

WE CARE CONNECT

Annual Impact Report FY24

"The families faces when they receive a care pack from you is priceless, they are so grateful, as are we. We at Samaritans, Brighter Futures are incredibly grateful for all your tireless efforts, for the care and the generosity of We Care Connect".



FY24 IMPACT

8,696 children supported
27,356 children helped since 2016

231,933
items re-homed,
valued at
\$2,315,054
second hand

75t.
of nursery items
saved from
landfill



We re-homed

247 prams,
120 cots, 92 bassinets,
298 car seats,
1796 packets of nappies,
78 high chairs
1,042 Back 2 School items
216,413 material aid items &
17,702 Christmas Presents

We partner with
650 Case Workers
from
123 Support
Agencies



On average we
deliver \$511 of
value to each
family at the cost
of \$51 per child.

140 volunteers
donated 38,877
volunteer hours
the equivalent
of 20 staff!

The children helped are often dealing with
substantial trauma:
66% are living in sole-parent households
42% have been affected by Family Violence
46% affected by chronic illness or disability
46% are First Nations children.



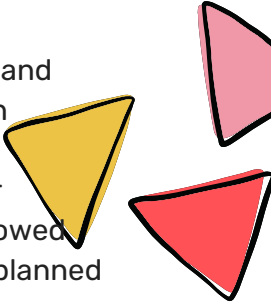


CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE - ROB DIXON

The 2023/2024 year has witnessed an increase in demand - this reinforces the knowledge that disadvantaged families living in poverty are still a major issue in the Central Coast and Hunter communities.

Once again the volunteers that make up the management and workforce of We Care Connect have risen to the occasion. To ensure that we continue to meet these demands we have strived to improve our organisation's procedures and structures. Our IT subcommittee has improved the efficiency and security of our computer applications and our on-site Coordinators, Christine and Alison, have created great morale and productivity on a daily basis in our warehouses. The Board has commissioned a series of workshops for our volunteers. These workshops meet our legislative requirement regarding providing a safe workplace and will be an opportunity to rethink what is good about We Care Connect and what changes could we implement to improve our results. It is envisioned that these workshops will enhance the skills and understandings of our volunteers as they continue their important tasks of providing quality items and equipment to families.

A priority for this period has been an effort by the Board to improve the functionality and comfort of the Thornton warehouse. We were unsuccessful in our attempt to lease an improved, yet affordable warehouse in January so efforts have continued to seek improvements to make the current warehouse a more user friendly workplace for our growing band of volunteers. A mechanical stacker has been purchased which has allowed increased use of the mezzanine floor. Extra shelving has been installed and fans are planned for installation prior to the summer months.



The Board of Management has been revitalised and we have welcomed three new Board members. Mr Andrew Davison, who has a background in public health administration, Mr Phil Smith, the Managing Director of Hunter Financial and Mrs Robyn Brown who has a background in business, IT and serves on other not for profit boards. As well as their experience and expertise, They bring increased contacts within business, government agencies and the communities that we serve.

The Board appreciates the increased support we have received from individuals, businesses and philanthropic organisations. We have become well known within the region and are often the first place that is called upon for emergency and ongoing support for identified families.

Our volunteers continue to bring the love and dedication. Their reward is the knowledge that their efforts are appreciated and we have received some wonderful feedback from families and caseworkers regarding the difference our items make to their lives. A special highlight this year was Derryck Klarkowski, our Founder and Volunteer CEO, receiving the Newcastle Permanent Chairman's Medal. Derryck dedicated this award to all our volunteers and accepted it on their behalf.

I am confident that We Care Connect is in good hands and well placed to continue our important work assisting vulnerable children.

Rob Dixon - Chairperson



CEO'S UPDATE - DERRYCK KLARKOWSKI

We Care started back in 2016 because there were so many disadvantaged and vulnerable children in our region, so much need. What was also clear was that effectively responding to this need was a task larger than any one individual or organization; it was a community challenge, and it required a community response.

Now 8 years later we are so proud that We Care Connect has grown into the community children's program we dreamt of, and of the amazing community power that has enabled us together to have reached nearly 30,000 children. There was never any doubt that our vision of a community response would become a reality. Thank you, all our volunteers, supporters, donors and funders for being such an important part of the We Care family.

But it gets even better, We Care Connect is also an integral part of a much broader community response. We recently attended a local Grants event, and it was so good to see that we knew everyone in the room. We are so proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all the other amazing local charities in our amazing community.

Over the past 12-months we have had the privilege to launch or expand key additional programs as we seek to reach more and more children. Examples:

- Engaging with groups of high school students for their guidance on how we can better support teenagers – what's in and what's out!
- Implementing programs to support early childhood development and the transition of disadvantaged 4-year-olds to school.
- A small but vital program of providing 'overnight packs' to teenagers couch-surfing.

Both our Central Coast and Hunter programs have grown this year, and as expected with Hunter growing at a considerably accelerated rate. This is indeed bitter-sweet as the growth has been driven so much by the increasing disadvantage we are experiencing.

A huge thanks to all our wonderful volunteers – you have worked tirelessly and enormously skillfully with huge dedication, and I am truly grateful and impressed!

My sincere and personal thanks to everyone who has supported We Care Connect this year, for being such a valuable part of We Care. Together we have made a huge difference to the lives of thousands of local children.

THANK YOU - Derryck Klarkowski CEO (volunteer)



Local Case Worker shared "Mum and child are in temporary accommodation due to very serious domestic violence and mum requires a stroller today if possible to transport the little one safely. Mum cannot go home to get her pram."

CASE WORKER FEEDBACK

Our model has always been to work in collaboration with social support agencies – case workers, social workers, school support officers and similar – who put in the request on behalf of the family they're supporting. We asked five Case Workers to let us know what the We Care program means to them.

Jeannie Hipwell: Aboriginal Case Worker – Ngiyang, NSW Health

"The amazing, handcrafted sacks & equipment we request play an immeasurable role in supporting our vulnerable families. In some cases, it is what stands between a mother being able to transport her newborn baby home from the Hospital after birth safely. Providing young parents/parents with a sense of dignity, a step up & boost of confidence in their journey of parenthood.

When I first started in this role & found out about We Care connect I thought it was great, however when I first attended the site for collection and seen the organization of the items, their processes, the type of items being provided to families as well as the handcrafted sacks & teddies made to each specific age group & gender it brought tears to my eyes, it still does!"

Robyn Ussher: Homelessness Engagement Worker – The Benevolent Society:

"Everyone is truly thankful. It makes a big difference in their lives at a point when they need it the most. One that stands is a mother of six children telling us how much the presents had meant to her family over the holiday period.

From the moment you step out of the car you can sense the positive morale, teamwork and commitment from the volunteers and workers. It's always a joy to visit and feel that everyone is on the same page in assisting vulnerable families."

Danni McLaughlin: Woodberry Place of Friends

"The bundles provide an opportunity for me to connect with families and build a relationship through supporting them to meet their basic needs as a starting point and then to be able to work with them in the other areas of their lives. It is very hard for a family to connect with services and work on education in parenting or family violence when they are struggling to meet the basic needs of their own children.

Many families I have supported have cried when receiving items for their children. This has saved them from applying for items through AfterPay and reduces the involvement of DCJ when they are unable to meet the needs of their children."

Sean Mackinnon: Practice Manager – Catholic Care

"As a Case Worker, it's uplifting to see their appreciation and joy. The sense of relief of being able to get the things that they need, but can't afford, is powerful.

The volunteers are always lovely and friendly to deal with, and We Care HQ it's almost feels like watching the Oompa Loompas from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory beaver away. The support provided is both relevant and practical, but it is also a stark reminder of the power of people and community, and that we can all make a difference."

Leanne Poole: Client Coordinator – Wesley Mission

"Providing families with essential items for their children allows them to take the necessary steps towards a brighter future and a better quality of life.

When families receive items for their children such as clothing, nappies, school supplies, or toys, it alleviates financial strain and ensures that their basic needs are met. This support empowers families to move forward with confidence and stability knowing that their children are taken care of and equipped for success. It also fosters a sense of dignity and hope, motivating them to pursue their goals and take the necessary steps towards a brighter future."

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS



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

Led by volunteer CEO, Derryck Klarkowski, we have over 140 marvelous volunteers throughout the Central Coast & Hunter who donated over 38,800 hours, the equivalent of 20 full time staff, and a value of \$1.36million!

These volunteers collect items, sort, wash and iron, clean, safety check, re-pack items. We have an incredible crew of We Care Sewers who handmade 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 is now running in the Hunter.

We regularly have groups from businesses and corporate organisations who donate their time to volunteer for the day – we love having these groups come in to the Base!

In FY24, eight volunteers reached a mighty milestone of sharing their beautiful days volunteering for FIVE YEARS! This includes a number of our Board of Directors. This gift of time does not go unnoticed and we are ever so pleased to share them here in this Annual Impact Report.

Volunteers

Janette Manca
Kathy Smith
Paula Wright
Rita Casha

Board of Directors

Ariane Dixon
Jackie Klarkowski
Robert Dixon

Thank you to each & every one of the volunteers who make up the We Care Team!





OUR ROLE IN THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

We are waste warriors.

Helping our environment by reducing, reusing and rehoming.

Our vision is to not just be zero waste, but we aim to shift consumption patterns to demonstrate the value of the circular economy by extending the lifespan of children and baby items that would otherwise be sent to landfill.

Since 2016, we have re-homed a huge 721,998 children's items, ranging from a t-shirt to a double pram. 95% of what's provided to disadvantaged children is community donated; we then sort donated items by type, and assess them against strict quality and safety standards before they are re-homed and packed into bundles for a family in need. Items that are all great quality with at least 1 if not 2 more "lives" left in them are very much welcomed.

We have a network of partners where items that are not suitable for the We Care Connect program are re-homed to, this includes Big W's toy recycling through TerraCycle, H&M's material recycling and Rebel Sport's joggers & footwear program.

Items that don't meet our standard to "delight" a family may be passed on to local charity Church for Life or worn and torn blankets are passed on to animal shelters. We would actively encourage our community to pass on donations directly to these services if items are very worn, old, holey, stained and broken.

We conservatively estimated the second-hand value of items re-homed in FY24 at **\$2.3 million.**

Our program not only reduces the waste going to landfill, but provides a disadvantaged child with the practical essentials they deserve.



14 bags of old & worn shoes donated to Rebel Sports

64 trips with donated materials to H&M

39 bags of broken toys taken to BIG W

THE WE CARE VILLAGE

It takes a village to raise a child.

30,000 children live in poverty throughout the Central Coast & Hunter.

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

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

Our supporters

Bendigo Bank – Junior Directors grant
Central Coast Council – ClubGrants
Cessnock Leagues
Coast FM
Count Charitable Foundation
Doylo
East Maitland Bowlo
Finlease
Gosford City-East Gosford Lions Inc
Honig Foundation
Hunter Financial
Ian & Shirley Norman Foundation
Inner Wheel Australia
Kiwanis East Maitland
Komatsu

Lake Macquarie ClubGrants
Maitland City ClubGRANTS
Mingara
Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation
Pacific Smiles
Sisters of Charity
Streetsmart
The Ary (Club Toukley RSL)
Transport NSW
Waratah Education Foundation
Wyong Roos Foundation
Wyong RSL Mounties Group
Wyong Rugby League Club Group
XERO

In-Kind supporters

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



Local Case Worker shared:

"At times her school has noticed A* not wanting to leave school due to being too cold at home and we see her hopping into bed as soon as she gets home from being too cold."**

COMMUNITY KINDNESS



CHLOE'S CREATIONS
Young Chloe handmakes jewelry. She set up a stall, donating money to buy toys for the Christmas appeal

CUPCAKES
A lovely group of supporters baked cupcakes and sold them at the West Gosford Bunnings raising \$1,100



CHAIRMAN'S MEDAL
CEO Derrynck was awarded the Newcastle Permanent's Chairman's Medal. During the award presentation he was described as the "heart of everything achieved by We Care"

JUNIOR DIRECTOR DONATION
Alannah sat on the Board of Bendigo Bank's Junior Directors in FY24. She organised a \$2,000 donation



Local Case Worker shared:
"Our client is very vulnerable, homeless & staying in her car. Her daughter is 5 years old and her birthday is Thursday she is turning 6, she loves Bluey and anything blue."

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE SNAPSHOT

In October 2023 we were blown away to be awarded the global award for the Xero Beautiful Business Fund Community Category, receiving an outstanding \$70,000. This was a one-off donation from a 90 second video application from over 5,000 entrants!

In FY24, we were grateful to start a three year partnership with the Ian & Shirley Norman Foundation, covering part of the costs for our two Operations Coordinators.

INCOME: \$573,412
EXPENSES: \$431,200

Again, We Care Connect 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 costs \$51 to help a child with \$511 worth of material aid



WE CARE BOARD

Robert Dixon

Chairperson - 30/7/2019

Andrew Davison

Director - 09/10/2023

Jackie Klarkowski

Secretary - 1/10/2018

Ariane Dixon

Director - 30/7/2019

Robyn Brown

Treasurer 09/10/2023

John Davison

Director 1/10/2018

Nathan West

Resigned- 5/12/2023

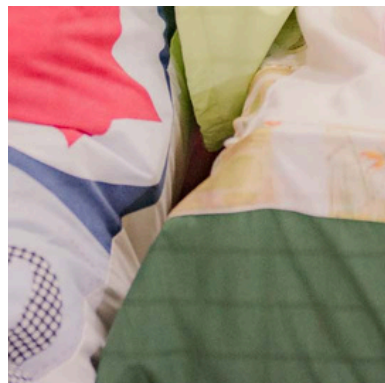
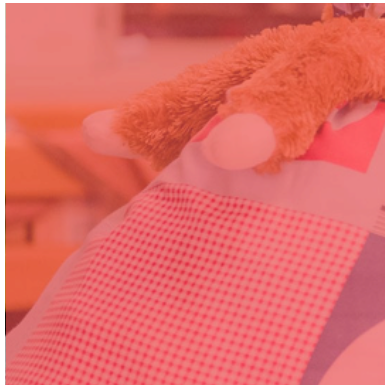
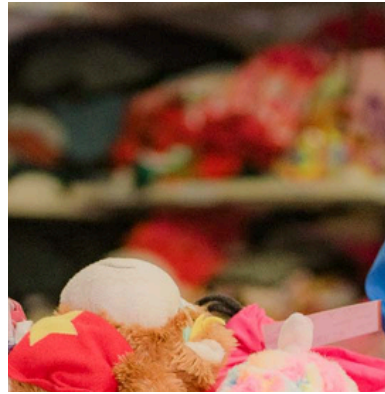
Phillip Smith

Director 5/02/2024

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



Local Case Worker from DCJ: *"Thank you so much for the packages you put together for this family! The pop up toy was a major hit with Miss 2 and mum was extremely grateful that she was included and now has sheets and lovely blankets. Mum was thrilled to be able to make up beds for the girls in their new house and to have some toiletries and toys for the girls. From a caseworker point of view, I love that everything provided for the family was well thought out with regard to their needs and the stage of development for the girls. The relief on mum's face when I handed her the toiletry and sanitary bags, a smile of dignity in her eyes as she said thank you, in a very meaningful way. Thank you to your team for assisting a family to start getting back on track and smile today, knowing that this fresh start is one filled with dignity and understanding. I appreciate you!"*