

2023-2024 Annual Report



**Building
stronger
communities**

Our Locations



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.

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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, child protection, youth support, housing, clinical support 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 which 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.

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.

Family Connections: includes supervised contact for facilitated visits between children in foster care and their families, mentoring to support additional needs and interests, and facilitating family time to build positive interactions for families working towards restoration.

Shoalhaven Youth Support Service: provides crisis and transitional accommodation for youth experiencing homelessness, with a focus on early intervention and support.

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 to family, guardianship and adoption.

Therapeutic Care Homes: provide round-the-clock care for young people who are unable to be placed in foster care or reside with family.

NDIS Services: supports people with disability, including Community Support, 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.

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 for their commitment to upholding CareSouth's values while operating in what has been a very challenging year for the sector. Changes in government legislation and a review of services has required strategic thinking and subsequent diversification in services to manage and accommodate these changes.

Naturally, the work of our staff and carers deserves to be recognised for providing care, support and a constant presence to the young people and more than a thousand families across much of NSW. Foster carers are very special people with love to spare, who make a place in their families for young people needing a permanent home or short-term care. However, in these difficult financial times, CareSouth and similar organisations across NSW have been struggling to find sufficient carers to meet the need. I have deep admiration for all our carers and on behalf of the Board, I say thank you.

This will be my final message as Chair. After more than two decades on the Board and five years as Chair, the time has come for me to step down and make way for new Directors with skills to advance the Board into the future. However, it is not without some sadness as the CareSouth 'family' has been a large part of my life and I have formed many friendships that will endure.

With CareSouth celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2024, we've now completed our History Book. There are many milestones to reflect on while reviewing the book which highlight recollections of past employees, carers and the significant growth that has occurred during this time. CareSouth now operates out of purpose-built offices in South Nowra and employs more than 500 staff across seven offices in Nowra, Batemans Bay, Berkeley, Goulburn, Deniliquin, Wagga Wagga and Griffith. This year, we have also expanded into new regions with plans in place to launch our Intensive Therapeutic Care Program into Queanbeyan and Orange, along with Wagga Wagga, Batemans Bay and Goulburn.

The focus of the Board is to give careful oversight to the management of that growth, while ensuring continuation of the high standards of service delivery that CareSouth is known for. The successful audit outcomes and re-registration from the Office of the Children's Guardian, the NDIS, Youth Support Services and Community Housing are testament to this. Without these accreditations, services cannot be delivered. Significant evidence of processes and adherence to the standards are required for audits to be successful. Many thanks to all those who contributed to these outcomes.

The ongoing implementation of the new client management system Reggie, which streamlines data collection, has again provided the organisation with staffing efficiencies. It presents accurate client information and evidence of care, which is at the forefront of the requirements during the auditing and compliance process.

Safeguarding client information is a high priority, and the Board is mindful of its responsibilities to ensure CareSouth's IT systems are managed with the necessary controls to protect against data breaches and cyber security incidents. Testing of these systems will continue to mitigate the risk to CareSouth business and clients.

CareSouth's Strategic Plan 2022-25 has more than 80 projects at various stages of progress, many of which are due for completion. The Board looks forward to working collaboratively with management in the development of priorities for the next Strategic Plan which will shortly commence.



The original Constitution of CareSouth has been under review for the past year or more. 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. After much scrutiny and with legal advice, the Board has now approved the new model which addresses numerous changes in legislation and ensures CareSouth will have a constitution that will endure into the future.

Another key focus for the Board has been to encourage the expansion of CareSouth's longest-running program, Aunties & Uncles, across all regions. We saw this plan begin to unfold last financial year in the Eurobodalla, and we've since had a successful launch of the Aunties & Uncles program in the Goulburn area. This unique mentoring program provides respite to young people at risk and is regarded as a valuable early intervention program to select young people and their families. Looking forward, as the cost is borne by the organisation, targeted grant funding may be required to secure longevity of this important program.

CareSouth continues to deliver additional services which enhance the lives of children, their families, and people living with disability. These services rely on grants from businesses, clubs and the community. The Health Hubs, Meet and Eat dinners, and the Bundanon Art with Heart program are only made possible by the generosity of such organisations. In a time when finances are tight, it is heartening to have received their support again this year. Participating in a Meet and Eat program with volunteer staff from the Nowra office was a highlight for me. Our clients look forward to these nights where they are provided a nutritious meal and the opportunity to socialise with friends and family in the Community Hub. These grants are certainly appreciated.

In closing, I wish to thank my fellow Directors for their collaboration, dedication and willingness accept the considerable responsibility for the governance of CareSouth.

Christine Cook
CareSouth Chair

Message from our Executive Officers

The year will be remembered as one of expansion and meeting the needs of our communities in which we serve. CareSouth now supports more than 2,000 children, young people and participants across seven regions. Staff numbers have also increased significantly, with more than 500 people employed throughout NSW.

This comes as we celebrate CareSouth's 30th anniversary. We reflect on the vision of founder Jim McEwan when he began operations in 1994 and how incredible it is that Shoalcare, now known as CareSouth, would become the progressive organisation that it is today.

During periods of growth, it is more important than ever to keep our history top of mind. We are putting this into practice by expanding into areas where there is a need and alignment with our strategic plan. Our new Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) program supports individuals and families with high and complex needs. We were already supporting this demographic through services across our footprint. Expanding into ITC felt like a clear evolution that builds on our existing services and supports the creation of holistic offerings for individuals and their families.

We are creating a point of difference for CareSouth as we continue to grow our services. Our organisation can support individuals, children and families from a holistic perspective. A child could come to CareSouth through our Family Preservation program and access NDIS services, be matched with an Aunties and Uncles mentor and receive clinical support, all through one single organisation. We continue to tailor the services we provide to meet the needs of each individual or family. This sets CareSouth apart from other organisations in this space. Mirroring Jim McEwan's decision to combine The Nowra Youth Refuge and Aunties & Uncles programs under one organisation, we are continuing his legacy by diversifying our services.



CareSouth's vision and values continue to drive our decision making. We demonstrate the value of compassion by providing services that are culturally sensitive and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, children and their families. Our new ITC homes create opportunities to keep Aboriginal children on country. This is inline with placement principles and the responsibility of cultural care of the children and families we support.

We lean on our value of courage when we look to branch into geographical areas with limited services. The success of CareSouth's growth can be attributed to the work put in to build solid foundations for our new programs. During the early stages of the ITC program, we developed practice guidelines as well as clear systems and process to guide practice and ensure success. The establishment of a dedicated Steering Committee for the ITC program has ensured a solid foundation during the implementation.

We are committed to supporting the organisation so it can thrive into its 60th anniversary and beyond.

We have a great balance and relationship. This takes time and work to maintain - like all good things 'you get back what you put in'. We come at things from different perspectives and constructively challenge each other. No matter which angle we look at things, we always come to a unified solution. We do this by asking ourselves 'What is in the best interest of the child, individual, family and CareSouth?'.

Even with this approach, we acknowledge that we do not always get it right. We aim to instil the value of belonging at CareSouth by being open, honest and vulnerable leaders. With a workforce of over 500 people now, we want everyone to know that it is safe to be vulnerable. Learning from our errors, owning them and making changes is an essential way that organisations and individuals grow stronger.

Staying true to CareSouth's values will carry us into the next financial year. It will be a significant one as we come to the close of our current Strategic Plan in June 2025. A huge focus for next year will be the consultation and development of a new Strategic Plan. Amidst ongoing times of change, it is our goal to provide certainty for staff with this new plan. We want to continue to build long-term stability for CareSouth so that it can continue making an impact and providing solutions for communities that have a genuine need. Where will those places be and what will those services look like? We want to be open to opportunities and collaboration. CareSouth is well placed to take on new opportunities by staying true to ourselves, our values and our vision.

We are very proud of what CareSouth has achieved, from small beginnings in Shoalhaven, to a medium-large organisation with a footprint spanning across NSW. We are committed to supporting the organisation so it can thrive into its 60th anniversary and beyond.

Tracy Mayo and Renee Knight
CareSouth Executive Officers

Integrity is critical to our everyday practice. We do this when we listen and provide genuine and thorough feedback with kindness and respect, whether it's at a local level or state-wide. Some of the hardest conversations at CareSouth happen between a child and our caseworkers. Our teams do this everyday. The value of integrity also carries into the conversations we have at a higher level. We always keep the child at the centre of our decision making and deeply consider what is in their best interests. At times this is advocating for resources or sector wide systemic change.

It is critical that we continue to demonstrate CareSouth's value of relationships as the organisation grows. We are always travelling to offices throughout the footprint to get as much face time as we can with teams in each region. We encourage people to come together when they can, through virtual events like communities of practice or other in-person gatherings.

Another key relationship we work on is the one we have with each other. Our Co- CEO model is essential to keeping the organisation dynamic and adaptable to change. The way we operate is very strengths-based, allowing us to have expertise in areas we are passionate about whilst also being across the whole business. Through this model, we both have capacity to maintain a more in-depth understanding of the areas we work in.

349

children and young people were supported by

418

carers in our foster care programs

16

children and young people were mentored by

29

Aunties & Uncles volunteers

197

NDIS participants were supported across a range of services

112

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

Our Impact

844

individuals and

237

families were supported by Family Preservation caseworkers

41

Therapeutic Care homes provided round-the-clock care for participants, children and young people

Clinical Services provided

9,500

hours of support to children, young people and participants

9,685

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

CareSouth employs
545
staff across
7
offices

30
staff identify as Aboriginal
1
identifies as Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander

96
staff
have **5**
or more
years of
service

35
staff
have **10**
or more
years of
service

Our People

2.66
is the
average years
of service
across the
organisation

413
staff
identify
as female

3
staff identify as gender neutral

132
staff
identify
as male

CareSouth adopts innovative ‘Tools Down’ approach to improve practice

CareSouth’s Practice Improvement Quality (PIQ) team developed a new coaching-based ‘Tools Down’ approach designed to provide a consistent organisation-wide approach to enhancing staff knowledge and casework practice across all seven CareSouth offices.

The collective space provided by the Tools Down approach gives staff a dedicated time every month to reflect on their work, collaborate, and introduce best-practice standards. PIQ Manager, Dr Kylie Evans-Locke says Tools Down improves casework practice across the organisation by sharing knowledge and using research, evidence, evaluation and policy. The sessions could not have gotten off the ground without the support of Managers and Senior Leaders who ensure staff are supported to prioritise their attendance.

“When you’re undertaking casework there are a lot of feelings and emotions involved because caseworkers want the best outcomes for kids. Our PIQ team’s Tools Down sessions help caseworkers to achieve those outcomes by creating a space for them to come together to learn some new approaches and share their experiences. We also provide a distanced perspective where needed. With advice based solely on evidence, standards and best practice.”

The PIQ team has run online activities covering topics that help improve casework practice, such as Case Planning, Life Story Work, Engaging with Families, and the importance of language.

“Our sessions focus on areas of casework that data shows us we need to strengthen. Access to data and evidence is a game changer for this organisation as it allows our PIQ team to target our efforts so we can help teams meet their benchmarks. The benefits we see within our practice when we use Tools Down flows on to positively impact those we support,” says Kylie.

Kylie along with Lauren Pengelly, Practice Specialist Team Leader, presented at the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) National Conference in June. ACWA is the peak body representing community organisations who work with children and families. Their National Conference gathers experts from across the sector and country.

“I always find some great ideas come from attending the ACWA National Conference. We have brought many things back from it that our team is keen to implement to enhance our work.”

A full house of industry leaders tuned into CareSouth’s presentation about how the Tools Down approach improves outcomes for children and young people.

“Presenting at this year’s ACWA conference was a fantastic opportunity. It gave CareSouth a chance to show off some of the good things we’re doing. We were able to share our knowledge with others in the field which is an important way to support the industry. Many sector leaders at the conference found our work with the Tools Down project really valuable. There were lots of questions at the end of our session,” says Kylie.



Kylie was shortlisted for an ACWA Service Excellence Award for exceptional service to achieve lasting and positive outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

She believes CareSouth’s PIQ team has helped to change the practice landscape for CareSouth, adding an extra layer of support to frontline staff.

**This work improves
our service delivery
so we can continue
creating meaningful
and positive change...**

“Our team works alongside staff to create a skilled workforce that embraces ongoing improvement,” says Kylie. “Practice and evidence continue to evolve in this sector in response to child protection challenges. Having a dedicated PIQ team to translate the latest research into everyday skills ensures that caseworkers, team leaders and program managers are kept up to date with industry best-practice. We also tap into collective wisdom across the organisation to grow each team’s skills and expertise. This work improves our service delivery so we can continue creating meaningful and positive change for our clients and communities.”



CareDogs lend a paw for wellbeing

CareSouth's CareDogs program features six specially trained dogs who provide therapeutic support and companionship to children, young people, families and people with disability. The innovative program is designed to improve the lives of those CareSouth supports by creating a calm, safe space using animal-assisted therapy.

Research confirms many benefits of animal-assisted therapy, including reducing symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety, and helping to regulate emotions and encourage feelings of calmness and safety. Studies by Purdue University in the United States have also shown that clinicians who use dogs as part of their sessions are often seen as less threatening.

Each of the four-legged friends in the CareDogs program live with CareSouth staff members who have been trained as handlers. They go to work with their handlers, or respite handlers, in our Nowra, Goulburn, Wagga and Berkeley offices. The dogs are trained to respond to the needs of the people CareSouth supports, under the guidance of their handler.

A child, young person or participant might be encouraged to gently pat or cuddle a CareDog to help them regulate their emotions, or to feel safe and calm in an unfamiliar environment.

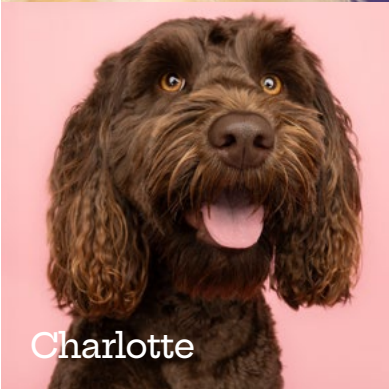
"The presence of a CareDog creates positive connections between staff and those they support," says CareSouth Clinical Services Manager Christine Gregory. "Interacting with CareDogs also has physiological benefits and can reduce the stress chemical cortisol and trigger the release of oxytocin, which plays a positive role in social bonding."



Buddy



Nora



Charlotte



Iris



Woody



Frankie



Individuals who may not be as comfortable relating to people, we've seen create instant and lasting connections with our CareDogs.

The CareDogs program can also teach empathy and improve communication, social, cognitive and emotional functioning through the power of touch, connection and feeling valued.

"It's fantastic to see the positive impact the program has had, especially for several of the adult participants we work with. Individuals who may not be as comfortable relating to people, we've seen create instant and lasting connections with our CareDogs."

Staff can book a CareDog to provide support for children, young people and participants through CareSouth's call centre.

Engagement and Communication

Awareness events create opportunities to connect with communities



Our coffee cup campaign opened a new demographic of people for us to engage, who we may not have reached through our other communications channels.

Each year on Aunties & Uncles Day and during Foster Care Week, CareSouth staff, volunteers and carers from across our footprint share their insights and experiences with the wider community.

Aunties & Uncles is CareSouth's longest running program, started in 1992 by founder Jim McEwan. It connects children, young people and families with carefully matched volunteers who provide guidance and mentoring through simple acts of kindness and small moments of support. This might be taking the kids to the beach, sporting matches, fishing or simply cooking a meal together.

To mark Aunties & Uncles Day in July 2023, CareSouth asked people from all walks of life to pop on a pair of slippers for the day to signify the invaluable impact Aunties & Uncles volunteers have, as they help vulnerable kids to feel safe, snug and supported – just like a pair of cosy slippers.

This campaign, titled 'Warm Hearts, Warm Feet', was a great success. Businesses, preschools and other community groups from across the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Eurobodalla regions signed up to support the campaign. Staff across these organisations and all seven CareSouth offices donned 'Warm Hearts, Warm Feet' slippers to acknowledge the crucial role Aunties & Uncles volunteers play in improving the lives of children and families.

Aunties & Uncles volunteers also used the day as a platform to share heart-warming stories with the broader community about the positive impact the program has had on them and those they support.

"It was wonderful to see how our regional communities embraced this campaign. Local fire service, sports clubs, businesses and local MPs, along with our Aunties & Uncles volunteer mentors and CareSouth staff, all put on their branded slippers to raise awareness and support local families. An activity like this is a great way to connect with and celebrate our current volunteers but also to spark conversations within the community about the Aunties & Uncles program to generate interest in volunteering for it," says Caroline.

Aunties & Uncles Day activities helped generate 14 volunteer mentor enquiries in July 2023 across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

Foster Care Week, held annually, is an opportunity to celebrate CareSouth's carers and their invaluable contribution to improving the lives of children, young people and families.

To mark the awareness week in 2023, running from September 10-16, CareSouth partnered with cafes located across our footprint. These cafes used CareSouth-branded, eco-friendly coffee cups throughout the week to raise awareness of the need for more foster carers. The coffee cups included a QR code which linked to the foster care page on CareSouth's website for those interested in learning more about becoming carers.

Caroline Ramirez Jones, Campaign Marketing Coordinator, believes that Foster Care Week provides a unique opportunity for CareSouth to acknowledge our amazing foster carers whilst creating essential awareness in the community around the need for carers and what's involved for those who haven't previously considered it or may have misconceptions.

"Our coffee cup campaign opened a new demographic of people for us to engage, who we may not have reached through our other communications channels. The bright pink coffee cups were conversation-starters within the local communities we work in. Seeing everyone with their cups was a lovely way to celebrate our CareSouth carers in those communities," says Caroline.

"The awareness week and coffee cup activation also provided opportunities for us to generate content for our platforms like social media and secure media stories to expand the reach of our Foster Care Week campaign even further."

During September and October 2023 following our Foster Care Week activities, CareSouth received 25 inquiries from prospective foster carers across the footprint.



Tailored solutions create a positive work culture for CareSouth's diverse workforce

CareSouth's growing workforce encompasses staff employed under a diverse set of arrangements, including salaried office work and frontline shift work. All initiatives to support a positive work culture are tailored to fit everyone employed by CareSouth.

One of the most significant initiatives is the How We Work at CareSouth policy. Originally introduced in 2021, the policy allows staff to work from home, access rostered days off (RDO), have flexibility around start and finish times and enjoy concessional leave between Christmas and the New Year.

Some aspects of the policy, like working from home, are only accessible to staff whose roles can facilitate it. It was important to Business Services Manager, Deb Woolley, that the policy be tailored where possible to benefit those employed under different arrangements.

"We've had a very positive response to the How We Work at CareSouth policy. Uptake of working from home, flexible start and finish times and RDO is high among those it is available to, utilised by nearly 66 per cent. We recognise that many CareSouth employees participate in rostered work that involves them needing to be on-site. It was important that we built in ways to give these workers an opportunity to benefit from this policy as well," says Deb.

The People and Culture team identified the three days of concessional leave after Christmas as an aspect of the policy that could be expanded on to provide additional benefits to rostered staff. Roster-based employees or shift workers are entitled to a week of concessional leave per calendar year. Employees entitled to this offering can choose when they wish to take this leave.

"A number of our roster-based employees are not able to take extra leave days over Christmas due to the nature of their roles. We believe it is important to provide these staff with an additional two days of concessional leave, on top of the three offered to salaried employees, and provide flexibility around when this leave can be taken. This addresses the needs of this area of CareSouth's workforce and acknowledges the extra challenges that can come with shift work by providing a specific offering for them to use."

In December 2023, CareSouth launched Deputy, a leading rostering solution offering seamless shift and workforce management to streamline and improve rostering processes. This was introduced to provide extra ease to roster-based employees. It comes with a mobile app that staff can use to view and track shifts and automates several rostering processes for teams.

"The roll out of Deputy was very considerate of the needs of staff who needed to start using it. We set up specific training modules to upskill employees in navigating the platform. Although employees started using Deputy in December, we held off on transitioning payroll processes to the new platform until April. This gave employees a chance to get familiar with Deputy and ease any concerns around disruptions to their pay during the transition period."

Another aspect of the How We Work at CareSouth policy that supports employees are packages offered by partners across a range of services.

"Our providers are proactive in engaging with staff across our footprint. As an example, representatives from our superannuation fund partner HESTA have led discussions at CareSouth about future financial planning.



When we work with providers whose values are aligned with CareSouth, we build a value-proposition for all our employees that goes beyond monetary benefits.

These have been well received as they were tailored to our workforce, like offering strategies to boost superannuation when on parental leave."

"When we work with providers whose values are aligned to CareSouth, we build a value-proposition for all our employees that goes beyond monetary benefits. This is just one way that we care about staff from a holistic perspective and aim to tailor our policies to the unique needs of our workforce," says Deb.

All CareSouth staff can access benefits from our partners including Westpac, HESTA, Benestar, Advantage Plus, Westfund and Flare Benefits.

Employee-led committees champion advocacy and bring CareSouth values to life

CareSouth's vision (Building Better Futures) and values (Courage, Compassion, Relationships, Integrity and Belonging) underpin all the work carried out by teams across the organisation. A primary way these values are embodied is through staff advocating for those CareSouth supports by driving change within the organisation and the broader community. To channel these advocacy efforts, CareSouth created eight committees for staff to provide their unique insight and expertise in building better futures.

In February 2024, CareSouth put a call out to all staff to join the newly established committees. Executive Officer Renee Knight believes that empowering employees to lead these initiatives within the organisation is essential.

"Our employees have an abundance of knowledge and experience that we want to recognise and tap into. These committees were created to give staff a formal platform to have their say in shaping CareSouth's approach towards diversity and inclusion, sustainability, domestic violence, staff wellbeing and more. Everyone at CareSouth is welcome to join the committees. The aim is to have representation from all regions and all roles," says Renee.

The CareSouth committees include:

Diversity and Inclusion aims to guide CareSouth by celebrating the diversity within the organisation across all levels, including governance, policy, training and events.

The committee prioritises the voices of people with lived experiences of diversity, including people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), First Nations Peoples, and people with diverse gender and sexuality. The committee includes staff from all different minority groups, including CALD, Aboriginal and LGBTIQ+ people. They are passionate about human rights and creating social change from within the organisation, local communities and on a bigger scale.

Buwanha aims to strengthen, review and monitor CareSouth's practice with Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities and affect organisational change to better reflect the needs and culture of First Nations Peoples. Buwanha is CareSouth's internal Aboriginal collective consisting of staff who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and one Executive leader. Buwanha is the Wiradjuri word for GROW, as it evolved out of the original Reconciliation Action Plan working group.

Domestic and Family Violence works collectively across CareSouth's regions to raise awareness of the pressing matters relating to domestic violence. They go above and beyond to educate and support CareSouth's staff, clients and families who are experiencing or may be exposed to any form of domestic violence and link them to relevant support networks within their community. The committee also helps to increase awareness within local communities to promote safety through partnerships with Escabags and others.

Our committees are essential in ensuring CareSouth shines a light on what's important to our communities.

Diverse Abilities promotes inclusivity and equal opportunities for people with disability. The committee helps create an inclusive and empowering work environment for people with disability at CareSouth. It aims to promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for people with disability, and firmly believes that everyone deserves a chance to thrive professionally and contribute their unique skills and talents. The committee plays a vital role in shaping policies, driving initiatives and implementing strategies to create a more inclusive workplace for all.

Green Team coordinates the rollout of waste streams at CareSouth, develops initiatives to improve sustainability and educates teams on sustainable and environmental principles and practices. Members are local sustainability and environmental advocates and help champion the green cause at the organisation.

Youth Voices for Change ensures young people can have their say on important decisions that affect them to create positive change. Staff and young people connected to CareSouth aged between 14 and 25 are encouraged to join and help give a voice to our youth.

Wellbeing supports and advocates for staff's overall health, satisfaction, productivity, engagement and more. The committee's members understand the importance of a holistic approach to physical, mental and social health to help us thrive personally and professionally. This committee drives initiatives, implement programs and coordinate social engagements.

CareDogs paves the way for exciting, progressive practice working with specially trained dogs to enrich the lives of children, families, people with disability and staff through therapeutic and emotional support. The committee guides the program's development, implementation and ongoing success.

"Our committees are essential in ensuring CareSouth shines a light on what's important to our communities. The organisation looks to them to shape our approach to key topics and issues that impact our colleagues, communities and those we support," says Renee.

Following its introduction in early 2024, over 60 staff across the footprint have joined at least one committee, with even more engaged in various initiatives and events led by the committees.

Our Year in Review



July 2023: CareSouth celebrates the inaugural National Aunties & Uncles Day brand awareness and recruitment campaign 'Warm Hearts, Warm Feet' on July 26. CareSouth staff, external stakeholders and community members to wear slippers to raise awareness of the early intervention program.

August 2023: CareSouth's Community Participation Disabilities program, in partnership with Bundanon Trust, holds 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. The program culminates with an art exhibition for family and friends in December 2023.

September 2023: CareSouth celebrates Foster Care Week dedicated to carers and their invaluable contribution to improving the lives of children, young people and families. During the week of 10-16 September cafes across our footprint use branded, eco-friendly coffee cups to raise awareness of the need for more foster carers.

October 2023: CareSouth is named Outstanding Therapeutic Residential Care Team at the NSW Youth Work Awards. The Illawarra team is recognised for developing an innovative care model that saw caseworkers, clinicians and support staff provide round-the-clock for five siblings and their mum working towards family restoration.

November 2023: CareSouth joins The United Nations 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, an annual international campaign calling for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

December 2023: CareSouth launches its CareDogs program. CareDogs are support dogs owned by CareSouth who help staff provide a safe, calm environment for children, young people and people with disability.

January 2024: CareSouth's Illawarra foster carers Kate and Matt Foster and Bec and Dan Kennedy are nominated for the Citizen of the Year awards at the City of Wollongong and Shellharbour Community Awards, respectively. This nomination is a testament to their unwavering dedication and the profound impact they have had on the lives of children and young people with CareSouth.



CareSouth Illawarra therapeutic care team accepting NSW Youth Work award for innovative care model.



Above: CareSouth staff taking part in the community awareness walk 'Say NO! to Domestic and Family Violence' in Illawarra organised by Rotary Club Dapto. Right: CareSouth SYSS Team Leader Tony Briggs with a representative from HMAS Albatross, supporters of the "A Couch is Not a Home" Campaign.

February 2024: CareSouth establishes eight internal committees to help shape the organisation's approach to key topics and issues that impact those we support. Committees include Buwanha Aboriginal Collective, Youth Voices for Change, Diversity & inclusion, The Green Team, CareDogs, Domestic & Family Violence and two new committees: Wellbeing and Diverse Abilities. Committees are essential in ensuring CareSouth shines a light on what's important to our communities.

March 2024: CareSouth, in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), expands its support services to provide Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) for young people who are unable to be in traditional foster care and require specialised support. The services will be available in Nowra, Wagga, Orange and Goulburn.

April 2024: CareSouth's Shoalhaven Youth Support Service launches the 'A Couch is Not a Home' campaign on Youth Homelessness Matters Day. CareSouth staff raised awareness of the growing number of young people facing homelessness by swapping their comfy bed for a couch. More than a quarter of homeless youth have been in foster care.



May 2024: Dr Kylie Evans-Locke, CareSouth's Practice, Improvement & Quality (PIQ) Manager, is nominated for a Service Excellence Award at the Association of Children's Welfare Awards (ACWA).

June 2024: CareSouth's PIQ team members Dr Kylie Evans-Locke and Practice Lead, Lauren Pengelly present their Tools Down approach to improving practice to peers at the ACWA conference.

Financial Overview

Financial Performance

Our financial performance is summarised from extracts of the audited financial statements of CareSouth for the period ended 30 June 2024.

Review of Operations

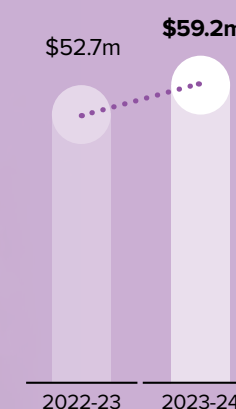
During the year, growth occurred with plans to expand into Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) in new regions like the Central West and Queanbeyan. The organisation has also seen an increase in the service provision of NDIS Supported Independent Living Accommodation.

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 ITC and the NDIS within the regions we operate.

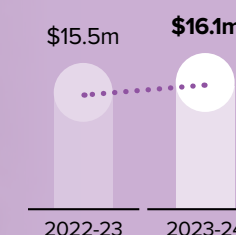
Revenue

12.4%



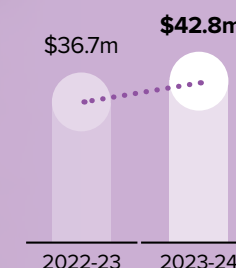
Operating Costs

4.1%



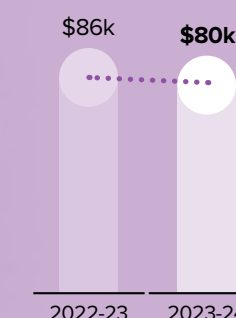
Employee Costs

16.7%



Fundraising and Donations

6.98%





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2023-2024 Annual Report

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CareSouth **EVERYDAY**