



2022- 2023 Annual Report

**Building
stronger
relationships**

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 recognise and value the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, carers, children, young people and communities on our path to reconciliation which we walk together. 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.

Our locations



Griffith
Wiradjuri

Deniliquin

Wamba Wamba (Wemba Wemba)/
Perrepa Perrepa (Barapa Barapa)

Wagga Wagga
Wiradjuri

Goulburn
Gundangara

Queanbeyan
Ngambri/Ngunnawal

Batemans Bay
Yuin

Bega
Yuin

Berkeley
Dharawal

**Nowra
Head Office**
Yuin



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About CareSouth

Our purpose

CareSouth is a for-purpose community services organisation based in seven regional locations across NSW. Our focus is on providing opportunities for people to build a better future, no matter what their circumstances, with kindness and humility.

CareSouth provides early intervention, foster care, youth support, homelessness, clinical support, therapeutic care homes and NDIS services to vulnerable people, families and communities across a range of programs. Safety, Healing and Connection is CareSouth's trauma-informed care model and takes into account the therapeutic needs of all those we support.

Our programs

Aunties & Uncles: links children with trained volunteer mentors to share new experiences. It currently operates in the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Illawarra regions, with plans to expand across CareSouth's footprint.

Foster Care: supports care placements for children and young people. Types of care include long-term, short-term, respite, emergency, and kinship care, as well as restoration, guardianship and adoption.

Family Connections: includes supervised contact (facilitated visits between children in foster care and their families), mentoring (linking young people with mentors to support additional needs and interests) and family time (building positive interactions for families working towards restoration).

Therapeutic Care Homes: provide round-the-clock care for young people who cannot live safely at home and who are unable to be placed in foster care.

Family Preservation: an early intervention program to support families through challenges and designed to reduce the number of children entering the child protection system.

SafeCare: helps parents of children aged 0-5 at risk of neglect and abuse. It focuses on developing parental skills and confidence across three areas: parent-child interaction, safety and health.

NDIS Services: supports people with disability, including Community Support, Support Coordination, Financial Plan Management, Clinical Services and NDIS Supported Independent Living services.

Disability Accommodation Services: includes Disability Supported Independent Living homes and Residential Care homes.

Clinical Services: includes psychology and family support services, occupational therapy, speech therapy and behaviour support planning.

Shoalhaven Youth Support Service (SYSS): provides crisis and transitional accommodation for homeless young people, with a focus on early intervention and support.



Our vision

Embracing communities with kindness and humility to build a better future.

Our values

Courage: We encourage ideas and behaviours that are bold and big-hearted to enable us to care for the complex needs of children, young people, people with disability, and families.

Compassion: Our practices are underpinned by trauma-informed principles and are carried out with kindness and empathy.

Relationships: We nurture the connections we have both internally and externally. Strong, effective relationships are at the heart of our success.

Integrity: People can depend on us to communicate consistently and be true to our word. We carry out high-quality work with clear expectations and boundaries.

Belonging: The safety of our people and community is our priority. We strive to create a nurturing environment filled with kindness, empathy and respect.

Message from our Chair

On behalf of CareSouth's Board, I would like to acknowledge the Executive Officers, Tracy and Renee, and the work of our staff and carers who consistently strive to provide the best possible support to young people and more than a thousand families across our wide geographic footprint.

The Board is aware of the importance of understanding the organisations demographics, which spans the South-East and Western regions of NSW. With this in mind, the Directors made the commitment to travel to hold a Board meeting in the Western region, which was planned to coincide with the opening of the new office in Wagga Wagga. The original warehouse premises, purchased by CareSouth, have been transformed into modern, light-filled office spaces. During our visit, we were warmly welcomed and given a guided tour by staff.

Similarly, a Board meeting held in Berkeley preceded an afternoon tea and catch-up with staff, which Directors found most valuable.

After almost two decades on the Board, I often reflect on the growth that has occurred during that time. The organisation commenced with only a handful of staff in Nowra, operating out of converted squash courts. Next year, we will celebrate 30 years of CareSouth with the publication of a historical account of the journey.

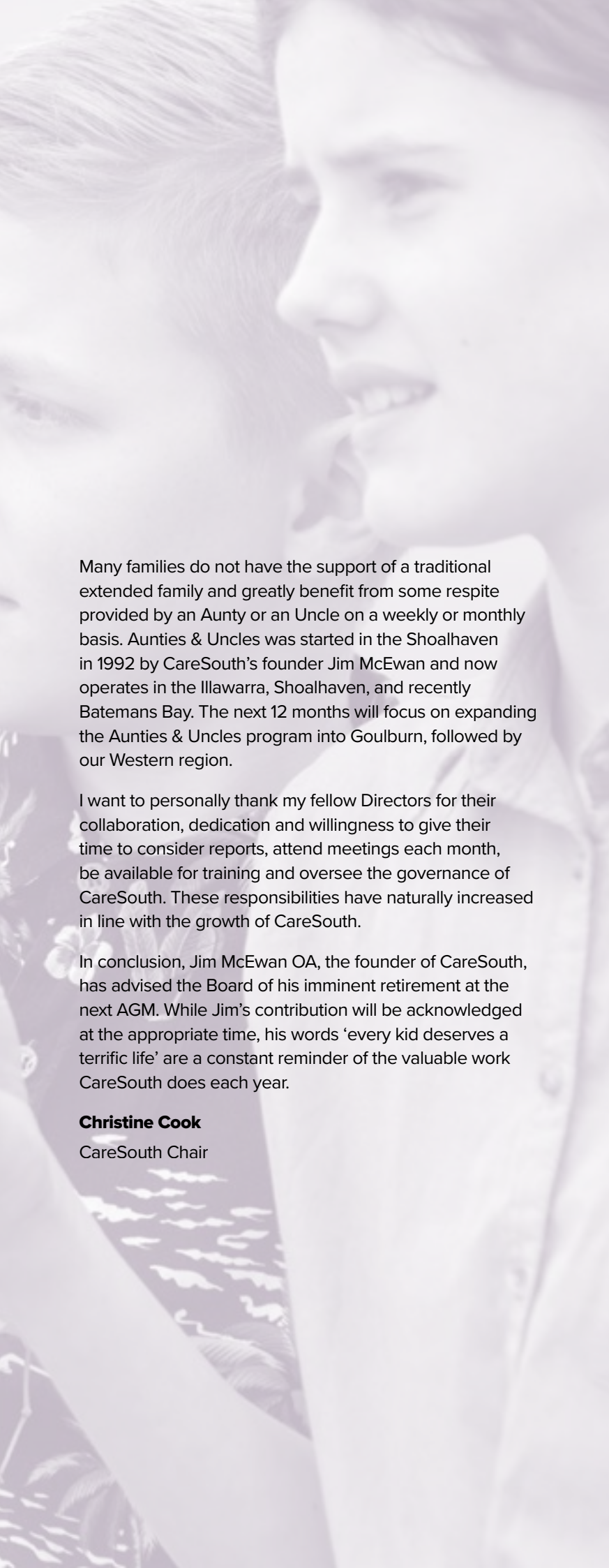
In 2023, CareSouth employs more than 500 staff across seven offices in the Shoalhaven, Batemans Bay, Illawarra, Goulburn, Deniliquin, Wagga and Griffith. And while we may have outgrown the old squash courts, the focus of the Board and Executive Leadership Group has been to ensure we manage that growth while continuing to maintain high standards and further improve our service delivery to the children, young people, families and communities we work with.

The Board is responsible for good corporate governance in dealing with internal and external stakeholders. One of the ways we do this is to support and ensure CareSouth is committed to developing a skilled workforce with education and training opportunities for all staff. Directors have also participated in additional training in Work Health and Safety, cultural training and development and board governance.

Under CareSouth's Strategic Plan 2022-25, there are more than 80 projects due to be delivered by staff. All projects are designed to ensure we continue providing a safe, supportive environment for all those in our care while also being responsive to opportunities and growth that will further help the communities we work in.

Many projects are not realised neatly within a year, and I would like to acknowledge, firstly, the considerable body of work that has been done by staff in preparation for the accreditation process by the Office of the Children's Guardian this year. Likewise, the Board has spent significant time throughout the year reviewing the original Constitution of CareSouth. The Constitution is a legally binding set of rules outlining the organisation's structure, governance and operations and explains the roles, responsibilities and powers of the Board, Directors and management. We anticipate there will be successful outcomes to report in both instances during the next financial year.

A key focus for the Board has been to encourage the expansion of CareSouth's longest-running program, Aunties & Uncles, across all regions. Aunties & Uncles has proven to be a successful early intervention program, where volunteer mentors are matched to vulnerable children in an effort to prevent them from entering the child protection system.



Many families do not have the support of a traditional extended family and greatly benefit from some respite provided by an Aunty or an Uncle on a weekly or monthly basis. Aunties & Uncles was started in the Shoalhaven in 1992 by CareSouth's founder Jim McEwan and now operates in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, and recently Batemans Bay. The next 12 months will focus on expanding the Aunties & Uncles program into Goulburn, followed by our Western region.

I want to personally thank my fellow Directors for their collaboration, dedication and willingness to give their time to consider reports, attend meetings each month, be available for training and oversee the governance of CareSouth. These responsibilities have naturally increased in line with the growth of CareSouth.

In conclusion, Jim McEwan OA, the founder of CareSouth, has advised the Board of his imminent retirement at the next AGM. While Jim's contribution will be acknowledged at the appropriate time, his words 'every kid deserves a terrific life' are a constant reminder of the valuable work CareSouth does each year.

Christine Cook

CareSouth Chair

In the financial year 2022-23, Directors have been proud to witness:

- The continued implementation of "Reggie", a client management system that streamlines data collection and presents client information and evidence of care with efficiency and accuracy when required for auditing purposes.
- Ensuring CareSouth's IT systems are managed with the necessary controls in place to protect against data breaches and cyber security incidents. Safeguarding our client information is our highest priority.
- The delivery of additional services that enhance the lives of children, families and people with disabilities through Health Hubs and Meet & Eat programs. As well as delivering client-centred, individualised supports across all programs, such as our Bundanon Art with Heart program.
- CareSouth's successful advocacy to raise the age of leaving care to 21. We believe this will make a significant difference to the lives of our clients as they reach maturity, as many are not quite ready for life without support at 18.
- Making sure policies and procedures across all programs are underpinned by a clinical therapeutic care model to guide and ensure high-quality service delivery.



Executive Officers' message

What a year 2022-2023 has been, with rapid growth and expansion across our footprint. CareSouth now supports more than 2,000 children, young people and participants across seven offices. Staff numbers have increased significantly, with more than 500 employees across NSW.

There's no question that working in the child protection space can be difficult. That's why it's so important for staff and carers to have opportunities to celebrate wins and discuss challenges.

One of the organisation's biggest challenges this year has been the retention of carers, many of whom have worked with CareSouth for decades. Some carers are reaching retirement age, others are experiencing burnout due to shortages across the sector and everyone is facing additional financial pressure, such as cost of living increases. Despite these challenges, we continue to be guided by our vision to embrace communities with kindness and humility to build better futures. We do this by creating strong connections and building relationships, because as leaders we believe stronger relationships are at the heart of this organisation's success.

Building positive, trusting relationships and connections provides a sense of safety for those in our programs. Strong links like these not only make an incredible difference to the lives of families, but also to staff wellbeing, when teams see the positive outcomes of their work. CareSouth's teams don't work in silos, they work together to listen to and understand the needs of families and communities so they can develop holistic support plans and create long-term connections for individuals.

In May 2023, CareSouth held annual Staff Engagement Days in Southern and Western NSW. The focus was on building, maintaining, improving and nurturing relationships. Staff were able to share positive stories of support, connection and collaboration and the difference this makes in their daily roles.

For example, we heard how staff working with a family in CareSouth Illawarra's Permanency Support Program (PSP) designed an innovative care model for five siblings and their mother who were working towards a restoration of their family. Therapeutic Care Home staff provided around-the-clock care to the siblings, with support from PSP caseworkers and Family Connections staff, while their mother completed the steps required to be reunited with her children. The purpose of the care model was to increase mum's visits to the home over time so she could eventually move in full-time with her children, and enjoy safe, stable housing. The team created a warm, welcoming home, with a focus on positive parenting skills, routines and creating community connections and support networks. This model, built on positive relationships, could open the door for CareSouth to support the restoration of many more families who struggle with accessing basic services like housing and having a network of support.

In another shared example, Deniliquin staff created the Rainbow Room, a safe space for young people exploring their sexuality and gender. The Rainbow Room provides fortnightly support group sessions for young people to help them make connections and build positive relationships with like-minded peers.

These programs, created based on client needs, are just two of many that demonstrate how building strong relationships with those we support allows teams to provide tailored, wraparound care for best practice service delivery.

Sharing the highs and lows of working in the child protection space at events like Staff Engagement Days reminds us to be open to creating connections. It encourages us to be trusting and honest with ourselves and others and to be present and really listen to the needs of those we support and work alongside.

As CareSouth's Executive Officers, we recognise that one of the things we do well as an organisation is offer assistance. And if we can't, we find someone who can. We're able to provide this high level of service delivery because of the successful relationships we have created with our staff, carers, participants, and communities. Creating a positive employee experience for staff ensures that they feel empowered and can deliver the same experience for those they support.

We are grateful and humbled to lead teams who do what they say they're going to do, who go that extra mile. They're incredibly special people because they're committed to improving the lives of the children, families, young people and participants we support.

Tracy Mayo and Renee Knight
CareSouth Executive Officers

**Building
positive, trusting
relationships
provides a sense of
safety for those in
our programs.**



347

children and young people were supported by

431

carers in our foster care programs



25

children and young people were mentored by

39

Aunties & Uncles volunteers

Our in

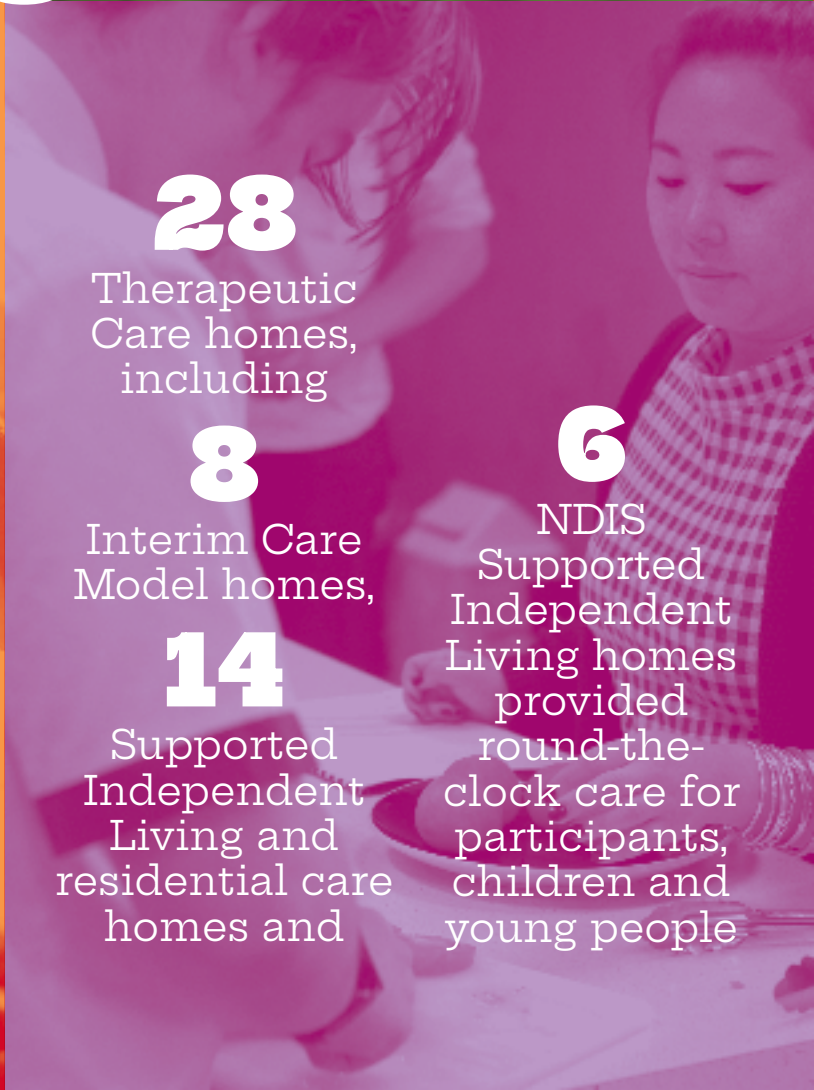


801

individuals and

225

families were supported by Family Preservation caseworkers in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions



28

Therapeutic Care homes, including

8

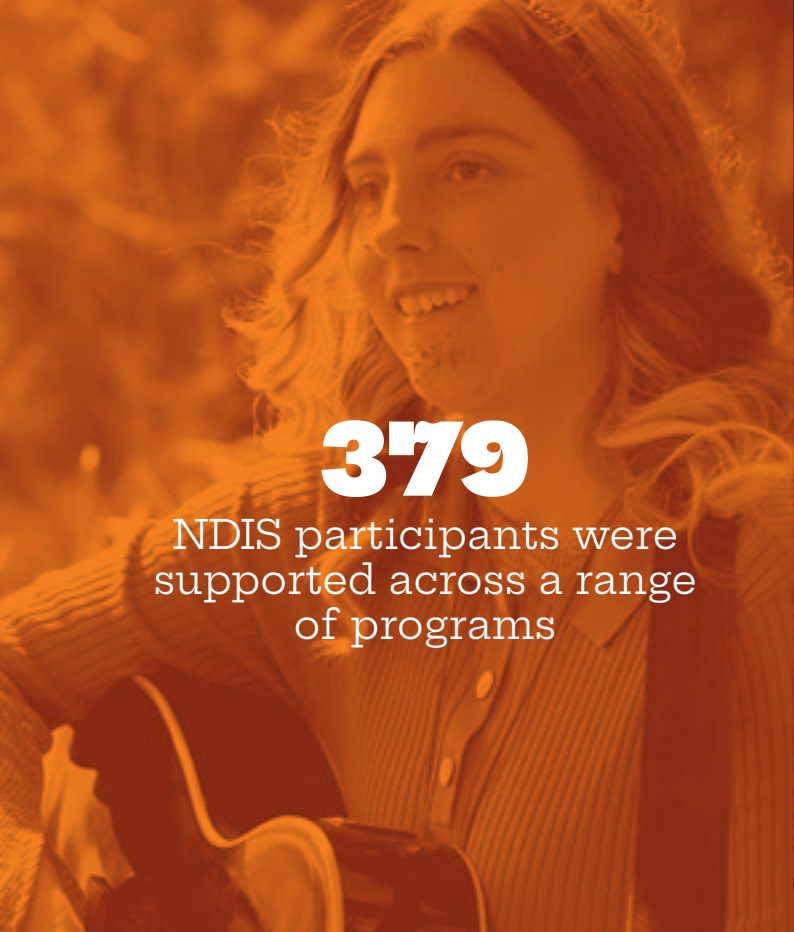
Interim Care Model homes,

14

Supported Independent Living and residential care homes and

6

NDIS Supported Independent Living homes provided round-the-clock care for participants, children and young people



379

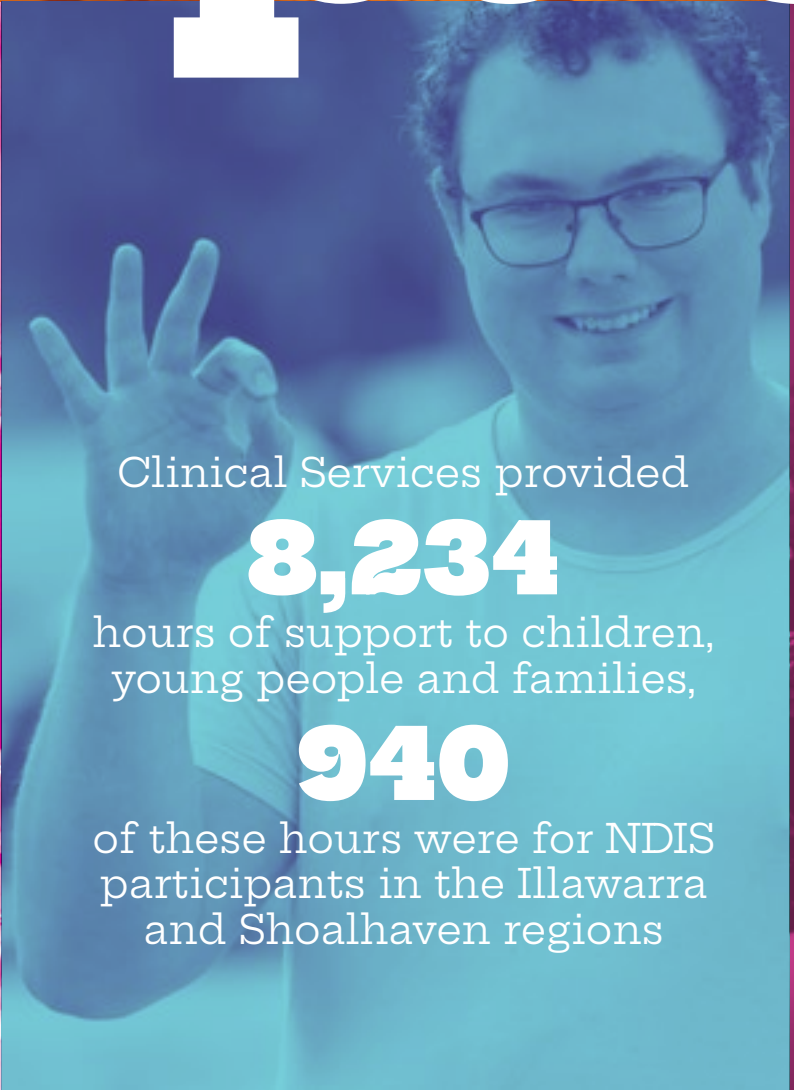
NDIS participants were supported across a range of programs



77

young people were helped by our Shoalhaven Youth Support Service (SYSS)

Impact



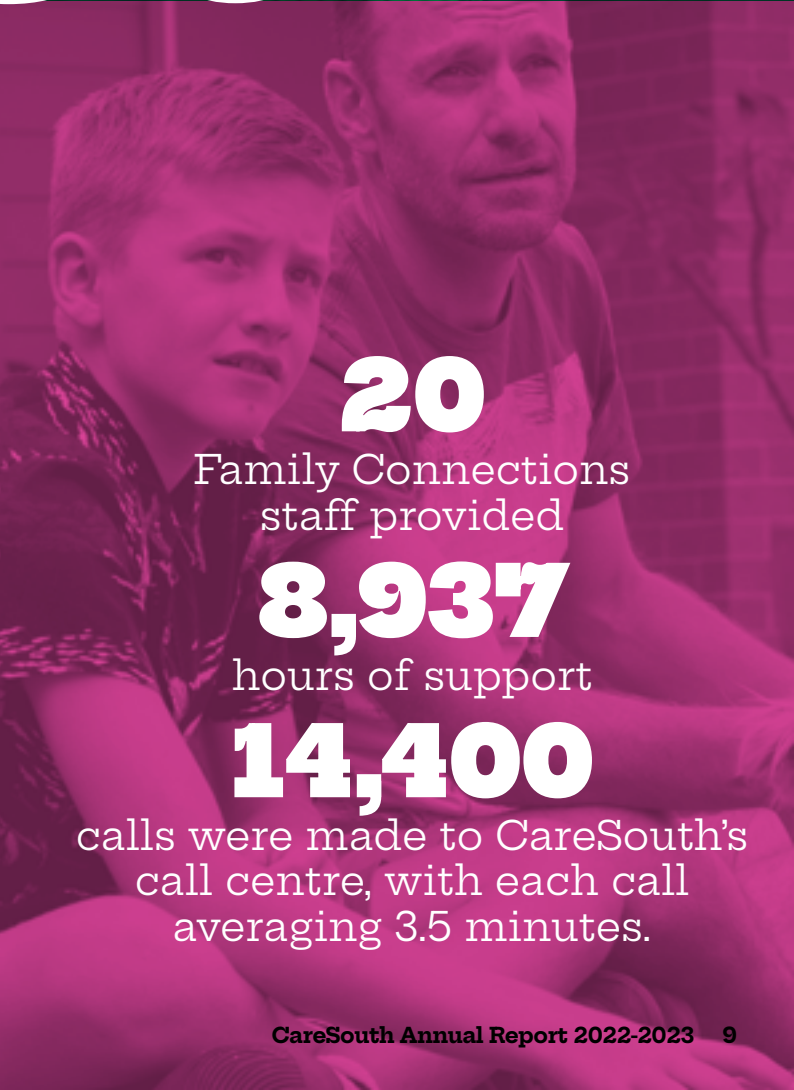
Clinical Services provided

8,234

hours of support to children, young people and families,

940

of these hours were for NDIS participants in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions



20

Family Connections staff provided

8,937

hours of support

14,400

calls were made to CareSouth's call centre, with each call averaging 3.5 minutes.



CareSouth employs

513

staff across

7

offices



65

staff have

5

or more
years of
service

Our
people



384

staff identify as
female



3

staff identify as



30

staff identify as Aboriginal

1

identifies as Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander

ur ople

28

staff have

10

or more
years of
service



gender neutral



126

staff identify
as male

New data management platform drives better outcomes

One of CareSouth's biggest challenges over the past few years has been the significant increase in data collection requirements as client, staff and carer numbers have grown. CareSouth Information Technology and Communications manager Danny Bosevski said CareSouth's growth raised a multitude of questions for the IT team and eventually led to an overhaul of the organisation's data management system.

"As growth increased, leadership teams began questioning the platform we were using," explained Danny. "Questions included: do we have the data we need? If not, how do we access the data we need? Are we managing data collection in an efficient way? Can we be more effective with the data we're collecting to drive better outcomes? The short answer to all those questions was no."

So, CareSouth's IT department spent thousands of hours overhauling the organisation's data management system in partnership with software company, Objective. Together, they implemented RegWorks, our new client management system. RegWorks enables frontline staff – caseworkers, support workers, and NDIS coordinators – to spend less time on the administrative requirements of their role and more time on positive, supportive, face-to-face interactions with the families and people they support.

Reggie, as staff nicknamed the platform, went live in August 2022. This singular data collection point now supports all CareSouth's programs in an efficient and effective way to enable the organisation to successfully expand alongside our growing client base.

"When we embarked on this journey to advance our technology capability, our goal was to establish sophisticated data collection to improve our client management process for better service delivery. This included effective use and management of the data we need to access," said Danny.

"Before Reggie, we used multiple legacy systems to manage different parts of our business and different service offerings. This meant our staff processes varied depending on what program and location they were in, so there were more opportunities for error.

"Also, with multiple data storage points, the visibility of key client information that staff needed to access was quite low. Or it wasn't accurate if only one data platform was updated and not the other."

Previous technology platforms weren't capable of tracking the expenditure, calculations and financial plan management of participants in CareSouth's NDIS client services.

RegWorks has improved response times to client needs, providing more in-depth reporting to inform processes. Most importantly, it has helped tailor support to individual needs.

"Staff now have quick and easy access to all key information at the click of a button, rather than wasting time navigating through different databases and platforms," said Danny.

Processes that used to take days for staff to complete, now take minutes

“Because all key client information is now stored in the one place, we’re also able to generate in-depth reports that factor in the client as a whole. This gives staff a complete perspective about an individual’s situation and their needs. From a regulatory perspective, RegWorks helps us keep track of our compliance standards and complex paperwork. Processes that used to take days for staff to complete, now take minutes.”

Danny believes the communities CareSouth supports will see as much of a positive impact as its staff have.

“That’s what it all comes down to; ensuring we have the systems and processes in place to achieve the best outcomes for those we support in our communities.”

Snapshot of RegWorks’ implementation

In the 2022-2023 financial year:

- 46,839 case notes have been uploaded to Reggie
- 4,123 home visits have been logged across the organisation’s footprint
- 12,709 daily shift reports have been generated
- 2,151 requests have been made for placement information.

Reggie



Advocacy helps sway NSW government to extend age of care to 21

CareSouth staff are strong advocates in supporting the rights of children and young people. They do this most effectively by stepping up and speaking up to achieve better outcomes for children, young people and families.

Sandy O'Halloran, team leader Therapeutic Homes Illawarra, and David Allman, Carer Recruitment caseworker, are vocal supporters of the Home Stretch campaign – a lobby group calling for the NSW Government to extend the age of foster care to 21.

"I joined the Home Stretch campaign because every young person in foster care across the country deserves equal access to extended care and support to 21 years," said Sandy. "They also need priority for housing during their years in extended care, as they're the cohort most likely to become homeless if no supports are in place."

In November last year, the NSW Government joined the rest of the nation and agreed to extend the leaving care age to 21. In February 2023, eligible young people in long term Out-of-Home care who were 18 began receiving additional support, up until the age of 21.

Known as the NSW Government's Your Choice, Your Future support package, it includes four key elements:

- The Staying on Allowance, to support young people who remain with their carers until 21
- The Independent Living Allowance, a fortnightly payment for young people who live independently and need financial support until 21

- An expansion of the Specialist Aftercare Program, increasing the availability and location of targeted supports for young people when they leave care
- Available casework to support young people plan their transition out of care.

"This new assistance will help many young people have a better start to adult life by supporting the best options for them, including remaining in their current care arrangements," said Sandy.

In June 2023, Sandy and four staff from CareSouth's Permanency Support Program (PSP), Clinical Services and Practice Improvement & Quality (PIQ) teams attended the Home Stretch Symposium in Melbourne. They participated in discussions around how the new assistance package would be used on the ground to help improve the lives of young people aged 18 and over.

"One of the highlights of the event was hearing several young people speak about their leaving care experience," said Sandy. "They described what they needed from caseworkers and talked about how they've excelled with the additional supports that can be put in place with the new funding package, especially the importance of the supports required for our Aboriginal young people."

Tracy Mayo, Executive Officer – Practice, believes the Your Choice, Your Future support package is an integral part of leaving care planning and preparation, allowing young people sufficient time to maintain their support networks while they're finding their feet as adults.



The new after care allowances will provide greater stability for young people

“The new after care allowances will provide greater stability for young people leaving care and better support with housing and the cost of living,” said Tracy. “Before this support package was introduced, caseworkers had discussions with young people at 15 about the reality of their life after 18. They helped them make decisions about housing, about their career. Imagine having a conversation with a 15-year-old about leaving behind all the supports they’ve ever known once they turn 18. These are decisions they’re simply not developmentally ready to make. Now that the age of leaving care has been extended, they won’t have to.”

Along with advocacy, relationship building has been another key focus in improving CareSouth’s service delivery for young people.

The Illawarra’s Semi-Independent Living team leaders (SILS) and the Deniliquin Short-Term Emergency Placement (STEP) team provide support to young people who are leaving care and moving towards independent living or who have complex needs and are living in residential care.

Relationship building is a key factor in the success of these programs. Gaining the trust of young people in the child protection system is difficult but staff work hard to ensure they provide the wide-range of support needed to build positive relationships with those in residential care programs. Ongoing casework support helped eight of the 10 young people in the Illawarra SILS program return to school or find employment. All 10 young people were disengaged from education when they joined the program, now 80% are enrolled in education or part-time employment.

In Deniliquin, caseworkers mentor and guide young people in two STEP houses, teaching them skills like cooking, managing finances, healthy living and job readiness. One young program participant was sleeping on the banks of the Edward River, and constantly on the run, before moving into the supported STEP home. Now, less than a year later, they have a safe home, have returned to school and work part-time while studying.

In January 2023, Griffith staff hosted CareSouth’s inaugural Skate with Mates family fun day at Griffith Skate Park, to create community connections and advocacy for young people. CareSouth invited community support agencies including Headspace, Murrumbidgee Police, Mission Australia, Vinnies, Griffith Aboriginal Medical Service, Wellways and Centacare to share information about the services they offer to better support young people in the Griffith community.

More than 100 children, young people and families showed up on the day and enjoyed a skate competition, games, a local DJ, a sausage sizzle, and a fairy floss and popcorn booth. “Days like this give our kids a chance to see us as their champions, and that’s what we’re here for,” said Griffith PSP team leader, Joel McIntyre.

Research and collaboration key to best practice service delivery

CareSouth staff and carers from across our footprint have recently shared their knowledge, insights and expertise as part of three university-led research projects. Over the past year, they've collaborated with the University of Sydney in the development and implementation of a Permanency Practice Framework, the Fostering Lifelong Connections project and a University of Wollongong (UOW) research project focusing on children's ambiguous loss in foster care.

Findings from the project – Responding to children's ambiguous loss in Out-of-Home care: The HEAR practice model – were recently published in the Child & Family Social Work Journal. More than 20 CareSouth and Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) caseworkers and carers from the Illawarra and Griffith took part in the project. They provided expertise and insights regarding the multiple losses children in foster care may experience, from separation from birth parents and siblings to loss of friendships, culture and a sense of belonging.

Participants drew on their practice knowledge and experiences to describe the impacts of ambiguous loss on children in foster care, sharing ways to lessen the impact. CareSouth's Aboriginal Community Development Officer also joined the project to ensure research materials and practices were culturally appropriate. Based on the first-hand knowledge provided by caseworkers and carers, the UOW research team created the HEAR ambiguous loss model:

- Honouring ambiguous loss by considering how it contributes to a child's feelings and behaviours
- Establishing a care community of people who matter to the child and creating relationships with them
- Attuning to and being mindful of potential triggers of ambiguous loss; responding based on a child's developmental needs
- Reducing ambiguity by keeping children informed of people and events that matter to them.

"From the pre- and post-surveys, focus groups with carers and caseworkers, and face-to-face training sessions, the researchers developed the HEAR practice model to help practitioners and carers start conversations with children," said Iman Aziza, Illawarra Permanency Support Program (PSP) manager.

"Experts argue that ambiguous loss is the most traumatic kind of loss because it lacks finality and resolution; in the context of foster care, parents may be physically present but psychologically absent. The HEAR model outlines clear strategies for practitioners to name the losses of children, and often carers, when placements end. It aims to build a narrative that helps children and young people in care to understand their story with the support of key people in their lives. By creating an honest narrative for children and carers, we're reducing the level of ambiguity for them."

Three members of CareSouth's Illawarra PSP team, in collaboration with CatholicCare and DCJ, also took part in the three-year research project, Fostering Lifelong Connections. Project outcomes were presented to the community services sector in June 2023.



Several practice resources were developed from this project

“Fostering Lifelong Connections was a statewide project that brought together a group of academics and experts, including foster carers and young people,” said Iman. Its aim was to examine the quality of connections between siblings and birth families, with a particular focus on Aboriginal families.

“Several practice resources were developed from this project that are now used extensively across the Out-of-Home care sector. These included Wiradjuri language books, trauma-informed tools to use when working with carers to help them understand children’s responses to family time, and practice resources that practitioners can use to facilitate family time and create positive social interactions. Taking part in these research projects, collecting evidence and data, developing resources and presenting outcomes to the sector is integral to ensuring CareSouth provides the best service possible for those we support.”

This year also saw the roll-out of the organisation’s Permanency Practice Framework to help caseworkers support children, young people, families and carers taking part in restorations. Restorations occur when children who have been taken into care return to live with their natural families if it’s considered safe to do so.

CareSouth’s Practice Improvement & Quality (PIQ) and PSP teams spent two years co-designing the framework alongside the Parenting Research Centre and the University of Sydney. It provides step-by-step guidelines for caseworkers, focusing on strategies to use when supporting parents and carers working towards restoration.

In partnership with the Parenting Research Centre, CareSouth delivered three days of training on the framework in September 2022. This was followed by monthly coaching of CareSouth caseworkers in the Illawarra through the framework’s modules from October 2022. CareSouth Illawarra’s PSP team now uses the model to support parents and carers to work towards and maintain restorations.

“The review process and regular reporting of our work and findings to the Parenting Research Centre allows us to evaluate the processes and progress of the project,” said Dr Kylie Evans-Locke, CareSouth’s PIQ manager. “These findings will help the sector better understand the needs and intricacies of restoration from the viewpoint of the caseworker, the carer and the family.”

Research, partnerships and collaboration with universities and other community service organisations allow CareSouth to be at the forefront of developing and implementing evidence-based, best practice service delivery. These projects also allow staff and carers to build their knowledge and skills and provide insights into their areas of expertise, resulting in greater staff and carer engagement, improved outcomes for those we support and better overall client satisfaction.

How We Work at CareSouth; policy addresses staff flexibility needs

CareSouth has implemented a range of initiatives to support a positive work culture. One of the most significant changes is the How We Work at CareSouth policy, a major outcome of a post-pandemic staff survey to improve work/life balance and offer more flexible working arrangements.

The new policy allows staff to work from home, access rostered days off, have flexibility around start and finish times and enjoy a week of concessional leave after Christmas.

Since the policy was implemented in 2021, CareSouth has continued to survey staff biannually to measure its impact and address changing flexibility needs. As a result, additional flexible working arrangements were introduced.

Another core aspect of CareSouth's new policy was to establish stakeholder partnerships to improve staff wellbeing and add value to staff employment packages across a range of services. All staff can now access six additional benefits. Providers of these benefits include:

- Westpac – access to discounted services and advice
- Hesta – provision of wellness and super fund advice and services
- Benestar – a confidential, free Employee Assistance Program providing additional support and guidance for staff
- Advantage Plus – provision of novated car leasing
- Westfund – provision of discounted health insurance
- Flare Benefits – the provision of discounts and offers for a variety of retailers.

“Other staff benefits under the How We Work at CareSouth policy include an Aboriginal Employment Strategy to attract and retain Aboriginal staff,” said People & Culture team leader, Casey Lovell. “CareSouth also created a new workplace policy for those experiencing domestic and family violence, ensuring staff know how to access support services and domestic violence leave entitlements.”

Another key component of How We Work at CareSouth includes the ongoing development of key skills. CareSouth's Learning and Development program provides an extensive suite of training and development opportunities through an online learning platform and external providers, with 133 training courses available for all staff and carers.

Christine Gregory, head of CareSouth Clinical Services, worked in collaboration with consultant, author and founder of Knightlamp, Stephan Friedrich, to create CareSouth's Safety, Healing Connection training and booklet for trauma-informed practice delivery. This therapeutic care model is a framework for all staff and carers and provides practical ways to apply trauma-informed approaches in day-to-day interactions with children and young people. Its four online training modules and two webinars are mandatory for all staff and carers.

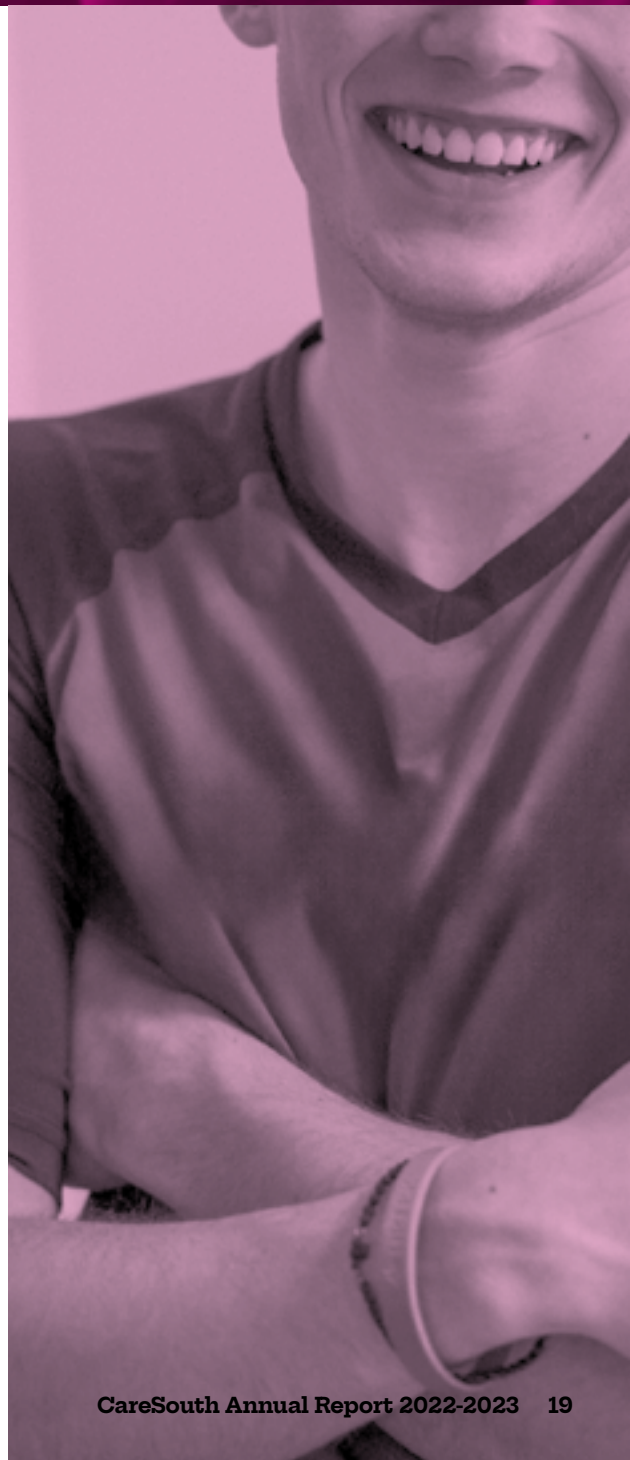
“CareSouth's flexible working arrangements, a week-long organisational shutdown over Christmas, and ongoing commitment to training and skill development are appealing to staff and create an engaged workforce,” said Casey. “Inclusive practices, both culturally and from a diversity and inclusion perspective, are also key contributors to staff retention.”



Staff wellbeing is our top priority at CareSouth

Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that the average employment turnover rate to February 2023 was 9.5%. As a comparison, CareSouth's 12-month turnover rate sits around 3%, significantly lower than the national average.

"Staff wellbeing is our top priority at CareSouth, and we're confident the increased flexibility and benefits of the How We Work at CareSouth policy will contribute to a more positive workplace," said Renee Knight, Executive Officer – Business. "As with any offering provided at CareSouth, we've also factored in business continuity and financial stability to ensure our programs and operations continue to run smoothly and effectively so we can maintain the increased flexibility offered for the long term."



Cultural understanding and diversity foundations for support

Culture, connection, diversity and inclusion are the foundations of all CareSouth support programs. Everyone is welcomed into the organisation, irrespective of ethnicity, culture, faith, sexual orientation or gender identity. Of the 500 staff employed by CareSouth, more than 30 identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, three identify as gender neutral and several are in same-sex relationships and have diverse abilities.

The lived experiences of a diverse workforce allows CareSouth to create better practice principles to support clients, people with a disability and the wider community. A key service delivery this year – under the Culture and Connection component of CareSouth’s latest strategic plan – focuses on educating and embedding learning to achieve best practice cultural planning for the families we support. Staff with lived experience are an integral part of this process. They are leaders in the field, designing training, supporting cultural events and promoting awareness, diversity, inclusivity and belonging.

Similar to CareSouth’s staff, many children, young people, participants and families in our programs are Aboriginal, from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background (CALD), in same-sex relationships, transgender, and have diverse abilities.

In March 2023, CareSouth officially launched Deniliquin’s Rainbow Room – a fortnightly support group connecting young people exploring their sexuality and gender. Deniliquin staff designed the Rainbow Room program to provide a safe space for transgender, gender diverse, non-binary young people and those exploring their sexuality. The program also helps parents, carers, educators and peers understand how to best support them.

“CareSouth offices have always acted as safe spaces for the children and young people we support,” said Christine Gregory, head of CareSouth’s Clinical Services. “Limited support services for young LGBTIQ+ people in Deniliquin and surrounds prompted staff to ensure young people who were curious about their sexuality or gender identity also had a safe space to discuss their thoughts and feelings with like-minded peers and mentors, without judgment.”

CareSouth’s cultural support training and education also helps carers and caseworkers better support the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

Buwanha – an Aboriginal collective of staff members who meet monthly to discuss, review and strengthen how CareSouth works alongside Aboriginal communities – and the Practice Improvement & Quality (PIQ) team provide guidance and support to caseworkers across CareSouth’s programs to ensure service delivery meets the cultural and diversity needs of communities.

A successful example of cultural best practice in action is through the work of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven-based Family Preservation teams. These teams work closely with families in crisis and need to establish a profound understanding of an individual’s cultural needs to create trusting, respectful relationships and build connections.

“Our Family Preservation teams work with up to 120 families at any one time, with more than 40% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families,” said Greer Rylie, a Wiradjuri woman and Illawarra-based Family Preservation caseworker.



I was able to give mum the tools and resources she needed to build a better life

Greer and the Family Preservation team support families with vulnerabilities, including drug and alcohol addiction, mental health issues, homelessness, domestic and family violence, health issues and school attendance concerns.

Recently, Greer worked closely with an Aboriginal mother, a historical victim of domestic and family violence, to deliver SafeCare, an evidence-based support program comprising three modules: Parent-Child Interaction, Health, and Safety. SafeCare is designed to make parenting more manageable and less stressful for families of children aged 0-5 years.

As part of program delivery, Greer visited the mum and her baby in their home each week over several months. Greer helped with tips and resources, including health manuals and safety kits, to support her in keeping her child healthy and safe. Most importantly, Greer listened to the family's needs and created a trusting, respectful relationship. One of the mum's main goals was to work towards the restoration of her eldest child who'd been taken into foster care. Greer and the Family Preservation team gave her the tools and the confidence to achieve this.

"We work with the family holistically and with the extended family as well," said Greer. "Building a trusting relationship with the mum, and her knowing that I would be there to support her, gave her the confidence to meet all her case plan goals."

SafeCare allowed Greer to source the education and support networks needed to expand the mum's skill set and build her confidence in her abilities. Building a relationship with her and supporting her as she worked to be reunited with her child was a highlight for the Family Preservation team. It was a strong testament to the value of the time caseworkers like Greer invest in building relationships and supporting families.

"I was able to give mum the tools and resources she needed to build a better life," said Greer. "With the proper support, she found her confidence, was able to learn new skills and access the resources she needed to create meaningful opportunities for her and her children."

"The mum successfully completed SafeCare and now has her driver's licence, a job and a home where she and her children are safe. She independently completed the legal process required to have her eldest child restored to her. It was a real privilege to be a part of that journey with her and her family."

More than 100 families have graduated from CareSouth's SafeCare program since its inception in 2017. The work being undertaken by the Family Preservation team is a wonderful example of how supportive relationships can build better futures.



Our year in review

Connection

July 2022: CareSouth launches its Strategic Plan for 2022-2025. The organisation's goal for the next three years is to consolidate and enhance practices and procedures whilst maintaining the best possible service delivery to families and communities.

August 2022: CareSouth's IT Department, in partnership with software company Objective, launches RegWorks, a streamlined client data management system. Affectionately known as Reggie, the platform went live this month, allowing caseworkers to spend less time at their computers and more time on frontline work with families.

Executive Officer Renee Knight wins Outstanding Business Leader at the Shoalhaven Business Awards. CareSouth also wins Outstanding Community Organisation.

September 2022: CareSouth hosts Foster Care Week events across its footprint to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of all carers. This year, CareSouth launched a coffee cup campaign to showcase how foster carers change lives. Baristas across NSW served takeaway coffee in branded CareSouth cups featuring a QR code linking people to inspiring foster care stories.

October 2022: Executive Officer Renee Knight is once again named Outstanding Business Leader, this time at the Illawarra Business Awards. She was recognised as an inspirational business leader who has demonstrated a commitment to her workplace, industry and the community through effective leadership, while providing valuable mentorship to others.

November 2022: Young people in Out-of-Home care now have access to increased support up until the age of 21 as the NSW Government extends the leaving care age. CareSouth is a vocal advocate of the #Makeit21 campaign and strongly believes that extending care and support for young people will be life changing and help to build better futures.

CareSouth's Brighter Futures program changes its name to Family Preservation. Families continue to receive the same level of intensive case management to keep them together. The change, under the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), broadens program referrals to include children up to 18; previously, it was up to age 9 only.

December 2022: CareSouth celebrates International Day of People with Disability with a Ride on Racers event in the Shoalhaven. The event included all-ability joyrides on modified lawn mowers and raised awareness of the NDIS services CareSouth provides.



Diversity

CareSouth's Western teams join the Rainbow on the Plains Festival to celebrate and support diversity.

For the second year running, CareSouth's Virtual Giving Tree is a huge success, with every child and young person in our foster care programs receiving a Christmas gift from their local community.

January 2023: CareSouth provides much-needed community support to our carers, clients and families across our regional locations through the School Dayz program, providing free stationery, bags, shoes, lunchboxes, drink bottles and haircuts to help vulnerable families prepare for the new school year.

CareSouth holds its inaugural Skate with Mates family fun day at Griffith skate park. The action-packed day featured skating and riding, a local DJ, a sausage sizzle and special guest mental health advocate Damien Thorne (Dookie) hosting mentoring talks. This great day gives young people the chance to connect with mates and learn about youth support services available in the local region.

February 2023: CareSouth hosts its annual Southern Family Fun Day at Jamberoo Action Park, for children, young people and their families in foster care and the Aunties & Uncles program.

CareSouth joins World Pride celebrations, advocating for LGBTIQ+ human rights worldwide. CareSouth warmly welcomes everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, ethnicity or faith.

March 2023: CareSouth supports National Close the Gap Day, demonstrating its commitment to equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

CareSouth staff join the community awareness walk 'Say NO! to Domestic & Family Violence'. CareSouth's Domestic Violence Committee meets monthly to help staff better advocate for domestic violence survivors, raise awareness of the social and personal impacts of domestic and family violence and ensure those experiencing violence, and the staff helping them, know how to access support services.

CareSouth officially launches Deniliquin's Rainbow Room – a fortnightly support group connecting young people exploring their sexuality and gender.

April 2023: CareSouth Health Hubs travel to Wagga Wagga, with free health checks also held in the Illawarra, Batemans Bay and Goulburn regions.

May 2023: Children, young people and their families in our foster care programs got up close and personal with animals from all over the world at Altina Wildlife Park in Western NSW. This terrific Family Fun Day allows kids, carers and families to build positive community connections.

CareSouth's Community Participation Disabilities program, in partnership with Bundanon Trust, held the inaugural Art with Heart program. This innovative program welcomes 20 NDIS participants of diverse abilities as they learn how to create various form of art, including sculpture and stop frame animation.

CareSouth's new Wagga Wagga office is officially opened, with Aboriginal elder Aunty Mary leading the Welcome to Country and Luke from Yuluung Cultural Programs carrying out the smoking ceremony.

CareSouth Executive Officers Tracy Mayo and Renee Knight host Staff Engagement Days in Southern and Western NSW for almost 500 employees. The theme was relationships – one of CareSouth's core values – and teams explored its importance in service delivery across all programs.

June 2023: CareSouth encourages all staff to be a tangible voice for reconciliation in our everyday lives – where we live, work and socialise – as part of National Reconciliation Week. Reconciliation is at the forefront of every interaction, conversation, decision and action in the work CareSouth staff perform alongside Aboriginal families and stakeholders.



Support

Financial overview

Financial Performance

Our financial performance is summarised from extracts of the audited financial statements of CareSouth for the period ended 30 June 2023.

Review of Operations

The operational result for the year ending 30 June 2023 was (\$566,000).

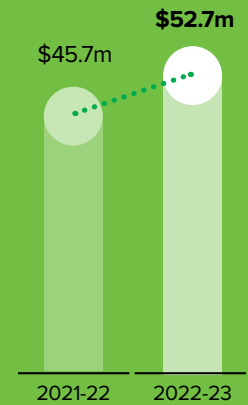
During the year, growth occurred in the Western NSW Permanency Support Program (PSP). The organisation has also seen an increase in the service provision of NDIS Supported Independent Living Accommodation and Interim Care Models.

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 NDIS within the regions we operate.

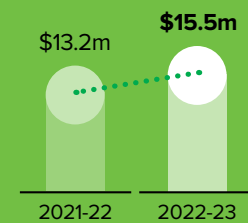
Revenue

15.3%



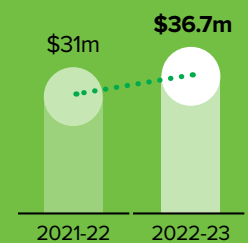
Operating Costs

17.4%



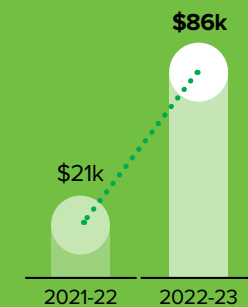
Employee Costs

18.3%



Fundraising and Donations

310%





2022- 2023 Annual Report

Building stronger relationships

Batemans Bay • Deniliquin • Goulburn • Griffith • Nowra • Wagga Wagga • Berkeley

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