

**WE CARE
CONNECT**

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



“ Sorry for the huge order and the urgency, although this single mum has nothing. The whole family is upset and distraught. ”

Local Case Worker

5,541

CHILDREN SUPPORTED



FY23 IMPACT

163,915

items re-homed

valued at over

\$1.5m

1109

cubic metres of nursery items saved from landfill, the equivalent of **7,918** red bins!

16,351

children supported since 2016

140

volunteers donated **31,464** volunteer hours, valued at over **\$1.1m**

On average we deliver **\$489** of value to each child at the cost of **\$42** per child.

WE DISTRIBUTED

181 prams

106 cots

194 car seats

64 bassinets

1329 packets of nappies

103,304 clothing items

62 high chairs

1228 birthday presents

584 Back 2 School packs

14,619 Christmas gifts

We are partnering with

525 case workers, **67**

support agencies, **20** drop off locations



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Another year of growth and significant achievements have solidified our presence within the Central Coast and Hunter regions. We Care Connect is now a well known and established charity with donors and organisations reaching out to offer their assistance to support us in achieving our goals.



The move to our new Central Coast warehouse has been a great initiative. The space provided has certainly enhanced the work practices of our volunteers and provided a better environment for all involved. It was an enormous undertaking to prepare the building and shift all the stock and equipment and this was undertaken in great spirit. The Central Coast coordinator, Christine, is to be congratulated for the planning and execution of this mammoth task.

The Hunter warehouse is functioning well with initial Hunter coordinator, Kath, establishing excellent practices and recruiting new volunteers. Sarah, who is currently in this position, has succeeded in growing our presence in the Hunter region. The newly founded coordinator roles have allowed us to coordinate and replicate good practice in both our warehouses.

Early in 2023 the board held a meeting day to devise our new Strategic Plan. We were capably led through this process by Gerri, one of our volunteers, and have now planned our way forward for the next three years. I encourage you to visit our website to review the Strategic Plan.

The key pillars that underpin our operation are now deeply imbedded in all the personnel involved in We Care Connect. We are a volunteer driven organisation determined to provide quality items to needy children and their families. Community support is growing exponentially as we expand our footprint and network. I extend the Board's gratitude to the Wyong Roos Foundation for their ongoing generosity. I am forever impressed by our committed and generous sponsors, volunteers, and support organisations.

The Board is seeking to strengthen and expand its membership following the resignation of Janice Smith. Janice was an original Board member and provided support and community contacts during the establishment of the charity and her impact was significant. Thank you Janice. I would like to extend my thanks to all of our Board members for your commitment and dedication.

To Derryck, Jackie and Helen, thank you for your leadership, governance and fundraising efforts respectively. In conclusion, I continue to be inspired by the enthusiasm and vision of our CEO, Derryck. Under his leadership I am positive we will continue to expand our support to those children and families in need.

I am thrilled to share with you our annual report, and I must start by saying a heartfelt thank you to each and every one of you who have made our year such a success.

As I reflect on the past year, I can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of pride and excitement for what we have achieved.



Our goal has always been clear: to provide quality support to more of our local kids in need. And that's exactly what we've been doing, with unwavering determination.

We are committed to keeping We Care Connect a volunteer-powered and community-empowered organisation. It's our belief that the heart and soul of our mission resides in the incredible individuals who selflessly give their time, energy, and resources to support these children. We are elated to announce that our volunteer family has now grown to over 140 dedicated individuals across all our activities. From working in our operational centres to sewing, washing, driving, shopping, giving professional expertise, and serving on our Board, you have all contributed immensely. You are all truly amazing, and we couldn't do it without you!

This past year we have set two key foundations for a brighter future. In September 2022, we launched our Hunter operational centre in Thornton, a significant milestone that will significantly boost our capacity to make a difference in this region. In December, we expanded our Central Coast operations, moving to larger and more purpose-fitted premises in Wyong. These new facilities will empower us to reach even more children and families in need.

We have also been busy implementing key community outreach programs that extend our reach beyond the traditional caseworker model. We've been successfully engaging with health programs, supported playgroups, and schools, enabling us to connect with children who might not otherwise receive our support. We are genuinely excited about these new ventures and the impact they are having.

One of the most humbling aspects of our work is the incredible support we receive from the community at large. Our supporters continue to amaze us with their unwavering dedication. We are indeed a fantastic community, united in our commitment to helping children in need. Your support, in all its forms, has been nothing short of extraordinary, and for that, we are profoundly grateful.

Together, as a community, we are extending our hand to thousands of local kids who are living in real poverty. We are committed to addressing their needs, as there is nothing make-believe about their plight. These children deserve the chance to thrive and succeed, and with your continued support, we will make it happen.

With heartfelt thanks,



WE SAY NO TO CHILDHOOD POVERTY

Our vision is to fundamentally reverse the day to day impact of childhood poverty in the Central Coast & Hunter – where over 30,000 children live below the poverty line.

So many of the children helped are often dealing with substantial trauma. Over this period 18,243 children were assessed as ROSH (at risk of significant harm) across the Central Coast and Hunter.

64% of children helped are living in sole-parent households

60% have been affected by Family Violence

52% affected by long-term illness or disability

35% are First Nations children.

We are a volunteer-run charity that connects local generosity with children who desperately deserve support.

Our leading value and quality standard is to delight each child with the care package they receive.

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Sadly, examples of families in need are far too common in our community. Children fleeing domestic violence, living in someone's garage, a rundown cabin or a motel receive great clothes, warm blankets, toys, books, craft packs; teenagers receive quality clothing and toiletries so they can feel part of the normal group, a 7-year-old can go to school with a proper backpack and not a plastic bag.

Here's a few small snippets of information about some of the families that we've supported that has been provided by Case Workers:

"Something special would be nice for these kids. They have been through a lot in the last 12 months and are finally in a place where they are safe. Anything that could brighten their days would be appreciated"

"Family are currently at risk of homelessness and living in a small cabin which has a broken window which lets in the cold air at night. The children would really benefit from some warm clothing and nappies at this difficult time."

"Child is currently staying with her grandfather for an unknown amount of time. Child currently has very little to no winter clothing and Grandfather is in his 70s looking after her with limited income. If there are any extra nappies or formula that be greatly appreciated"



THE LAUNCH OF OUR HUNTER PROGRAM

Following six years of remotely supporting vulnerable Hunter families, in September 2022, the We Care Hunter program was launched.

The foundation of the program was the establishment of a Hunter based warehouse – to house community donations of children’s clothing, cots, prams, car seats, nappies & hundreds of other nursery items. The Thornton lease was signed in June 2022; the signing of the lease coincided with the recruitment of a part-time Hunter Coordinator role, the establishment of Hunter based “drop off partners” for the community to donate children’s items to, and the recruitment of volunteers to pack and prepare bundles of material aid for vulnerable children.

HIGHLIGHT: We set a goal to support 1,500 disadvantaged children by 30th June, 2023 we are pleased to share that this was exceeded to help 1,704 children from 715 families.

These outcomes from our programs are highlighted in the quotes below:

- 1: K*** and her 4 children have been homeless since January, they walked away from their house of 25yrs with nothing after K*** fled DV to keep herself and her children safe. K*** signed a new lease today with the DOH and is starting from scratch. The family would appreciate any items available that are essential for day to day living such as towels, blankets, Doona covers.
- 2: Children were given back to mum 2 months ago. Mum went back to jail over the weekend and they are now back with nanna. Both children lost significant amount of weight in those 2 months. Please can you help with clothing & nappies.

Our programs aim to reduce waste and the negative environmental effects of landfill. Since opening we have rehomed more than 58,070 items ranging from a t-shirt to a double pram.

HIGHLIGHT: The We Care Hunter program is powered by over 45 incredible volunteers, providing an estimated 5,750 hours since opening last September, the equivalent of 3 full time staff and \$201,250 worth of labour.

A big heartfelt thank you to the **Newcastle Permanent Foundation** and the **Honig Foundation** for your generous support – thank you! We are looking forward to expanding our reach to support more and more families in need in future years.

OUR HUNTER VOLUNTEERS SHARED "THE BEST PART OF THEIR ROLE"

"I love packing the donations into care packs and imagining the joy and excitement on the families faces when they open them"

"Knowing that everything we fix is going to help people who really need it"

"The warm happy feeling it gives you, knowing the time we put in helps the people in need. It's definitely worth it"

"The absolute delight I feel to know we are looking after people in need, especially children"

"The awesome team of volunteers who are all so passionate about helping children in need - and doing everything across the We Care footprint with love, dedication and commitment"

"I can give some of the time to an excellent cause while meeting my own need for companionship through the conversation and laughter with so many friendly people"





Programs going from strength to strength

As well as the incredible launch of the We Care Hunter program, a number of other new programs grew and were launched in FY23, growing our reach to support more deserving children in the Hunter and Central Coast.

CHRISTMAS AND BACK2SCHOOL PROGRAMS: We want disadvantaged children to wake up on Christmas day with a smile on their face, then start the school year happy, confident and with the resources they need.

In December and January we see a flurry of festive fun as our volunteer Christmas elves pack donations of brand new gifts for the We Care Christmas program, then quickly transform into school captains to prepare backpacks with Back2School essentials.

During Christmas 2022, we provided 1804 disadvantaged kids with brand new gifts, and 584 students with Back2School essentials.

OUR NEW CENTRAL COAST HOME: In January 2023 our Central Coast program moved into a new home! From very basic beginnings in the back of a small church to an old citrus packing shed where we kept having to asking to lease another room, then another room, our new warehouse feels very much like home.

We now have the luxury of space to store more delightful community donations, flooring that's all on one level, a new kitchen that we sourced second hand from Gumtree, ceiling fans to keep volunteers cool in summer (pew!) – and even an outside deck for refurbishing cots that need some TLC.

With a warehouse that's "fit for purpose", our process from sorting, packing to distributing care bundles is so much more efficient and the space is so much more inviting and user-friendly for our marvelous volunteers.

Everyday is a financial struggle for their family. They are a married couple, the mum suffers from a mental health diagnosis is currently pregnant with twins and unable to take medication to relieve her emotional erratic behaviors, 2 siblings aged 6 and 9, They were very grateful for the support of toys, Christmas Tree, decorations and food hamper and value the community connection and response to their current situation.

Local Case Worker

COMMUNITY PACK PROGRAM: Over the years we have piloted a 'community pack' program, as a way to reach additional families living in poverty who are not seeing a Case Worker.

After suspending the program during Covid, we relaunched our Community Pack program on the Central Coast, distributing smaller care packs to neighbourhood centres.

Next year we will expand this program to supported play-groups and childcare centres in areas of high socioeconomic hardship.



OUR GOLDEN THREAD: In FY23 we developed our first Theory of Change, with support from the Social Impact Hub.

It sets out our understanding of change for vulnerable children living in the Central Coast and Hunter and how we contribute to positive change in their lives to reduce the day-to-day impact of childhood disadvantage.

It builds a common thread between our redistribution of community donations, effective partnerships with welfare agencies and our incredible volunteer workforce to show the improved long-term outcomes to address poverty at a community level.



“Absolutely great I cannot thank you enough. The stuff was all useful and even some brand new. I was emotionally overwhelmed but very appreciative of the support. My kids were excited to have more than one pair of shoes.”

Local recipient



THE WE CARE VOLUNTEERS are the beating heart and logistical work-force who sort, prepare and pack bundles of material aid for vulnerable Central Coast and Hunter kids. Led by volunteer CEO, Derryck Klarkowski, we have over 140 incredible volunteers across the Central Coast & Hunter who donated over 31,000 hours, the equivalent of 16 full time staff!

We have an incredible crew of We Care Sewers who handmake every single bag that the care packages are sent out in – we estimate that over 5,000 bags were sewn by this remarkable group of volunteers. Our Sunday Sort program is still going strong and will soon launch in the Hunter.

Our volunteers network with case workers, other volunteers, Board members, funders and supporters alike. We cannot over-emphasise how appreciative we are, without our volunteers, we simply couldn't have the impact and support the large number of families that we do

OUR SUPPORTERS: As a grassroots not-for-profit the contributions we receive from businesses, individuals and other organisations are critical for our operations.

Beaumont People
Central Coast Leagues Club
Doylo
Gosford City-East Gosford Lions Inc
Inner Wheel Australia
Port of Newcastle
Streetsmart
Transgrid
Wyong Roos Foundation
Wyong Rugby League Club Group

Central Coast Council
Commonwealth Bank Foundation
Emma McBride – MP Volunteer Grant
Honig Foundation
Kiwanis East Maitland
Sisters of Charity
The Ary (Club Toukley RSL)
Westfield
Wyong RSL Mounties Group

IN KIND SUPPORTERS:

Good 360, E-Threads Foundation, Share the Dignity, Streetsmart, The Nappy Collective, Thread Together, Warm Blankets for Everyone

💬 Thank you for the amazing work you do for children in need, as a Case Manager I can't say enough how much what you all do is appreciated. We get to see the grateful smiles which is amazing but the kindness I feel when collecting items from your team is truly heart-warming.💬

Local Case Worker



TOOTH FAIRY GENEROSITY

Alice is 6 and she told her mum she wanted to use her tooth fairy money to help people in need. Her mum was so touched by her thoughtfulness she then doubled what Alice donated. Together they bought some nappies, baby wipes and head to toe baby wash.



The Kiwanis Club of East Maitland

have welcomed We Care into the Hunter community with open arms. They have organised a number of donation collections and fundraisers to give a helping hand to disadvantaged Hunter kids.



OKTOBERFEST FUNDRAISER

The fabulous Gosford City - East Gosford Lions Club held an Oktoberfest-themed Trivia fundraiser with lots of laughter, steins of beer and merriment, they surprised us with a \$2000 donation



MRS HARRIS GOES TO PARIS

Thank you to the team who organised a Parisian inspired movie night fundraiser watching "Mrs Harris Goes to Paris", a fabulous movie and raised \$3,700 to support families in need.

To our community of fundraisers who've been out organising events, morning teas, Bunnings BBQs and donating to our appeals - **thank you.**

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Overall income for the FY23 year was \$362,251 and expenses were \$337,697.

The timing of two large grants from the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation and The Honig Foundation to support the launch our Hunter program meant that income was received in FY22, and the expenses realised in FY23.

INCOME

\$362,251

EXPENSES

\$337,697

We Care Connect also received an incredible asset donation from a large retailer in the form of gift cards that are being used to purchase much needed items.

On average it cost us \$42 to help a child with \$489 worth of value.

WE CARE BOARD

Robert Dixon
Chairperson 30/7/2019

Nathan West
Treasurer 1/10/2018

John Davison
Director 1/10/2018

Jacqueline Klarkowski
Secretary 1/10/2018

Ariane Dixon
Director 30/7/2019

Janice Smith
Resigned 8/6/2023





WE CARE

CONNECT

We are a growing community of passionate, local people who say no to childhood poverty.

Contact us on the details below if you would like to join our village, we'd love to hear from you.

INFO@WECARECONNECT.ORG.AU

WWW.WECARECONNECT.ORG.AU