

**Sisters of Charity**  
Foundation

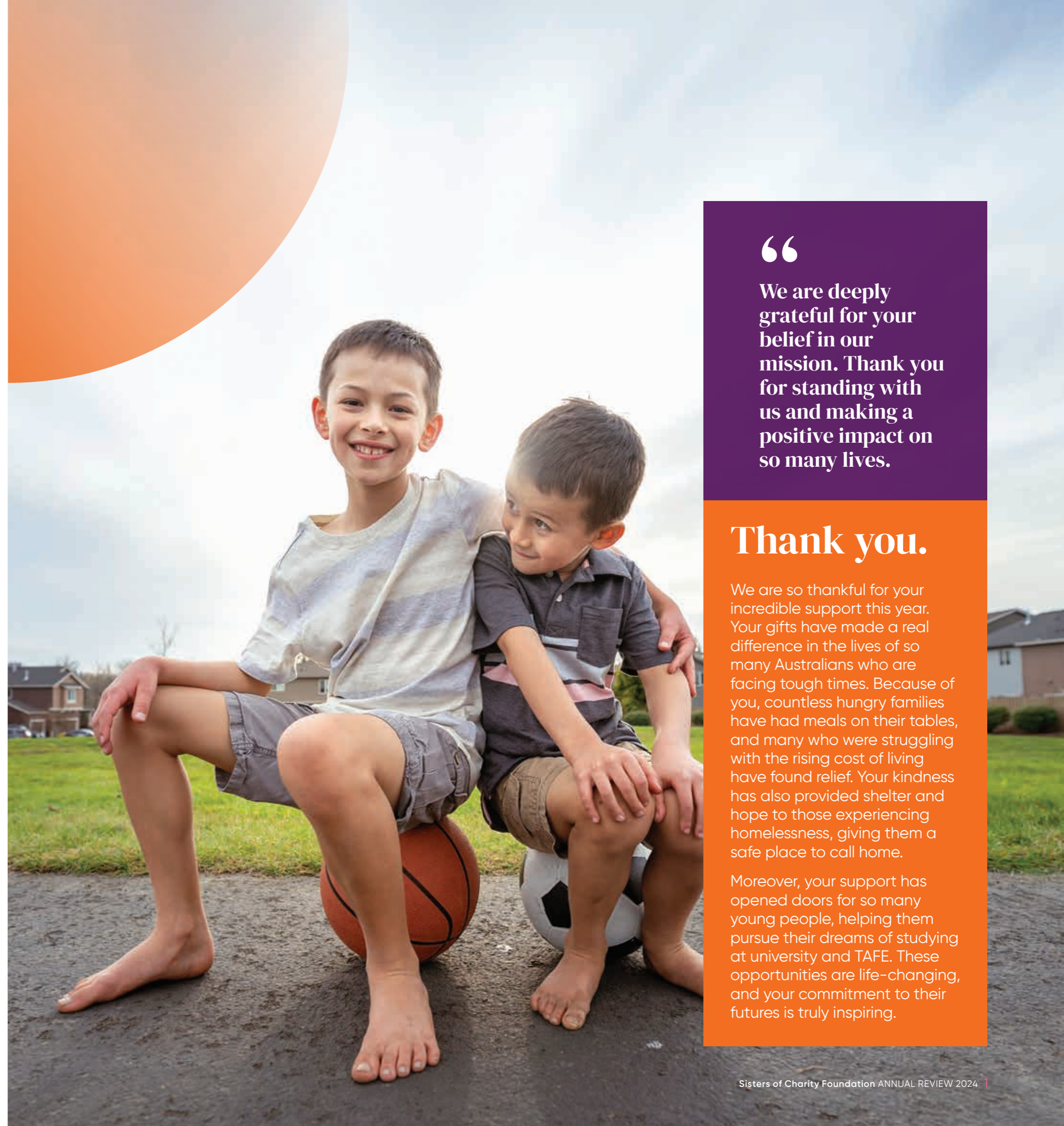


**Annual Review**  
**2023–2024**

## Contents

<b>02</b>	Chair and CEO's Report	
	2023–2024 Impact	<b>03</b>
<b>04</b>	From the Sisters	
	A Perfect Vision	<b>05</b>
<b>06</b>	Community Grants Program	
	Tertiary Scholarship Program	<b>08</b>
<b>10</b>	Baneen Graduates	
	Finding a Safety Net	<b>11</b>
<b>12</b>	Asylum Seekers Housing Program	
	Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program	<b>14</b>
<b>16</b>	Remote and Rural	
	Downs & West Community Support	<b>18</b>
<b>20</b>	Sidney's Story	
	Our History	<b>21</b>

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and express gratitude that we can all share this land today. We share the sorrow for the costs of that sharing, and hope and believe that we can move together to a place of equity, justice, and partnership.



“

We are deeply grateful for your belief in our mission. Thank you for standing with us and making a positive impact on so many lives.

## Thank you.

We are so thankful for your incredible support this year. Your gifts have made a real difference in the lives of so many Australians who are facing tough times. Because of you, countless hungry families have had meals on their tables, and many who were struggling with the rising cost of living have found relief. Your kindness has also provided shelter and hope to those experiencing homelessness, giving them a safe place to call home.

Moreover, your support has opened doors for so many young people, helping them pursue their dreams of studying at university and TAFE. These opportunities are life-changing, and your commitment to their futures is truly inspiring.

# Chair and CEO's Report

The 2023–2024 Annual Review demonstrates the impact of our five programs on some of the most financially disadvantaged and forgotten people in Australia.

Over the past financial year the Community Grants Program has distributed \$599,980 in grant funding to 49 grassroots charities across Australia. These organisations are fully embedded in their communities, responsive to the changing needs of the people they serve, and have a significant impact despite their resources. Our grant recipients witness first-hand the devastation of financial insecurity and marginalisation.

Small charities have been under significant stress this year due to cost-of-living pressures, so we allocated \$482,018 to organisations that support those who are most affected – working in areas such as food relief, homelessness services, domestic violence and education.

Since inception, almost 25 years ago, the Foundation's grants program has distributed more than \$11,089,980 to 1,094+ vital community projects across Australia.

Through the Tertiary Scholarship Program we awarded 14 new scholarships to disadvantaged young people who have grown up in out-of-home care. The program's expansion has resulted in more lifechanging opportunities for these students who, with our closer oversight, we are better able to support – financially, and through introductions to our networks for internships and employment.

We have significantly modified both housing programs this year. The sale of our Berala and Petersham properties will enable us to substantially increase our support to individuals and families seeking asylum through the funding of rental relief payments, crisis accommodation and casework support provided by the Asylum Seekers Centre.

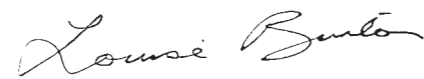
We have increased our financial commitment to the Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program by 30%, as well as the variety of housing options for survivors. Again, this means more people will benefit from the program and find their independence.

Sister Christine Henry and Sister Anne Mayberry continue their on-the-ground work in rural and regional New South Wales and Queensland, ministering to families and farmers who have experienced horrific challenges, from extreme weather events to health problems and isolation. Their personalised, caring support is much needed in these communities, which have suffered the effects of the cost-of-living crisis without the extra services city people are able to access.

We would like to express our deepest thanks to all our supporters for your incredible generosity. Your belief in the mission of the Sisters, carried on through their Foundation, allows us to transform so many lives in Australia for the better.



Juliet Dunworth  
Chair



Louise M Burton  
CEO



# 2023–2024 Impact



## Community Grants Program



We distributed **\$599,980** in grant funding to 49 charities this year, bringing our total to more than **\$11,089,980** provided to **1,094+** community projects across Australia.

## Tertiary Scholarship Program

**26** scholarship recipients have now graduated with a university degree or TAFE diploma, while a further **30** are currently enrolled at institutions across the country.



## Asylum Seekers Housing Program



A total of **177** people seeking asylum have found safe accommodation, casework support and community through the program.

## Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program

**9** survivors received **1,094** hours of casework support centred on finding safe accommodation and independent living this year.



## Community Care: Remote and Rural



Sister Anne Mayberry drove **7,522** kilometres through country and regional New South Wales this year, providing support to **15** schools and organisations in need.

## Community Care: Downs & West Community Support

This year **\$132,176** was provided in financial support, and 21 events were held for **943** country Queenslanders by Sister Christine Henry and her team.





The Sisters of Charity of Australia Congregational Council. From left: Sr Adele Cottrell-Dormer rsc, Sr Tess Marcelo rsc, Congregational Leader Sr Laureen Dixon rsc, Sr Libbey Byrne rsc and Sr Margaret Guy rsc.

“

**“We believe that education can lift people out of poverty, providing them with the skills and opportunities needed to break the cycle of disadvantage.”**

## From the Sisters

As we reflect upon another year of the Sisters of Charity Foundation’s achievements and service, it is fitting to recall the rich history of our Congregation in Australia, a history deeply intertwined with the mission of providing quality education to all, and especially to those most in need.

Since the founding of our first school in 1858, St Vincent’s Primary School in Potts Point, Sydney, our Congregation has been committed to transforming lives through education. Over the decades our Sisters established dozens of schools along the east coast of Australia, each providing quality education and encouraging hope for the future.

We have always believed that education is not merely a tool for knowledge, but a powerful force

for social change. We believe that education can lift people out of poverty, providing them with the skills and opportunities needed to break the cycle of disadvantage. This belief continues to this day, and is present in the Sisters of Charity Foundation’s Tertiary Scholarship Program for young people who have grown up in out-of-home care.

These remarkable individuals, despite facing significant challenges, have shown extraordinary resilience and determination. Without the parental or financial support that many take for granted, they have pursued their dreams and are building fulfilling careers in fields as diverse as nursing, engineering, agriculture and social work.

On behalf of our Congregation, I would like to congratulate this year’s graduates: Bailey, Baneen, Danny, Gracie, and Lilly. Since 2012, when the scholarship program began, 26 students have now graduated with a university degree,

TAFE diploma or equivalent. There are a further 30 currently enrolled at institutions around the country; and we enjoy hearing regular updates about their goals, progress, and challenges. We are proud that these bright and motivated students are receiving the resources and encouragement they need to succeed.

Our Congregation is very grateful for the Sisters of Charity Foundation’s responses to serving those who are poor and marginalised. Along with the scholarship program, many small community grants have been given across Australia to provide help, support and encouragement in these difficult times.

Every blessing,

**Laureen Dixon rsc**  
Congregational Leader

## A Perfect Vision

John’s Vision used its Community Grant to provide free eye testing and glasses to people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage in the northern suburbs of Perth.

The story of how John’s Vision came to be is both heartbreaking and inspiring.

“When it was really bad I felt so ashamed and worthless that I couldn’t even look at my own reflection without crying... some days I didn’t even feel human,” says John’s Vision Founder and Chairman Moses Chandran.

Moses was battling alcohol addiction, and experiencing shame and depression as he tried to get sober. It dragged on for months, with Moses losing all hope. “I started to think real dark thoughts,” he admits. “What is the point of living like this? It all felt so meaningless.”

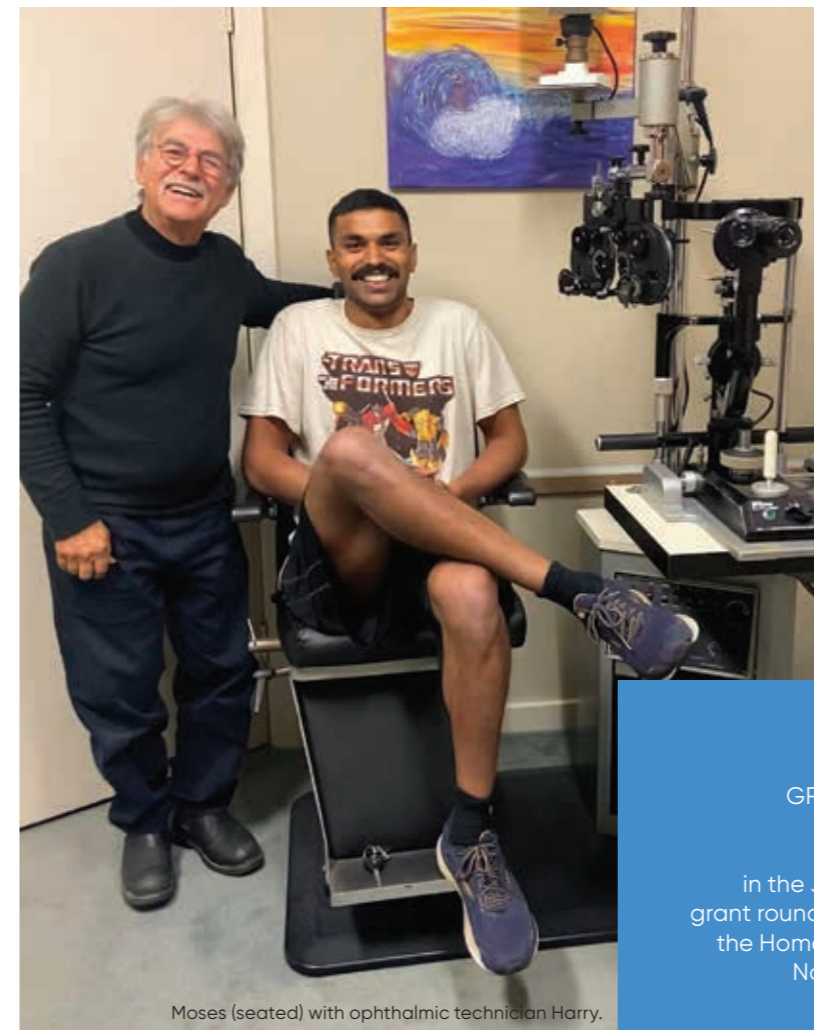
Then Moses’ brother, John, gave him some advice that would prove a turning point.

“He told me my life has meaning regardless of what I’m going through,” Moses recalls. “My value is not situational, it’s intrinsic and can’t be taken away from

me. He told me I won’t find meaning in life pursuing achievements, money and other frivolous things. He said I’d find it in helping and serving others... He was right.”

These words led Moses, an optometrist, to found a charity that would serve others. Now, Moses and the John’s Vision team of volunteer optometrists travel to soup kitchens and community centres around Perth with mobile optometry equipment, providing accessible eye care to those most in need.

“We hope to reduce rates of correctable and avoidable blindness; by providing glasses to people with refractive errors; and detecting undiagnosed ocular disease, such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy,” Moses explains. “We believe that good and clear vision should not depend on someone’s financial or living situation.”



Moses (seated) with ophthalmic technician Harry.

### Seeing clearly

Despite going through multiple eye surgeries before the age of eight to correct lazy eyes caused by past trauma, John’s Vision client Jody remains resilient. At her appointment she said she was finding it difficult to read small print, including on her mobile. She was joyful while choosing frames – a new pair of glasses had her grinning from ear to ear!



#### GRANT DETAILS

**\$11,500**  
in the January 2024 grant round to help fund the Homeless Eyecare North program.



# Community Grants Program

Providing grants of up to \$15,000 to innovative community projects that break down social isolation and alleviate the impact of poverty on individuals and families.

The current cost-of-living crisis in Australia is severely impacting individuals and families on the lower end of the socio-economic scale. In response, we have distributed \$482,018 over the past financial year to small charities dedicated to assisting those affected.

This financial strain is evident in the applications we receive for our grants program, which highlight the greatest areas of need. We have identified food relief programs and services supporting individuals experiencing homelessness as top priorities. To address these urgent needs, we allocated \$160,200 to ensure that vulnerable people

do not go hungry. Additionally, we provided \$71,500 to organisations working in the area of homelessness, offering crucial practical support and compassion to those without stable housing.

Through these targeted efforts, we aim to alleviate some of the immediate hardships caused by cost-of-living pressures and provide a measure of relief to those most in need.

We are proud that the grants program has now distributed more than \$11,089,980 to 1,094+ community projects since the Foundation began in 2000.

## Teaching empathy to the next generation

Bowen Community Technology Centre used its \$10,000 Community Grant to run a children's program, designed to curb violence and bullying in the local area.

Bowen is one of the most disadvantaged and geographically isolated social housing areas of Orange, where a significant number of children have been taught to speak with their fists and feet or bully each other in the local park.

The RONAN Project – 'Respect Others, No judgement, All empathy, No shame in asking for help' – helps children build anger-management skills, resilience and community connectedness, and respect for themselves and others.

"This photo was taken after a hard game of basketball," says Bowen CTC Founder Paula Townsend. "The kids seem to enjoy Thursdays where they can share any concerns and their happiness around the table with the group."

Ms Townsend, who founded the centre in 2011 and still manages it today, was named 2024 Orange Woman of the Year. "It feels amazing knowing people think I do okay work," she says. "I feel very humbled."



## Program Highlights

**204** ORGANISATIONS APPLIED FOR FUNDING

118 in July 2023  
86 in January 2024

**49** ORGANISATIONS RECEIVED A COMMUNITY GRANT

28 in July 2023  
21 in January 2024

**\$599,980**

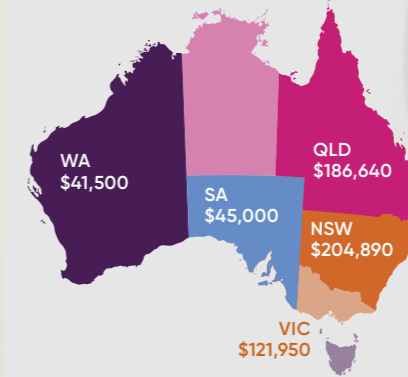
GIVEN IN GRANT FUNDING

\$330,390 in July 2023  
\$269,590 in January 2024

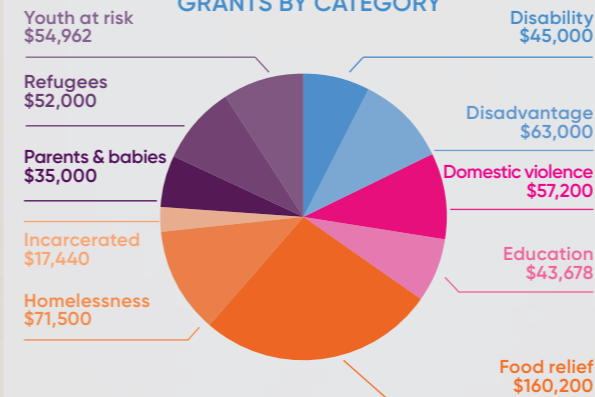
**\$482,018**

GIVEN TO ORGANISATIONS THAT HELP PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

GRANTS ACROSS AUSTRALIA



GRANTS BY CATEGORY



**\$11,089,980 +**

GIVEN TO

**1,094 +**

COMMUNITY PROJECTS SINCE 2000

## Creating a village

A \$10,000 Community Grant helped The Babes Project bring older women together with young vulnerable new mums to share a meal, encouragement, advice and learning.

"Everyone says it takes a village to raise a child, but what am I supposed to do if I don't have a village?" said a young new mother and client of The Babes Project, which assists at-risk pregnant women and new mums via educational workshops and material aid.

To help grow the village, fortnightly lunches bring together mums and babies with volunteer 'nanas', who prepare food and help with the babies, while staff present educational content. It's a dynamic, safe and supportive space for women to meet others in the early stages of parenting, while giving older female volunteers the opportunity to connect with younger generations.



# Tertiary Scholarship Program

Helping young people from out-of-home care backgrounds transform their lives through tertiary education.

The rising cost of living has been a major concern for our scholarship students over the past year. The flexibility of the program has helped alleviate some of this pressure, as our students don't have to restrict financial support to costs associated with their studies. Although some have reported using part of their scholarship to replace unsuitable laptops and purchase textbooks, the majority have needed it to pay their rent, bills, and groceries.

We have begun surveying our students annually, and are thrilled to report that 95% said the scholarship helped alleviate a great deal of stress, while 99% said they felt very supported by the Foundation.

"Since we started managing most scholarships in-house in 2022, we've had much closer relationships with the students," says Program Development Manager Estelle Muller. "This has allowed us to better understand their challenges, celebrate their successes and offer additional support whenever we can.

"We have been able to draw on our wide network to provide opportunities; a part-time job for one student, an internship for another – we even connected a student with one of our previous Community Grant recipients to arrange suitable clothing for them to wear to Youth Parliament in Victoria.

"But most of all, for these students – who don't have many supportive adults in their lives – knowing that the Foundation is looking out for them and encouraging them makes a huge difference."

## Andre

Andre is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) at Western Sydney University.



"After my four-month internship with Abergeldie finished in April, I was delighted to receive a call from them offering me a casual position as Trainee Engineer.

I'm working on the T-way Cycleway project at Constitution Hill. We are on site and have a small demountable office in the middle of the compound. For me, I've found the moments spent outside on the site – after having found solutions to problems – have been the most rewarding. I enjoy getting on the tools whenever I can; for example, learning how to use a surveyor's laser and level rod or getting to use a bull float to finish the surface levels of concrete.

Managing 30 hours a week at Abergeldie with 30 credit points of study has kept me busy for sure! The Project Manager, Johnathon, has been great in fostering a schedule that works around my busy week of study. I'm very fortunate to have gotten in with such a supportive team and certainly do my very best to return the favour in my diligence and work ethic."



## Jackie

Jackie is in her first year of a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Canberra.

"If I were to describe myself in three words, I would say that I am a very kind, sporty, and adventurous person. I love being outdoors, hanging out with friends, playing sports, and going on long hikes or runs with a good view. In school I was one of those students who tried too hard in sports classes. I hate being stuck in a classroom, I always loved being outside and doing something that is hands-on and practical.

My dream career would be to work as an exercise physiologist, because I know how important physical health is for people to live their best lives. Helping individuals feel better, without injury or worry, is something I hope to do. Being able to learn and one day teach what I love doing in life excites me and keeps me looking forward to completing this degree.

When I received the phone call to inform me that I had won the scholarship the first feeling I had was a complete sense of relief and excitement because I immediately knew that I wouldn't have to worry so much about money while trying to pass my units. So far I've been using it to pay for rent, groceries, utilities, and other university expenses; which has helped me stay focused on my degree, as during exam periods I can cut down on shifts at work without worrying about any financial problems."

*We would like to thank The Snow Foundation for supporting students, like Jackie, in the Canberra region.*

## Korrine

Korrine completed a Diploma in Youth Work at TAFE Mt Druitt and will soon commence her placement.



"At school I was rather reserved. I love to write anything from poetry to random stories about absolutely nothing. It's become my healthy coping mechanism over the years.

I went through foster care as a teen, so now I want to help young people. I want to use my experiences and turn them into motivation to help show other young people that, even if they can't see it, there's a light at the end of the tunnel. I always knew I wanted to work with youth in some way.

Long term I plan to study social work. I've had numerous ideas about what to study over the years, but social work is the one that stuck with me. Youth work is a good stepping stone to that. I plan to take a year away from education to work and then start university.

I found out I'd won a scholarship on my birthday of all days. I'd just ordered dinner and was having a movie night. I was a little surprised!

I used the scholarship funds to help me move which was great, it took some of the pressure off. I also replaced my laptop since my old one was giving me issues – so that was an expense that I didn't have to think too much about thanks to the scholarship. After that I could comfortably do my assessments without worrying if my laptop was going to shut down."

## Program Highlights



**5** STUDENTS GRADUATED in 2023–2024



**14** STUDENTS AWARDED NEW SCHOLARSHIPS for university and TAFE courses this year

### CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S GRADUATES!

**Bailey**  
Cert III Information, Digital Media and Technology  
TAFE Qld

**Baneen**  
Doctor of Medicine  
Western Sydney University

**Danny**  
Bachelor of Nursing  
University of South Australia

**Gracie**  
Bachelor of Laws  
Deakin University

**Lilly**  
Diploma of Live Production and Technical Services  
Academy of Film, Theatre and Television, Ultimo

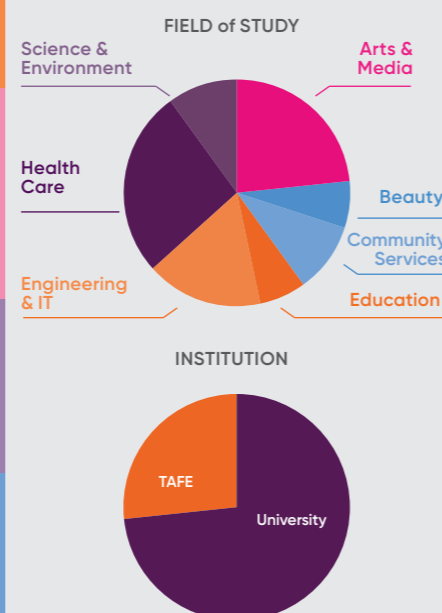
**26** STUDENTS HAVE GRADUATED WITH a university degree, TAFE diploma or equivalent since 2012

**100%** OF STUDENTS SURVEYED said they were able to focus more on their studies as a result of the scholarship

**95%** OF STUDENTS SURVEYED said the scholarship helped alleviate a great deal of stress

**99%** OF STUDENTS SURVEYED said they felt very supported by the Foundation

**OUR 30 ENROLLED STUDENTS**



# Baneen Graduates



Our scholarship recipient Baneen graduated with a Doctor of Medicine from Western Sydney University in June 2024.

"This year, I began working as a junior doctor at Albury Base Hospital. I have completed rotations in General Surgery and General Medicine. My year has been immensely enjoyable, and I've had the privilege of working alongside experienced clinicians who have guided and mentored me.

Transitioning from student to intern has been a significant and enjoyable experience. While challenging at times due to new responsibilities and the need to navigate various personalities – whether patients, family members, or colleagues – it has been incredibly rewarding. I've had the pleasure of working with many patients. I also serve as the intern representative for the Postgraduate Medical Council of Victoria at Albury Base and the intern representative for the hospital's Junior Doctor's Society.

The scholarship also afforded me the luxury of time to pursue extracurricular activities, enriching my university experience. This enabled me to do things like serve as the vice chair of a national organisation and to undertake an elective placement in Bangladesh.

Thank you for your support throughout medical school. The impact of the scholarship is evident in my ability to complete medical school and excel in my extracurricular activities. Attending graduation was a wonderful experience, especially as the first person in my family to attend university. Your support has truly made a difference in my life."

“

**“The scholarship has opened many doors for me, both personally and professionally. Knowing that someone believes in you is incredibly empowering.”**

# Finding a Safety Net

Seven years ago, Aaliyah and her husband fled unimaginable dangers in their home country, seeking asylum and a chance at a safer life in Australia.

Aaliyah\* appreciates Australia's natural beauty, multicultural society, and the warm, welcoming nature of the people. However, the family lives without a safety net – no financial assistance, no childcare subsidy, and no housing support.

The couple work many hours in unstable jobs with fluctuating incomes. They juggle opposite shifts – Aaliyah in a factory at night and her husband during the day – to ensure that one of them is always there to care for their young son, Aaron\*. Their weekly earnings, averaging around \$1,000, are quickly consumed by rent, food, medicine, and other essentials, leaving little room for unforeseen expenses. Childcare, a critical need, costs \$700 per week – far beyond their financial reach.

For this family, the cost of surviving is not only counted in money, but in their time, sleep, energy, mental health, and the welfare of their son. "My child needs more from me but I'm always so tired I can't even leave our apartment," Aaliyah says. "He's only little and he always misses out."

Walking through the doors of the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) for the first time, the family felt immediate relief. They met dedicated family support caseworker Alison,

who offered them mental health care, social support, job search assistance, English lessons at TAFE, Opal cards, and referred them to a specialist legal service.

"My burden went away when I spoke to Alison. She didn't judge, just helped us," says Aaliyah. "I was so relieved I had found a place that could offer support during this challenging time in my life. The hope that ASC represented, with its resources and service to help people like me rebuild our lives, filled me with optimism for the future."

Most critically, Alison helped find subsidised childcare for Aaron. "I have noticed some wonderful changes in my son since he started going to daycare," Aaliyah says. "His love for singing and dancing has really blossomed, and it's delightful to see him express himself through music and movement... He's made friends, he's excited to go each day. The staff are so caring and really make me feel part of the community."

The positive impact on Aaron's development brings immense joy to Aaliyah and her husband, strengthening their bond as a family beginning to thrive in a new place.

\*Names changed for privacy reasons.

## A call for compassion

Right now, there are countless such families in Australia in similar precarious financial situations. In the current cost-of-living crisis, they could be plunged into destitution at any moment.

Aaliyah calls for understanding for people seeking asylum. "By working together, we can create a more compassionate and inclusive society that upholds the values of dignity, equality, and solidarity for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances," she says.



# Asylum Seekers Housing Program

## Providing safe accommodation and welfare services to people seeking asylum, together with the Asylum Seekers Centre.

In three decades, the Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC) has never witnessed global displacement and local poverty on the scale we face today. The twin cost-of-living and housing crises have had a significant impact on people seeking asylum, with many struggling to cover essentials such as rent and groceries.

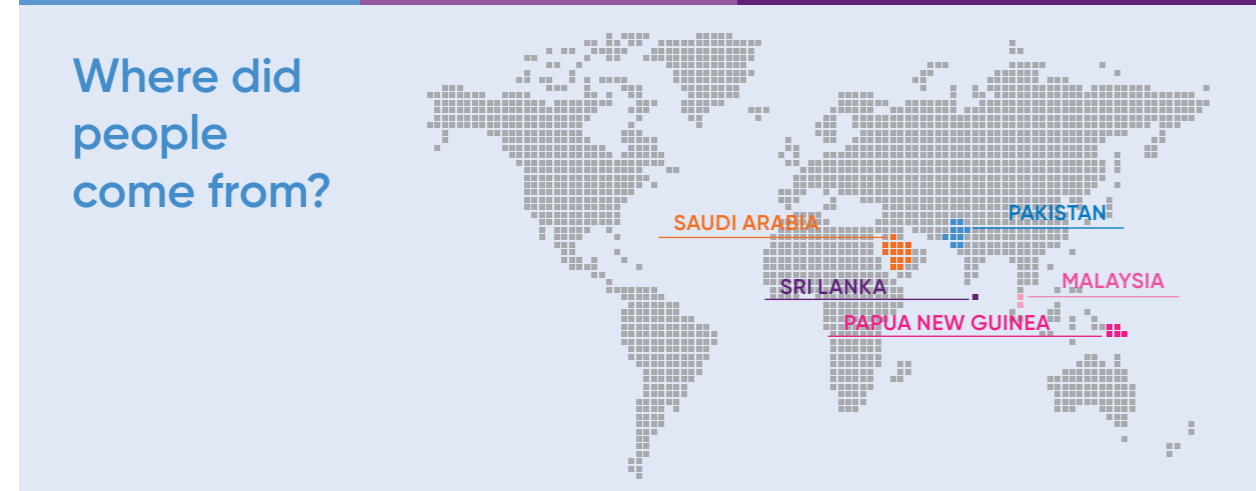
There has been a steep increase in the number of people living in temporary, overcrowded accommodation, as well as many cases of people sleeping rough. The risk of homelessness is detrimental to their welfare and mental health, which in turn can impact their capacity to lodge and progress their applications for protection. With protracted wait times for outcomes on these claims – that often stretch years – many

are experiencing a deterioration in their mental health, with no access to a safety net while they are trapped in visa limbo.

The properties at Petersham and Berala were sold toward the end of the past financial year, and the Foundation is using the funds raised to support an increased number of families and individuals. By providing rental relief payments, and helping fund crisis accommodation and casework support through the ASC, these changes to the program will have a greater impact.

We are continuing to work closely with the ASC to support those seeking asylum.

## Program Highlights ▾



## Q&A with ASC Intensive Support Caseworker Marina Camarão

### How do caseworkers help clients find housing?

If someone is being exploited by their landlord, we make sure to provide them with information and connect them with appropriate services, such as their local tenancy advice line. We also help them, where possible, to keep their tenancy, particularly given the difficult rental market in Sydney.

If the person is experiencing homelessness, we may be able to provide respite and offer them a hostel booking. During the week they are accommodated, we work closely with them to find pathways towards more sustainable solutions. This includes referring them to organisations to address their main needs, which might surround mental health concerns, legal barriers, alcohol and other drugs use, employment loss and many others.

ASC also provides short-term financial assistance, and for some people we support this will be the best pathway for them to secure a stable job and move towards financial independence.

### Tell us about a client that you helped find accommodation.

A community member presented to us experiencing homelessness. Despite his vulnerable mental health, he showed strong motivation to improve his circumstances. We booked him into a hostel for a week and connected him with an acute mental health team and an outreach service for problematic alcohol use. This first step led him to detox and showed a marked improvement in his mental health.

To support his journey to recovery, we extended his hostel accommodation another week, during which he worked with our Employment Services team on his resume and cover letter. We then started to provide short-term financial assistance, which allowed him time to job search and secure employment.

We provided the client with resources to look for a house, and empowered him to do it independently, helping to build his capacity for the future. After much searching, the client was able to find a room in a boarding house.

### Why should all Australians care about the wellbeing of people seeking asylum?

People seeking asylum are human beings, just like all of us. Humanity is what unites us. I think that one day spent talking to those we support would make anyone care deeply.

People seeking asylum have a lot to contribute to the Australian community, across their diversity, their creative ways of solving problems, the innovation brought from other countries, their qualifications, their resilience, and their immense will to make this place home. The people we work with want to make Australia a better place, and for that, their wellbeing is hugely important!



# Modern Slavery Transitional Housing Program

## Providing transitional housing and casework support to survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking, together with The Salvation Army.

The program's model was designed preceding COVID-19, the current escalation of the housing crisis, and a significant rise in the cost of living. Participants now face an extremely competitive rental market with limited options due to affordability. Their experience of modern slavery means they have additional constraints when looking for accommodation as wellbeing and safety is a priority: for example; dark, confined spaces can be upsetting.

In the past financial year the program was adapted and expanded to combat these challenges. Available accommodation now includes share housing, affordable housing, public housing and similar low-cost options. Survivors may now also access casework support focused on housing (for example learning about tenancy rights and how to look and apply for properties), independent living and community connection – regardless of their ability to immediately take on a private rental.

Sourcing safe and stable accommodation is key to a survivor's recovery journey. These changes will result in more people being helped to find their independence and happiness, and avoid further exploitation.

## Journey to independence

MSTHP Program Manager Melina Matthia on one client's experience moving out on their own.

Rachel\* entered the program and managed to secure a rental within a fortnight, in a studio apartment by herself. She attended a lot of inspections and demonstrated high motivation to find a place to live, on her own, as soon as possible.

Rachel's experience confirmed that it's so important for people to enter the program when they're ready – and not just in terms of having steady employment – but also in regards to their mental health, and knowing what they want and where they want to live. It definitely helps when people are in a better head space because you have to make time to inspect properties on Wednesdays and Saturdays, even though you're probably working a lot. You also have to be equipped to face rejection after rejection; it can be a difficult process for some of our clients. They need to be advanced enough in their recovery journey, otherwise it can be scary to leave the safe house.

As for Rachel, she used the program's \$1,500 set-up fund to purchase a bed, bedding, fridge, microwave and other household items. Once clients have spent that money we help them get anything else they may need through organisations that donate furniture.

The situation is still quite fresh and new but she's doing well. However, nothing is linear – there could be setbacks or challenges down the road, which is why we provide her a caseworker to monitor and offer support if needed.

As long as people are in the program they receive at least fortnightly contact. When we renew their lease we do an inspection of the property, it's a good chance to ensure they're working towards their goals in other areas aside from housing. We also use this time to ensure they're becoming a strong rental applicant in their own right.

When they have six more months left in the program we start having conversations about what's next. Would they like to take over the lease if the real estate agent approves, and the rent remains similar? When three months are left in the program we start that conversation with the agent.

\*Name changed for privacy reasons.



## How does the program work?

The Foundation provides funding to program participants to set up their new homes and cover a significant portion of their rent for nine to 12 months, and to The Salvation Army to employ a dedicated caseworker. The caseworker helps survivors secure an independent living situation, educates them on their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, ensures their general health and wellbeing, and guides them toward independence.

## Program Highlights

9

modern slavery survivors assisted this year



1,094

hours of casework support provided this year



5

survivors have completed the program to achieve independence since launch



# Remote and Rural

**Part of Community Care, this ministry is led by Sister Anne Mayberry rsc, and provides support to families in remote, rural and regional New South Wales who have been badly affected by droughts, bushfires, floods and general economic downturn.**

Every year Sister Anne drives from Liverpool in Sydney through country New South Wales and back multiple times, taking donated goods and cheques to schools and other organisations in need. She has developed close relationships with the principals of these rural and regional schools, who know they can call her for help and receive what they need – whether it's books and toys for the students or money for families experiencing hardship.

If groceries or other essentials are needed, Sister Anne purchases them in the local area, so as to benefit the township and surrounding community.

Schools in rural NSW face unique challenges, often related to their isolation and the declining population in farming communities. With fewer students enrolling each year, many struggle to maintain sufficient resources and staff. Access to education is further hindered by the lack of specialist teachers and limited extracurricular opportunities, affecting students' academic and personal growth.

"The principal from St. James in Muswellbrook phoned in May and requested financial help for three families in substantial need," says Sister Anne. "I sent a cheque for \$3,000 knowing it would help to alleviate their needs somewhat."

"Around the same time, the deputy principal from St. Patrick's Gundagai phoned, asking for some financial help to allow the Year 5 and 6 children to take part in an excursion to Sydney. For most of these children, Sydney was just a word. The school had been holding fundraising activities throughout the year, so as to lower the cost for families. A couple of families had children in both grades. I sent \$3,000 to them."



Sister Anne with students from St Patrick's Primary School Gundagai.



## Merdenbrook

A journey well known –  
along quieter roads.  
Grateful to again enjoy  
the beauty of our earth.

Solid mountains.  
Open fields, tall pines.  
A fuller Dam Windamere this time around.  
A joy to see.

Vineyards clothed in fresh foliage.  
Shelter to woolly lawn mowers,  
manicuring grasses below vines.

Mudgee, abuzz with shoppers.

Nearing Merriwa –  
a forlorn landscape is painted  
with dry dams, failed Canola crops, few stock.  
'For Sale' signs dot the highway.

Grateful, smiling faces – a change of pace.  
'Come to my place for a cuppa'.  
We could only be in the bush.  
Irrigated crops a welcome sight.

Onto the denuded lands of mining  
which hold secrets of an unknown future.  
Tarnished, steel structures,  
testament to years of hard labour.  
Standing like sentinels  
midst the heavy green foliage.

No smiling Moon today!  
Gifts left to cheer little children.

Homeward bound!  
Grateful for our sunburnt country.  
Yet concern for those who toil  
to earn a living  
and give us food as in days gone by.

Onto the freeway come speedway.  
Wondering why the rush.  
Taking time to notice life on the verges.  
Thankful for another chance  
to bring some joy, love, laughter  
to friends along the way.

*Written by Sister Anne Mayberry. 'Merdenbrook' is based on Merriwa, Denman and Muswellbrook.*

### This year's highlights



7,522

kilometres travelled through country NSW

15

schools and organisations assisted

\$21,600

provided in cheques, groceries, school supplies and other essentials to families experiencing disadvantage

# Downs & West Community Support

Led by Sister Christine Henry rsc, DWCS provides support to farming families and their communities in rural southern Queensland who are severely affected by climatic conditions or family matters beyond their control.

"By way of warm-hearted encouragement and compassionate pastoral care or discreet and personalised practical support, each year, many farming families and communities in southern Queensland can overcome problems that appeared to have no solution, thereby growing and flourishing once again," says DWCS Advisory Committee Chair Chris Muir.

"Bushfires in the Western and Southern Downs regions last October saw 130 dwellings lost and more than 20,500 hectares burnt. Later in summer there was flooding which caused road closures, shut down schools and businesses, destroyed fields, disabled machinery, reduced crop yields, and damaged homes. Heat waves and extended periods of high humidity have damaged crops and impacted people's health, and the rising cost of living continues to place enormous pressure on many farming families and rural communities. It has been another very busy year for Sr Christine and her wonderful band of volunteers who assist in this ministry."

"Our books show 2,340 recorded hours were provided by individual volunteers, both male and female," says Sr Christine. "The generosity of our volunteers is awe-inspiring. They freely choose to share their time, skills, energy and enthusiasm."

"Our volunteers help us to sort through in-kind donations; wrap gifts; pack hampers; create exquisite patchwork quilts, sew, knit, or crochet items; with office duties and organising fundraising events."



## Personal, loving care

Often, through no fault of their own, people find they are unable to see light at the end of the tunnel. They need a hand-up through these extremely difficult times. These are stories from just two families, of many, that DWCS has supported.

### An unexpected surprise

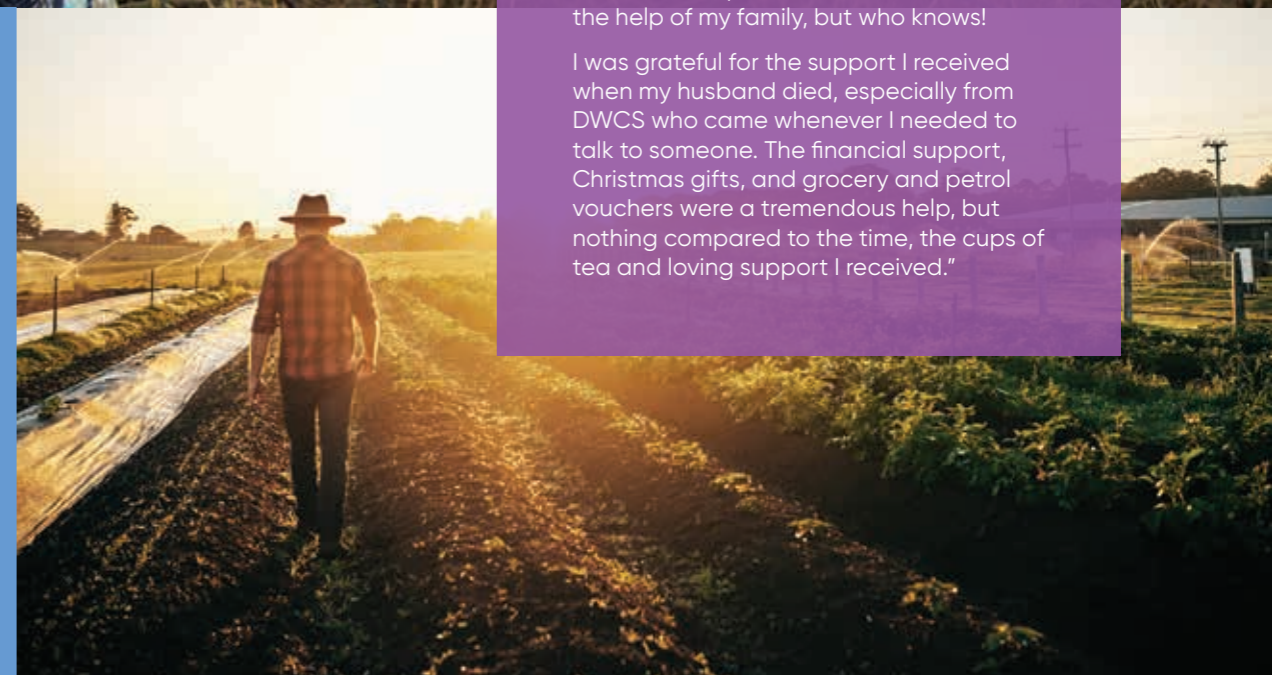
"Last year when I wanted to enrol the boys in soccer, I did not realise how expensive it would be. I worried about how I might afford it. This year I've had many trips to specialists in the city for my complex eye problem and knee problem – all costly. I had a knee replacement which meant I could not work, so I was worried about how to pay bills.

Money from DWCS has appeared in my bank account both times – a pleasant surprise, but extremely well timed! The work they do to help people like me is truly amazing. God bless you all."

### Finding the strength to go on

"Ah, I couldn't believe that our life changed forever! I was lost, lonely, confused and the grief I felt when I lost my husband in a farm accident was enormous. Words cannot adequately express how I felt and still feel to an extent. But I must be strong for my two young children and make the best decision for our future together. I love the farm, and I hope to be able to run it, with the help of my family, but who knows!

I was grateful for the support I received when my husband died, especially from DWCS who came whenever I needed to talk to someone. The financial support, Christmas gifts, and grocery and petrol vouchers were a tremendous help, but nothing compared to the time, the cups of tea and loving support I received."



## This year's highlights

\$132,176

provided in community support payments



33,526

kilometres driven through rural southern Queensland



13

Wellness through Learning and Creativity Days hosted for 313 women



5

Mental Health Days co-hosted for 265 men



2

Family Bush Christmas Days held for 335 adults and children



1

Dragonfly Health and Wellness Retreat hosted for 30 country women



## Sidney's Story

Sid was a healthy little boy, enjoying everything that active five-year-old farm kids do, until one day, life changed in the blink of an eye.

"It was a typical weekday afternoon," recalls Sidney's mum, Brie. "I'd had a flat-out day picking up hay to try and keep up with the drought feeding. I was heading to the poddy pen when I heard a cry, the kind of cry you know instantly as a mum that's going to be a bit more than a scuffed knee."

Sidney has refractory epilepsy and the injury that day was just one of many caused by unpredictable drop seizures. The seizures started in 2023, and quickly increased in frequency and severity. Sidney underwent tests and started taking medication, but the seizures persisted.

"He was constantly twitching, his arms would jerk uncontrollably – sending pens, porridge-filled spoons and toys into his face," says Brie. "He was experiencing drop seizures so often it was easier and safer for him to stay on the couch watching tv, something foreign to this little farm kid."

The family eventually managed to see a neurologist, who instructed them to head straight to the Queensland Children's Hospital in Brisbane, a four-hour trip from home, for better control and treatment. Sidney

spent 11 days in hospital: undergoing several blood tests, an MRI, 24-hour EEG monitoring and a lumbar puncture.

"We had a very special visit from Sister Christine in the hospital and her presence was a much-needed lifeline for both Sid and I," says Brie. "Calming, reassuring, compassionate – Sid didn't have many positive interactions after months of medical staff, so to see him embrace Christine on one of his more challenging days was just such a wonderful moment."

Downs & West Community Support has assisted the family with Christmas gifts, prepaid travel vouchers, and financial and pastoral support, and will continue to help the family as they anxiously seek a treatment that improves Sidney's quality of life.

"The support from Downs and West has been invaluable for helping us through this tough time. This is made only tougher by drought, rising living costs and numerous specialist appointments and hospital trips far away from our little farm," says Brie. "Things will get better. One way or another, things will get better."

Sid enjoys a much-needed cuddle with Sister Christine at the hospital.



## Our History

**"May we never act contrary to justice and truth – and may we be guided by charity in all our actions and words."**

– Mary Aikenhead

Moved by the plight of the needy in Ireland, in 1815 Mary Aikenhead founded the Sisters of Charity to serve those living in poverty.

The order was unenclosed, to allow the Sisters to walk with the poor and marginalised, offering practical relief and spiritual nourishment.

When Bishop Polding sent a request to Mary Aikenhead asking her to send Sisters to the most neglected portion of the Catholic world, she responded by appointing five volunteer Sisters to Australia. Mother Mary John Cahill, Sister Mary John Baptist De Lacy, Sister Mary Xavier Williams, Sister Mary Lawrence Cater and Sister Mary Francis de Sales O'Brien arrived in Sydney on the last day of 1838.

These heroic and courageous women began their ministry in Australia by assisting the convict women in the female factory at Parramatta. There were few good roads then and so the Sisters walked everywhere, from hospitals and orphanages to schools and gaols.

From these humble beginnings the Sisters of Charity have continued to answer the call to ministry across a wide range of social welfare activities.

In order to continue the mission and traditions of the Sisters of Charity of Australia, specifically to the service of the poor, the Congregational Leader and Council established the Sisters of Charity Foundation in 2000. The Foundation continues to take the history and values of the Sisters forward through our social justice programs.



# Compassion. Hope. Practical Assistance.

*In the tradition of the Sisters of Charity*

Sisters of Charity Foundation  
Level 7 / 35 Grafton St Bondi Junction NSW 2022  
(02) 9367 1211  
[info@sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au](mailto:info@sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au)  
[sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au](http://sistersofcharityfoundation.org.au)

 @Sisters of Charity Foundation  
 @socfstories  
 @sisters-of-charity-foundation  
 @SOCFAustralia