical team launched Cool Kids, an interactive, skills-based group anxiety program that teaches children and adolescents, and their parents/carers, how to better manage their anxiety. It has helped six kids in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions, with one parent's feedback stating that "their child was more willing to try new things and to face their fears."

Each year in October, CareSouth's Illawarra PSP team hosts an awards night to recognise the achievements of children and young people in their program.

This was not possible this year due to COVID-19. However, a generous donation from The Agency Wollongong meant CareSouth was still able to celebrate the achievements of the children and young people by sending them each gift vouchers.

November 2020

NAIDOC Week 2020 was celebrated this month, however planned activities were postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

December 2020

CareSouth hosted Christmas parties for children and young people from the organisation's Brighter Futures, Foster Care and Aunties & Uncles programs. Anglicare and Good360 donated gift hampers, toys and clothing, which were distributed to more than 300 families across all our locations.

Ray White Goulburn also hosted a donation drive and local businesses donated more than 50 gifts, which were wrapped and distributed by the real estate's staff.

Simple Cycles donated 21 refurbished Trek bikes, which were gifted to children and young people from across the organisation for Christmas.

CareSouth's new office at Batemans Bay officially opened.

CareSouth opened a new Interim Care home, providing a therapeutic and safe home for children and young people.



Year in review

hope



January 2021

CareSouth's IT department launched the Office 365 migration, moving staff from an on-site email server to a new and forward thinking, cloud-based system. Office 365 allowed staff a larger mailbox size and the ability to send larger attachments.

CareSouth hosted its Annual Family Fun Day at Jamberoo Recreation Park, with 260 young people, carers and caseworkers coming from far and wide to enjoy some fun in the sun.

CareSouth launched School Dayz in our Berkeley Community Hub, with free haircuts, school shoes and stationery packs donated to vulnerable children and young people.

February 2021

CareSouth's new trainee, employed under the organisation's recently minted Aboriginal Employment Strategy, began a two-year work and study program.

March 2021

CareSouth's Deniliquin staff developed a school-based trainee position late last year in a bid to attract young people into the Community Services sector. The aim of the traineeship is to highlight to young people in the Deniliquin community the rewarding aspects of pursuing a career in community services, and the requirements for providing support to vulnerable children and their families.

A new streamlined incident reporting process launched across CareSouth, allowing frontline staff to call through to our call centre to lodge incidents.

The Goulburn Carer Recruitment and Permanency Support Program (PSP) caseworkers held a store at the annual Goulburn show as a community engagement activity.

April 2021

Families in Deniliquin accessed CareSouth's free Health Hub service, after expansion of the Health Hubs across our entire geographic footprint was put on hold due to the prior year's COVID-19 restrictions. For the past five years CareSouth has been providing free dental, optical and hearing checks, as well as speech and occupational therapy assessments, in the Illawarra and more recently Shoalhaven and Goulburn regions.

CareSouth's Board agreed to a three-year strategic growth strategy for Aunties & Uncles, the organisation's foundational program which began in 1992.

The Illawarra PSP team hosted an Easter Fun Day activity for all children and carers, which included a surprise visit from the Easter bunny.

CareSouth Executive Officer (Practice) Tracy Mayo, a member of the Children in Care Collective, supported the Home Stretch campaign and urged the government to legislate the

extension of Out-Of-Home Care (OOHC) to the age of 21.

May 2021

CareSouth launched its Aboriginal Employment Strategy to increase and support our growing number of Aboriginal staff. The strategy outlines workplace best practice across four key areas: attraction and recruitment, workplace environment, career development and retention, as well as cultural awareness training for all CareSouth staff. The Aboriginal Employment Strategy includes a traineeship position and a number of identified

positions across our footprint.

All CareSouth staff, and carers in some areas, attended Cultural Awareness training with Curijo.

Nowra relaunched its Carer Support Group after pausing due to COVID-19 restrictions.

June 2021

CareSouth staff, carers and families in our Wollongong and Shellharbour LGAs were placed into lockdown. CareSouth implemented the creative service delivery solutions – via online platforms such as Telehealth and Skype – used

during last year's lockdown to again ensure children, young people, carers, and staff continued to receive the level of support they are accustomed to.

CareSouth began work with Wandiyali, Parenting Research Centre and Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to co-design the Permanency Practice Framework for Restoration. The CareSouth team has participated in a series of design workshops throughout the 2020-21 financial year, where staff provided input and expertise on their experiences of restoration and helped to shape the direction of the framework.



Financial overview

Financial Performance

The financial performance is summarised from extracts of the audited financial statements of CareSouth for the period ended 30th June 2021.

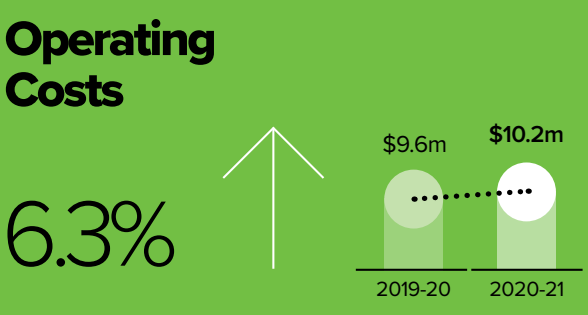
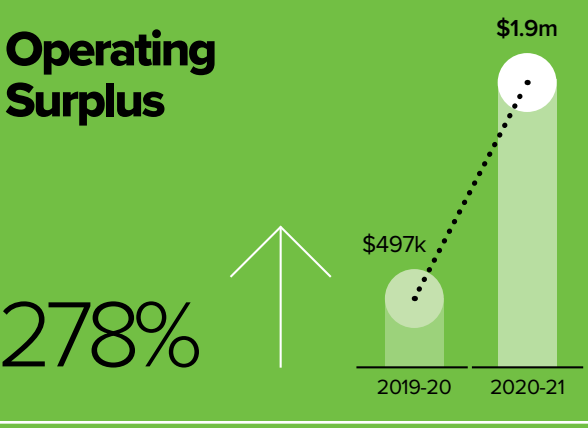
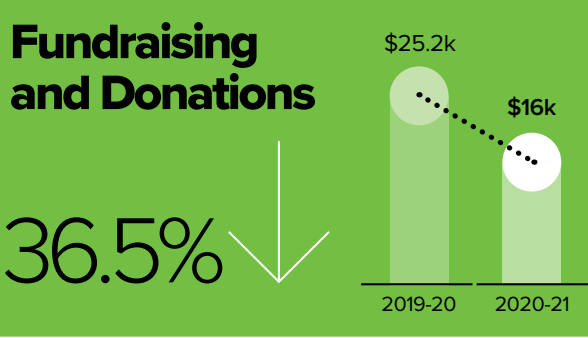
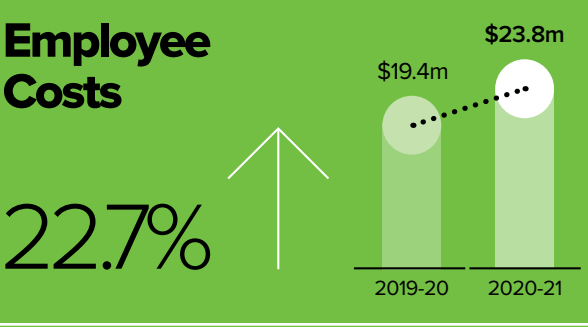
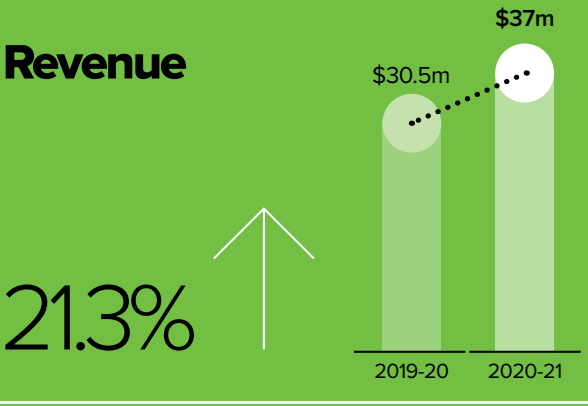
Review of Operations

The operating profit for the year ending 30th June 2021 was \$1,883,694. In the previous year it was \$497,226. Growth occurred in the Western and Southern NSW Permanency Support Programs, the NDIS Supported Independent Living Accommodation and Interim Care Models.

The Organisation intends to:

- (a) Expand services provided to clients through provision of more community-based services across a wider geographical area.
- (b) See continued growth in relation to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in the regions in which we operate.

together





annual report



2020-21

