

# LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

## Collaborating for **Impact**

Annual Report 2022-23



## Acknowledgement of Country

Life Without Barriers acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country and their connection to land, water and community.

We pay our respects to them, their culture and customs and to their Elders past, present and emerging. We believe that reconciliation must live in the hearts and minds of all Australians. We are committed to an ongoing journey towards truth-telling and reconciliation.

We also recognise and value the contribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, carers, people we support and communities to our continued reconciliation journey together.



# Our purpose

To partner with  
people to change  
lives for the better

Our values of respect, courage, imagination, responsiveness and commitment to authentic relationships lead us in everything we do.

Effective collaboration relies on trusted partnerships. This year, we celebrate the positive changes people have made in their lives with the support of our employees, carers and extended communities.

## Board and Chief Executive message



**Greg Ridder**  
Chair



**Claire Robbs**  
Chief Executive

Partnerships have been central to our engagement across the country over the year. Through genuine collaboration, we have witnessed great outcomes in the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Over three decades, we have learned that changing people's lives occurs best through partnerships. Our Annual Report for the 22-23 financial year is an exploration of these collaborations and the impact they have in creating a fairer and more equitable Australia.

This year, we continued navigating the economic challenges propelled by national and international events while staying closely connected to our values and purpose. Significant inflation, increased production and supply costs and international conflict have applied domestic pressure and we have seen the impact directly within our communities. Despite this, a focus on sound financial stewardship this year has enabled us to continue as a strong, sustainable organisation for the people we serve.

Important partnerships are those our staff and carers have with people we support across the country. Through the adoption of Active Support in our disability services, we have strengthened our workforce to uphold people's human rights

and to support people's participation in as many aspects of their lives as possible. This year, key policies have been co-designed in partnership with people with direct lived experience, including the Relationships, Intimacy and Sexuality policy shared in this report – a learning from stories shared at the Disability Royal Commission.

As we strive to influence the systemic barriers faced by many people and communities, we have advanced large-scale collaborations and bolstered our allyship. We continued our participation in Alliance20, working closely with the government and the disability sector to strengthen the NDIS. Through the Alliance, we partnered with people with disability and disability representative organisations to explore new approaches in home and living options. These engagements led to our policy commitment to separate supported independent living and specialist disability housing services – enabling choice for people with disability in the services they choose from Life Without Barriers.

## Board and Chief Executive message

Continuing our commitment to people with disability, we released our employment policy commitment, which places increasing participation of lived experience at the centre of our employment goals. This aligns with our goal of striving for at least 15% of our workforce to comfortably identify as having a disability.

Our Child, Youth and Family services team extended positive relationships with young people through voice-based initiatives that encourage young people to have strong participation in key decisions we make in our services. This includes participating in staff recruitment, engagement in important decision-making, influence in service design and providing crucial feedback on proposed changes in service delivery. We advanced our priorities in education with the release of our education strategy, which outlines how we are partnering with school communities and carers to improve the educational outcomes of children in care.

For children and families who experience disadvantage now, collective wisdom is critical to innovate what is possible in child protection so more families can thrive. This year we broadened our leadership as a founding partner in the Allies for Children – a collaboration of several of Australia’s largest providers of services for children and families. The Allies for Children is progressing its key policy agenda, the first of which will address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

As the Prime Minister announced a referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Parliament, we delivered a large-scale accessible resources initiative in collaboration with partners. The project delivered information on the Voice in over 50 languages, including Aboriginal languages. Hundreds of these translated and accessible

assets were shared and used across both the corporate and non-government sectors.

We elevated our commitment to reconciliation in our support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and major areas of our Reconciliation Action Plan. Senior Leaders worked with the government, commissioners and peak bodies to advance our transformation project and the return of First Nations children to their communities. We released our Transformation Policy commitment explaining how we partner in decision-making with ACCOs and we started our journey towards a strong cultural governance approach within our organisation.

In aged care, we established advisory groups led by the people we support to offer invaluable insight and direction on services for older Australians. Our Refugee and Asylum Seeker program supported more than 1100 people with vital services, creating opportunities for people to begin to recover from the trauma of leaving their homelands. While the World Health Organization announced the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, our vigilance has remained on the safety and well-being of our communities.

The Board has stewarded in-depth conversations on the role of digital innovation and our requirements as a large organisation for the future, as well as beginning mapping our climate justice commitments.

In our stewardship of Life Without Barriers, we have reflected on our role in practice governance and our responsibility to support our people in effective safeguarding. It has been a rewarding year because of the trust placed in us by the people we support, and we sincerely thank the communities we have served for the opportunity to be a part of their lives.

# 2022-2023 highlights

Supported **23,740** people across Australia

We are a community of **13,119** staff and foster and kinship carers

**5148** children, young people and families supported

**8236** older Australians chose us to provide at-home supports

Partnered with **5043** people who chose our disability support services

**1150** refugees and asylum seekers welcomed and supported

**Extended** our policy and advocacy on Disability Employment, Reconciliation and Home and Living choices for people with disability

**12.4%** of employees with disability in leadership roles

# Delivering great service



A video without sound is playing. A lady puts on medical gloves while another lady helps her pull up her sleeves.

## Delivering great service



Caroline looks glamorous in a pale pink sequined dress as she hugs her father.

## Disability and Mental Health Services

**Over 5800 people with lived experience of disability or mental illness chose our support services this year. Our services focused on each person's specific needs, choices, goals and independence. This year, we concentrated on collaborating with the people we support to understand how best we meet their needs. We have made great progress over the year, including:**

- Rolling out our “lighthouse program” an Active Support pilot, across our disability and mental health services to maximise people’s ability to participate in their own lives.
- Co-designing the “My Rights: nothing about me, without me” rights statement with people with disability, which articulates their expectations in experiencing their fundamental human rights.
- Strengthening our commitment to co-design that includes a lived experience led approach and service level strategy, like the RELATE mental health framework, which was co-designed with people we support.
- Strengthening our collaborations with families and supporters through more engagement, responding to feedback and more collaboration with family and supporter groups



## Delivering great service



Emily is wearing a blue dress in her kitchen. She is standing at the kitchen bench with two plates of food in front of her.



Emily is sitting on a couch with a friend. She is wearing a maroon and white t-shirt and her friend is wearing a blue shirt and a blue wig. They are smiling.

## Em leads her journey to greater independence

Determined to become more independent, Em collaborated with her support team to achieve her goals.

Last year, Em spoke to her support team about her desire for meaningful employment and income. “I want to have money so I can be more independent and buy things I like,” she said.

After some research, Em met with Avenue with her support team and her Coordinator of Supports for an interview. Avenue is a day program that empowers people to engage in purposeful work and develop skills. Em was hired and she changed her Facebook status to reflect her employment. At Avenue, she crafts items that she sells at the markets, and she recently secured a pet-sitting gig. “I love going to work. Caring for dogs is my favourite part of the job,” she said.

Em does a budget with the help of her support team to keep track of her earnings, and to pay for her social activities and other things she wants. “I’m now saving for an Apple watch,” she said. Em has now advised her support team of her next goals.

“

**I love meeting new people and I want to have more friends. I can take the bus by myself now, so next I want to do my weekly shopping by myself.**

”

## Delivering great service



Video shows how support workers actively support residents of Richmond Street to live their best lives.

### Active Support in action

The right to make choices and have control over how we participate and engage in our community is an important key indicator of quality of life, and a fundamental human right. For people with intellectual disability, there can be barriers to participation in activities of daily living, both in the home and the community. Active Support is an evidence-based approach that increases engagement and expands a person with disability's capacity to make choices and participate meaningfully in their lives. It focuses on a person's right to choose what they do and enables support teams to partner more effectively with them.

Focusing initially on ensuring the foundational skills of Frontline Practice Leadership, such as supervision, observation and feedback, we commenced the nationwide rollout of Active Support training for our frontline leaders this year. Life Without Barriers partners with La Trobe University's Living with Disability Research Centre to further develop the sector's understanding of Active Support in Australia.

## Delivering great service



Roxanne wears pink pants and a matching top with flowers on it. She is at the airport with her luggage and is making a “peace” sign before her trip to visit her family in Groot Eylandt.



Roxanne wears a brown straw hat and yellow t-shirt with Bob Marley on the front. She is hugging a family member by the side of the road.

## Partnering with Roxanne to keep her connection to family and culture

Roxanne lives in Darwin where she receives support from Life Without Barriers, but she misses her remote island home. We worked with Roxanne to help her stay connected to her family and culture, including facilitating and supporting Roxanne to return to Country, using the trips as an opportunity to build ties with her family.

On her second trip in six months to see family, Roxanne and her support travelled to Groote Eylandt airport and then by boat to the island of her home community of Umbakumba. Roxanne spent her two nights at home reconnecting with her family and Country. “I love visiting Umbakumba and love to sit with my mum, my brother, my grandmother and other family members. We talk, laugh and cook damper in the fire,” said Roxanne.

Life Without Barriers, Country Connect (a community access provider), Roxanne and her

family collaborate to plan the trips to support her in reaching her goal of visiting home every three months. By working together, Roxanne has been able to have better interactions and connections with her family and community.

Saying goodbye at the end of each trip can be understandably upsetting for Roxanne. She and her support team work together through the process so she understands what is happening, and that she will see her family again. It helps Roxanne to know when her next return to Country is and when her family will visit her in Darwin. The support team around Roxanne have seen such an uplift in her quality of life and happiness since her trips home.

Having the next trip to look forward to greatly helps with Roxanne’s wellbeing. “I am flying to Umbakumba soon,” Roxanne said.

“

**I will hug mum and everyone once I see them. Then give them the chicken and candy I brought for them. We’ll cook damper later. ”**

**Delivering great service**

## Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability

**This year, over 1200 people nationally chose our disability support services, including 293 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

We help the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples we support to keep their connection to their culture and family, and our Elevate Reconciliation Plan (RAP) outlines more initiatives we are undertaking to keep improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we support.

## Delivering great service

### Ellen regained a sense of control over her life, with her team by her side

When Ellen met her Community Rehabilitation Support Worker, Song, she shared much about her life that had been hard for her and which left her lacking the confidence to engage with people or use public transportation. At 63, Ellen wanted to re-engage with the community but was unsure how.

Ellen received supports from Life Without Barriers' Intensive Home Based Support Service (IHBSS) program. IHBSS offers customised short-term support to help people manage crises, prevent relapses, and return to their usual living and work routines.

Recognising Ellen's strengths in creativity and advocacy, Song and Ellen devised a plan Ellen was comfortable with to help her connect with her community. Their approach started with setting goals and identifying barriers.

Ellen's first goal was to attend an Andy Warhol exhibition. Song and Sophia, a student social worker, worked on building trust and fostering a positive relationship with Ellen.

Ellen worked with Song in creating a step-by-step plan for visiting the art exhibition, which included learning to use a bus route app, developing a self-care and safety plan for public transportation, and building confidence in using buses. Ellen practised these skills multiple times, and found enjoyment in the journey and the exhibition.

With the continuous support of her team, Ellen's confidence grew. Song helped her practise administrative skills, including filling out government forms for gym passes and medical clearances. Ellen also connected with Hearing Dogs, an organisation that enhanced her sense of safety at home and in her community.

Fuelled by the support, Ellen participated in a women's wellbeing class, building her self-awareness and forming new friendships. She rediscovered her passion for sewing and started attending sewing groups, yoga sessions, and the local gym and swimming centre.

Ellen's recovery journey instilled in her a positive outlook and a newfound sense of control over her life. Ellen was thrilled to document her story to advocate for individuals with mental health conditions who may lack confidence in seeking professional support.

## Delivering great service

### In collaboration with people we support, we are improving how we uphold people's rights to engage in positive relationships, intimacy and sexual expression

It is a fundamental human right to have the opportunity to explore and enjoy relationships, as well as intimate and sexual experiences. Our new Relationships, Intimacy and Sexuality Policy was co-designed with people we support. We listened to and were led by people with disability about how we can support their rights respectfully and safely in our role as a support provider. Twenty-two people with disabilities (aged 22-61) participated in co-design sessions across New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria. Northcott Disability Services and Sexuality Education Counselling and Consultancy Agency (SECCA) were our partners who created the framework for co-design and, along with the Victorian Advocacy League for Intellectual Disability (VALID), facilitated sessions. Each session included participants, support workers, facilitators and an observer from the Centre for Practice Excellence. An interim policy, developed by the National Safeguarding Unit and the Centre for Practice Excellence, was in effect during the co-design process.

This policy promotes the rights of the people we support to have the freedom to explore and express their sexuality, control decisions that have an impact on their relationships and sexuality, and participate in healthy, intimate relationships based on consent, respect and safety. After completing the co-design process, this year we commenced education and support for staff to understand the policy and how it has been designed and informed by people with disability. We have partnered with Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT on the Safer Girls Safer Women Project and have

commenced training in Queensland. The Safer Girls Safer Women Project empowers the disability workforce sector to create a culture of safety, where girls and women with disability experience increased social and sexual safety everywhere and always.

“

**Just wanted to tell you that my eyes lit up when you talked about sex. I never knew anything about that before the workshops. I never got told about this when I was at school. I'm 46. I have a right to know about sex.** ”

– Julianne, participant

“

**It is very important to have privacy, and everyone should get a say. Everybody's got different beliefs, but I reckon no matter what, I think it is important people with disabilities can do whatever they want** ”

– Dan, participant

## Delivering great service



Suzy poses with her cousin and sister, wearing a red hat, dress and sunglasses for her 70th birthday celebrations.

## Making policies more accessible for the people we support

To improve our communication with people we support and their families, this year we created accessible, plain English versions for all our people-facing policies and procedures. These include service agreements, privacy details, complaint processes, individual support planning and health information.

We have also translated key documents into Easy English, such as our Client Rights Statement,

Relationships Intimacy, and Sexuality Policy Guideline, and Apology Framework.

Easy English simplifies information to meet the diverse communication needs of our community. This accessible format removes barriers for people who use our services to help them make informed decisions, actively engage in discussions, seek clarification, express their preferences and raise any concerns.

## Delivering great service



Video of Bill Cracknell talking about the experiences of families with loved ones using Supported Independent Living services. In the video, Bill is speaking to a room full of people. He is in front of a screen that shows pictures of his son and family.

### Working in partnership with families

Families and supporters can play a crucial role in the lives of people with disability. Alison and Bill Cracknell are parents to Thomas, who chooses Life Without Barriers Disability services, and they explain the importance of collaboration between staff and families to support people to exercise their choices and independence. At a forum for our disability service employees, Bill and Alison Cracknell told staff, “It’s not a ‘you and us’, it’s all of us.” The forum was designed to give staff direct insight from families about what they can do to work collaboratively with families and supporters.

The Cracknells recounted their journey as parents, addressing challenges and the impact that Life Without Barriers can have. They are very happy to see Thomas enjoy his independence as a 29-year-old man.

Alison Cracknell offered staff practical suggestions for working better with families – communication and trust, open and honest conversation, family involvement and asking questions.

**“ Thank you from every parent’s heart for choosing this career path. ”**



## Delivering great service

# Listening to the voices of families and supporters

The Cracknells are part of the Victorian Disability Accommodation Supports (VDAS) Family and Supporters Group. The Group was established in 2019 to enable families and supporters to work collaboratively with Life Without Barriers to improve the way we support people in supported independent living. The Group meets bi-monthly with Life Without Barriers senior team members. Family and Supporters Group members raise issues and give feedback on matters to do with the supports that people receive from us. We formalised our commitment to uphold the rights of people we support through a co-designed “My Rights, Nothing About Me, Without Me” booklet. It expresses what people with disability told us about how they wish to be supported by us. It empowers people to understand their rights and outlines what people can expect from Life Without Barriers to protect their rights and keep them safe.

## Delivering great service



Annie, who uses our services, smiles at the camera.



Darren, Damien and Craig are smiling in a car.



Two people who use our services at a group event.



Eurobodalla Shire Mayor, Matt Hatcher, elbow bumps a woman in a wheelchair while another woman looks on

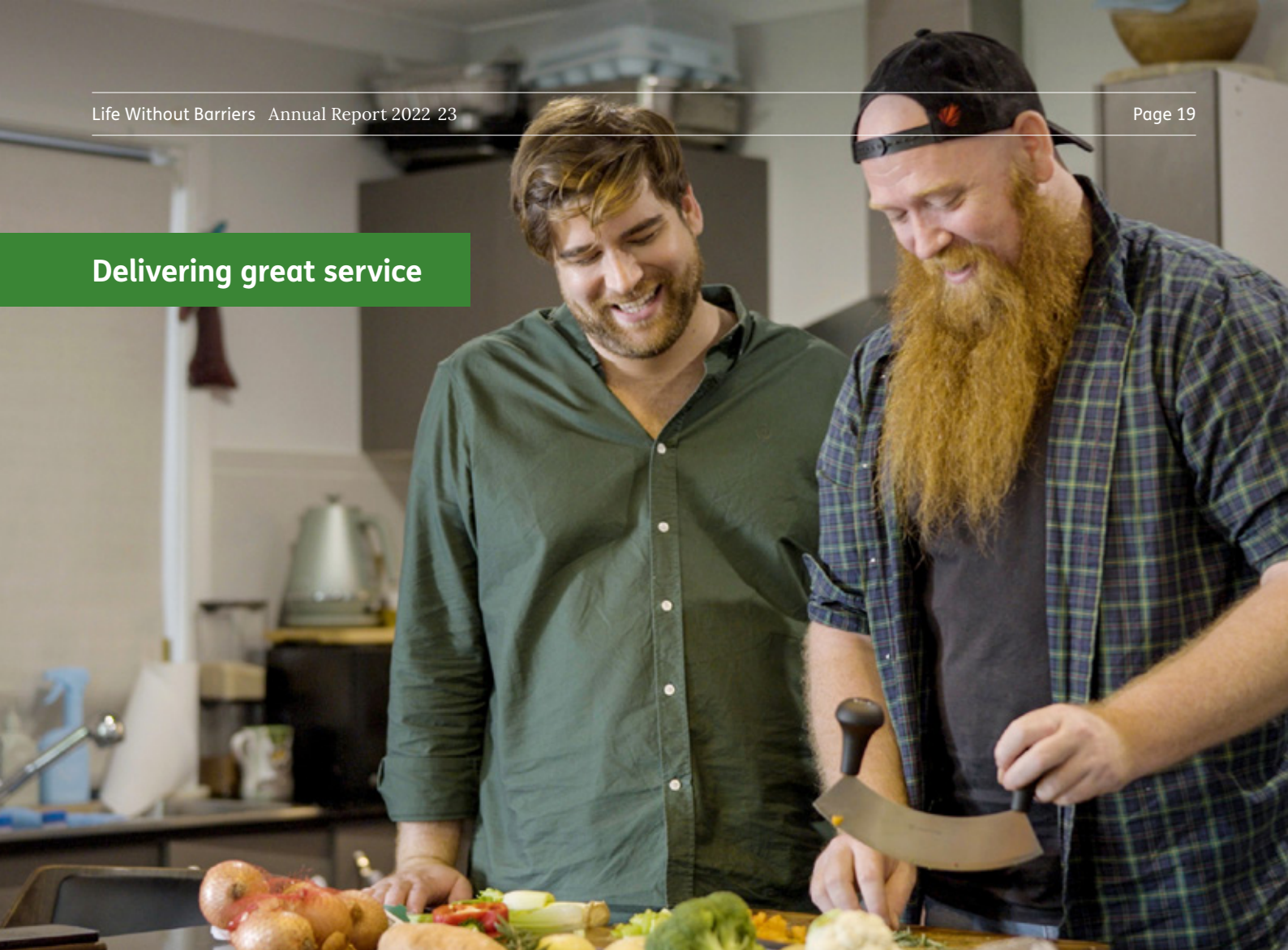


Two women are hugging and smiling at a Reconciliation Week event in Alice Springs.



A group of theatre performers wearing grey suits and red ties pose around Guy, who is smiling and wearing a cream hat.

## Delivering great service



Foster carers Luke and Eric are at home, smiling and looking downwards. Luke is wearing a green button up shirt and Eric has a long red beard and is wearing a checked shirt.

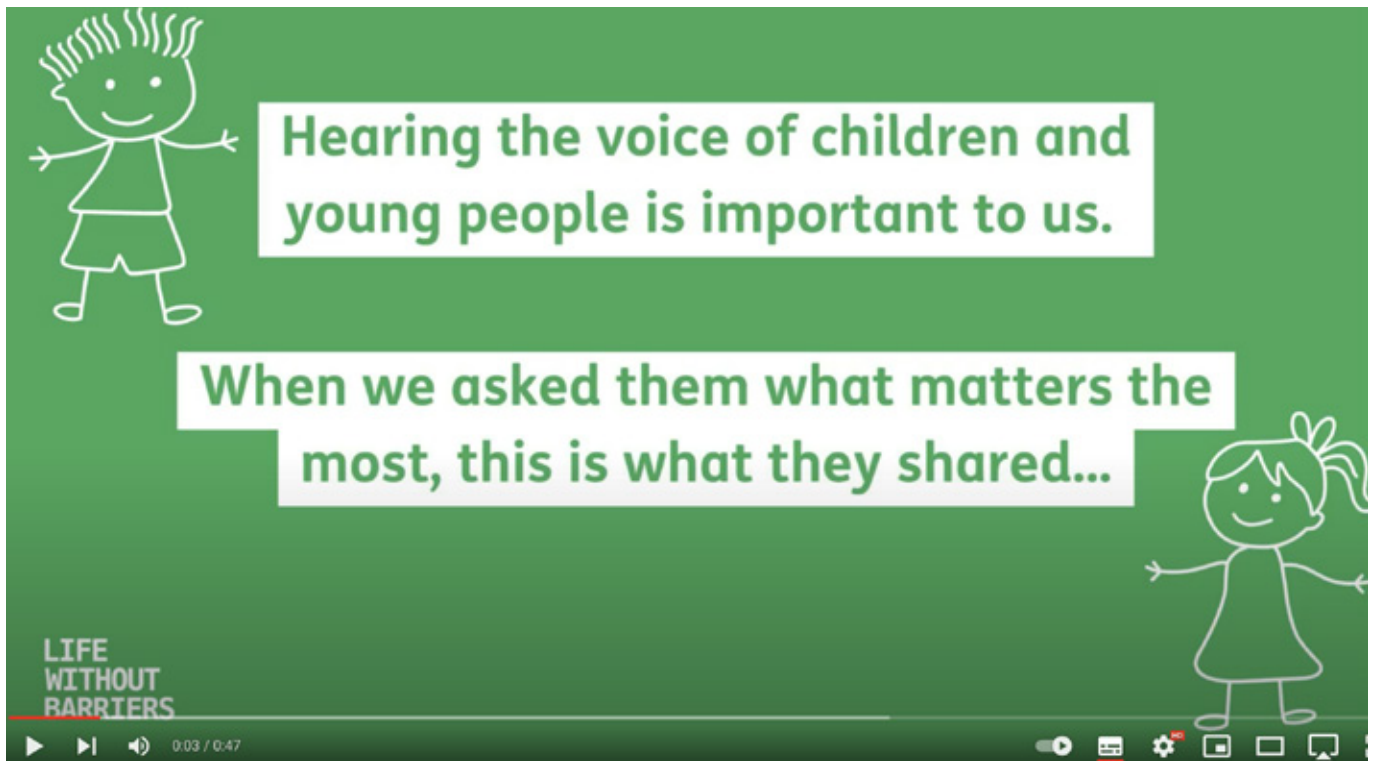
## Child, Youth and Family services

**This year we provided support and care to 5148 young lives. To positively meet this significant responsibility, we relied on close collaboration and co design with children and young people, carers, families and partners in our community, including Cornell University and the CARE model.**

It was also important that we partnered with children and young people, so they could participate in decisions that affect their lives. Some of our collective actions include:

- Established Child Participation Champions and Community of Practice.
- Trialled involving young people in the recruitment of staff.
- Developed Carer Value Proposition.
- Improved the way we support carers through our Carer Support and Supervision program.
- Made preparations so WA, NT and VIC remained on track for CARE certification later in the year.

## Delivering great service



In this video, children and young people in care tell us what mattered the most to them.

## Delivering great service

### Partnering with Toby to unleash his warrior spirit and natural leadership abilities

Toby lives with his grandmother and his brother Pete. Toby's grandmother was concerned about the lack of positive male role models in his life. Toby's Life Without Barriers Care team knew that the strong and talented young man had the potential to go far in life but needed more guidance to thrive. Through their advocacy, Toby started working with a dedicated youth worker and a cultural support planner.

"My youth worker talks to us and listens to what we have to say and what activity we want to do," said Toby. His youth workers also showed him emotion regulation strategies while they were out and about in the community, which was better suited to Toby's learning style. Toby started to think more expansively about himself, his life and what he is capable of. "It made me think I can one day be an army man, be able to travel and learn about all the amazing gadgets and drive the big army trucks," Toby said.

His workers told him about the Proud Warrior Program, run by the Australian Defence Force, where at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are individually mentored and supported.

Toby attends the Program fortnightly with the support of his youth worker and cultural planner. He is having a great time and identified several male figures who are role models to him. "I want to be in the army one day, and at the Proud Warrior Program, I get to talk to the army guys. It's good; I have fun while I'm there. I always look forward to it because we do different stuff each time," said Toby.

Toby is now doing well at school and excels at sports. He was made house head and won a series of medals in athletics, including two blue ribbons for running. Toby's achievements are a credit to him and his choices.

"Toby has made significant strides. He is a motivated young person who will be an amazing leader," said his youth support worker.



Toby is outside in an animal park feeding a small kangaroo. We can see the back of Toby; he is wearing a "Cape York Peninsula" long sleeve t-shirt and shorts.

## Delivering great service

### Claire sets herself up for a successful future

Claire and her care team manager Ashleigh sat outside her new home in the heavy rain. Claire had just left the safety and comfort of the hospital where she had been for a long time. Ashleigh was prepared to wait as long as Claire needed.

“After three or four hours, this huge gust of wind took our umbrella. Ashleigh ran after it, but the umbrella kept running away. I felt bad for her, but it was so funny,” said Claire. It broke the ice, and Claire was ready to come inside.

At the time Claire moved into the home, the CARE model had been introduced in Life Without Barriers in Queensland. CARE is an evidence-based, trauma-informed model adopted by Life Without Barriers across our child, youth and family programs. “We recruited all our staff with a CARE perspective from the beginning to align with the CARE framework,” said Ashleigh.

They approach everything with a trauma-informed lens, guided by the CARE Family Involved principle, have fostered relationships with Claire’s family, particularly her nan, making it a beautiful experience when they visit.

Claire’s world view changed when she started to feel secure. Her first job at McDonald’s, with her team’s support, was a turning point. Her confidence grew, and she successfully applied for a second job, building her self-efficacy and self-belief.



Claire is standing in a kitchen wearing black bike shorts and a black t-shirt. She is cooking and has two frypans on the stovetop.

On her 17th birthday, Claire reflected:

“

**In the past, I felt powerless. Now I realise how much power I actually have. I am thankful for everything I have created for myself with the support of the people here. Now I want to make the most of the time I have here to set myself up to be the best I can be when I leave this house.**

”

Claire proactively collaborated with her care team to set up her perfect life after leaving home. She got her driver’s licence and bought a car. She learned to cook and confidently discussed her transition and future goals at a Transition to Independence Day event. “I’m excited about my future because I believe I can achieve anything I truly put my mind to,” said Claire.

## Delivering great service



From left to right: Martha Holden (Director of the Residential Child Care Project) and Life Without Barriers staff members Veronica Marin, Courtney Patterson, Belinda Mayfield and Loriza Daud stand in front of a Cornell University sign at the International Residential Child Care Project Retreat.

## Partnering with Cornell University to improve the lives of children, youth and families we support

We meet children, young people and families at some of the most traumatic times in their lives.

We have partnered with the Residential Child Care Project at Cornell University to embed the CARE model in our practice. Evidence-based, trauma-informed CARE gives us the framework and tools to support children to heal, grow and thrive. CARE gives us a shared language and consistent practices and helps us to work together to support children and their families. The collaborative implementation approach gives us the flexibility to adapt CARE to the diverse continuum of support we provide across Australia. We are continuing to work together with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to examine how the CARE principles are understood from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and have developed practise resources called CARE cards to support staff and carers to practise reflectively together

alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural support planners and leads.

This year our South Australian and Tasmanian Child, Youth and Family teams were awarded CARE certification. CARE certification and a partnership with Cornell University reinforce our application of six CARE principles.

Martha Holden, Director Residential Child Care Project Cornell University, said, “In 2016 when Life Without Barriers decided to implement CARE nationally, it appeared to be a herculean task. Today, Life Without Barriers teams in every state and the Northern Territory are successfully working together to embed the CARE model at every level of their organisation, creating the conditions for change in the lives of children and families. Life Without Barriers is an international model of how to integrate the CARE model across multiple levels of an organisation.”

## Delivering great service

### Working as one team for a brighter future for Jenny

The Australian Bureau of Statistics National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2020–2022) showed that 38.8% of people aged 16–24 had experienced a significant mental health condition during the previous 12-month period. This year we teamed up with the Tasmanian Government to partner with individuals and their families when young Tasmanians have a lived experience of mental health concerns.

Jenny was enjoying life as a 16-year-old, thriving socially and academically, when her mental health suddenly declined drastically. Life Without Barriers worked with Jenny, her mum and health services to help Jenny strengthen her mental health, just in time for a big school year.

As part of her recovery journey, Jenny joined our intensive iConnect youth mental health outreach support program. iConnect is funded by the Tasmanian Health Service and works in partnership with Tasmanian Government Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) across Tasmania. It supports young people and increases carers' and other family member's knowledge, understanding and response to mental health challenges.

The iConnect care team began working with Jenny during her school holidays, two months before starting Year 11, while also assisting her mother in providing support to Jenny.

Jenny led the way and advised what she was comfortable with. She gradually stepped out into the community with her iConnect support worker, starting with walks. As Jenny's energy built, they visited cafes, which increased her confidence and decreased her anxiety. As Jenny's mental health improved, she started thinking more positively about returning to school. She still had a lot of concerns, so her iConnect worker partnered with Jenny to prepare for the start of school. The care worker took on a coaching role. She and Jenny attended meetings with school staff and planned the route to get to school together. Collaboration was crucial to prevent Jenny's mental health from relapsing, so the team worked closely with CAMHS, including medical and therapeutic staff, throughout the process.

By the time the iConnect program ended, Jenny had regained self-care abilities. She attended school full-time and resumed a social life like the one she had before she became unwell.



## Delivering great service

### Collaborating with young people to recruit youth workers

Our Youth Advisory Group is a partnership where young people co-design how services are delivered.

Kai, a 15-year-old who lives with his foster family on the Gold Coast, volunteered for Life Without Barriers' Youth Advisory Group. He wanted to represent kids in care like him. Kai was thrilled when we asked him to help interview potential candidates. He met with his Child and Family Practitioner for preparation.

Kai met with the 11 candidates on the day, introducing himself and spending time with each candidate during the break. He prepared his own questions on his own initiative, asking the applicants, "Why do you want to be a youth worker? Will you take part in fun activities such as camp? What made you apply for Life Without Barriers?"

He took time to sit with each one, listening attentively to each response. After the break, Kai led the first group activity. He had prepared for this with his Child and Family Practitioner, so he knew what to expect and how to respond to any questions. Kai observed candidate interactions, communication, relationship formation and adherence to instructions, and whether they were respectful. He provided feedback with the assistance of a Youth Worker, which the recruitment team found highly accurate and insightful. He noticed each candidate's strengths and areas of development and this feedback informed candidate evaluations.

"It was an amazing experience and I feel proud that I did it. I would love to help again in the future," said Kai. He eagerly planned how to use his earnings. All applicants appreciated meeting Kai and valued his presence during the day.



Group of boys talking (AI generated image).



A young person is talking to two adults (AI generated image).

## Delivering great service



Video shows how support workers actively support residents of Richmond Street to live their best lives.

### Meet some of our wonderful kinship and foster carers

We partner with our 2504 foster and kinship carers, who open their homes and hearts to children and young people around the country, giving them a safe environment to thrive.

Even with the challenges and sacrifices that come with foster care, our carers continue to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to our children's wellbeing and positive development.

We give our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them.

## Delivering great service



Foster carers Sue, Phi, Kerrie, Jessie, MP Katrine Hildyard, Hanne, Kate and Julie at the launch of the fourth MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ constellation in South Australia.

## Close bonds formed through MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ demonstrate the power of families collaborating to help each other

Life Without Barriers introduced MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ in South Australia in partnership with The Mockingbird Society and the Department of Child Protection. The model allows relationships to develop naturally in a supportive environment. Sara, a care worker, emphasised that MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ is not just respite. “It is an extension of family that they get to hang out with. It makes a difference,” she said.

Close bonds formed quickly in MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ constellations, providing many children with their first close friend or sibling-like relationship. Both carers and workers value the

collective approach of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ in fostering these bonds, particularly considering trauma histories, behavioural challenges, multiple placements, school changes and peer exclusion.

In the past year, Life Without Barriers expanded from three to six MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ constellations, with six Hub Home providers supporting 61 children and 43 carer households. As Australia’s replicating agency, we assist other agencies in implementing the model. We received a child protection award for Outstanding Service NGO from the Department for Child Protection South Australia in 2022

## Delivering great service

### Life Without Barriers teams up with young adults for a better transition to adulthood

In 2022, following years of advocacy from Life Without Barriers and other non-government organisations, the Queensland Government extended care support for care-experienced young people to age 21 to better support transitions into adulthood. Life Without Barriers now delivers Next Step Plus and the Extended Post Care Support Programs in various regions in Queensland.

The two programs work together to support young people aged 15–25 to develop their skills and knowledge to live independently, provide additional support and services when they need them and also provide financial support for rent and accommodation expenses.

The new Extended Post Care Program provides intensive proactive support over three years, with financial assistance for housing and developing or maintaining a connection to country and culture being key priorities. Through assertive outreach, the program meets the needs of young people who might not be in stable ongoing living arrangements when leaving care. The program also supports foster and kinship carer households.

Our Next Step Plus program has been helping young people for years. With our ongoing partnership of 10 years with Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander Community Controlled Organisation, Marabisda, in Mackay, we were able to support 23-year-old Aboriginal single mother Judy\* towards a positive outcome.

Judy's four nieces and nephews were in care and all with separate foster care families. Through our Next Step Plus service, Judy worked with Marabisda, to become a kinship carer to bring her nieces and nephews back home to her, their kin.

As Judy did not have her own accommodation, we assisted her with an application to the Department of Housing and advocated on her behalf with both the Queensland child safety department and local community housing providers to find her a new house. We supported Judy in attaining the Queensland Working with Children Check (Blue Card).

Judy was approved to become a kinship carer and two of her nieces and nephews came to live with her in their new home, and she is working towards bringing the other two homes. We connected her to community services, daycare, school and the local Aboriginal medical service. Judy says her family is doing very well and she is grateful for the support from Next Step Plus.



A young woman with curly hair is sitting outside, and there is a blurred image of a person in the background (AI-generated image).

## Delivering great service



Video shows how support workers actively support residents of Richmond Street to live their best lives.

### Partnering with families in child protection

“Through our research, innovation and our practice every day, we have learned that parents and families themselves hold the solutions in child protection. This is true at every level in the system, from casework to policy and law reform,” said Jessica Cocks, National Manager for Research and Innovation.

**We know that advice from people with lived experience improves our practice and our processes.**

## Delivering great service

### The following are some of our activities this year.

#### Direct Experience Group

This year, Life Without Barriers partnered with the Reily Foundation and DS Consultancy to establish the first-ever Direct Experience Group to provide policy and practice advice to the Minister for Child Protection in South Australia.

The Direct Experience Group provides a regular platform for parents and families with lived experience of the child protection system in South Australia to provide advice on ways to improve outcomes for children in child protection. Parent and family insights are then used to drive change in policy and practice for the benefit of children and families in care.

Quarterly forums with the Direct Experience Group and the Minister promote the participation of parents and families with lived experience who have previously lacked a voice in policy and practice development.

Dana Shen is the principal consultant at DS Consultancy. She specialises in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, service providers and those with lived experience to create change and improve services.

“It is particularly important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents participate in the Group due to the unacceptably high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care,” said Dana.

“The development of this group is an important opportunity for the department to listen and learn from parents and to refocus on the family and the community as a solution to child welfare problems.”



A panel of people are on stage in front of an audience (AI-generated image).

## Delivering great service



Four people are talking in a living room (AI-generated image).

### SHIFT

Life Without Barriers continues to partner with Shoalhaven Illawarra Families Together (SHIFT), formerly known as Parents Voices Matter. SHIFT is a group of parents with lived experience of child protection and out-of-home care, who support, empower and inform other parents who are on this journey with them. They want families to feel like their voices are heard when it comes to parenting their children, regardless of the situation. SHIFT believes well-supported parents mean better outcomes for our children. During three months in 2023, SHIFT provided fortnightly peer support at the Department of Communities and Justice's One Place at Coniston. They also supported parent peer workers in this role through mentoring and coaching before and after peer sessions.

### Family Time Coaching

Life Without Barriers Child, Youth and Family services, practitioners, parents with lived experience and carers came together to design Family Time Coaching, a coached and supported approach to family time which is focused on reunification. The evidence-informed approach

to family time uses CARE and evidence-based elements from research, practice and lived experience.

Practitioners support parents before, during and after family time to provide coaching and reflection. The Family Reunification Service in South Australia offers this program to parents, and an evaluation of this voluntary and parent-led process is underway.

During the past year, Family Time Coaching workshops were run for Child, Youth and Family practitioners and leaders in Adelaide, Tasmania and Queensland. The overall feedback from these workshops has been very positive and teams are being supported as required.

“Working on the co-design team was a great opportunity to represent parents with children in out-of-home care. Knowing that the aim was to build a program that would have crucial benefits for families in the reunification process was most rewarding. Co-designing in this way is a fantastic opportunity to build on knowledge from both lived and learned experience,” said Rachel, lived experience expert.

## Delivering great service

### Acting collectively to break the cycle of addiction

Often children and young people exposed to adults with addictions go on to repeat the behaviour, passing trauma from generation to generation. Consistent, non-judgemental support from our alcohol and other drugs (AOD) team and collaborative action between individuals and the sector are keys to disrupting the cycle of addiction and bringing better outcomes for children, young people and families.

Last year, Adele used cannabis and morphine to manage her back pain. Gradually, she agreed to engage with our South Australian Assertive Outreach Alcohol and Other Drugs Service as a team. As trust was built, the 52-year-old was finally ready to let someone help her with her lifelong anxiety and social isolation, which were rooted in childhood trauma.

Adele worked with a Life Without Barriers social worker and psychologist to develop her coping skills for anxiety and to reduce her cannabis use. Our Registered Nurse referred her to an alternative pain clinic for a pain management trial. Adele started the trial and completed the Assertive Outreach program.

Nine months later, Adele called her former AOD team to say she had stopped morphine use for three months now. She experienced reduced pain and improved mental health, made new friends, increased activity levels and participated in community events. Her limp disappeared, and she felt genuinely happy again. Adele said, "I haven't even considered using morphine again. I still have pain and it's more manageable. The support you gave has helped me to live again."



People sit outdoors in a circle at a Cook and Yarn group facilitated by Life Without Barriers in Ceduna.

Our AOD team assisted approximately 900 individuals monthly across three services this year: Outpatient Counselling and Police Drug Diversion Initiative, Country SA Primary Health Network Far West program, and the Assertive Outreach program. We are one of South Australia's largest AOD providers, offering help to individuals aged 11 to 79. Our team of 25 professionals encompasses various disciplines, including counselling, social work psychology, nursing, Aboriginal primary health, peer work and community support.

The Assertive Outreach program has a 72% successful treatment completion rate and recently secured an 18-month contract extension. This holistic, multidisciplinary program aids individuals who have historically disengaged from traditional AOD programs, leading to fewer hospital admissions, reduced substance use, and improved physical health and quality of life.



## Delivering great service



Judy wearing pink tinted glasses, an orange top and pearls, sits in her lounge room.

## Aged Care services

**We partnered with 8236 older Australians to increase their independence and enjoyment of life at home for as long as possible through Life Without Barriers' in home support services. Collaborating with people, their families and partner organisations, this year we:**

- Commenced developing an improved Aged Care Client Management system.
- Established Client Advisory Groups and a Client Engagement Team to analyse people's feedback and prepare more ways to co-design our services with people we support.
- Launched the Values Champion awards, a staff recognition program based on our values, to engage staff and increase staff retention in a market where there is a shortage of quality aged care staff.
- Improved quality of service by ensuring staff are onboarded in a consistent way and are well-trained with a Corporate Induction program.

## Delivering great service

### Experience brought a devoted couple back home

Life Without Barriers collaborated with Tony and Louisa and their family to find a way to bring the couple from an aged care facility back to their family home.

Tony and Louisa have shared a lifetime of love and devotion. Through all of life's challenges and joys, they remained an inseparable couple. When Louisa was diagnosed with dementia, Tony became her dedicated caregiver.

As time went on, Tony faced health issues of his own, which made it increasingly challenging to provide the level of care he wanted to give. Tony decided to move into a residential aged care home so he could continue to be with Louisa and play an active role in her care.

Weeks passed, and Tony realised that being in a residential care setting wasn't where he felt he and Louisa should be. He yearned to return to their family home filled with cherished memories. Tony shared his wishes with his family, who reached out to Life Without Barriers for support as Tony and Louisa were past clients.

Working with the family to find contemporary solutions, Life Without Barriers arranged services that supported the couple to transition back home and live independently.

With innovative and timely support in place, Tony could better care for Louisa, and the family gained valuable respite, allowing for more quality time together. Through this partnership between the family and Life Without Barriers, Tony and Louisa's enduring love story continued in the place they cherished most – their family home.



A framed picture of Tony and Louisa sits on a table.

## Delivering great service



Barry is ready to bowl a ball at a bowling alley.

### Partnering with people to inform our Aged Care service

Aged Care has established Client Advisory Groups to actively consult and engage with those who rely on our services. This is an additional avenue to enable the voices of the people we support to guide how we operate, influence decision-making processes, and drive transformative changes within the Aged Care service.

The people who put up their hands to become members wanted to put their skills to use and help other older people. “I like to influence systems and consider client feedback essential,” said one member. “I want to advise about better options for older Australians,” said another member. Another reason was “to advocate for people who, for whatever reason, have no voice.”

In the first Client Advisory Meetings, we delved into the “Pillars of Practice” and their significance for those who rely on our services. Through discussion, these pillars – Effective, Safe, Inclusive, Person-Centred and Coordinated – were brought to life through the lived experiences of the members.

The Client Advisory Groups also gave feedback about the scheduling of our services. They talked about the need for clients to offer input on our recruitment advertisements and the desire for regular check-ins to provide feedback on service quality.

The Aged Care Client Advisory Groups demonstrate our commitment to ensuring the people we support have an active role in shaping their care and the services they receive. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to nurturing these partnerships and creating a better service together.

## Delivering great service



A man is standing at house doorway holding a box of plants given by a lady.

## National Immigration Support Services

**This year, our National Immigration Support Services (NISS) partnered with 1150 refugees and asylum seekers. Working as a team with asylum seekers, government and community bodies, and other services, we support people as they wait for the outcome of their visa applications and as they transition to life in Australia or elsewhere.**

## Delivering great service

### When seeking refuge in an unfamiliar country, caring support can mean the world

Our NISS team works together with people seeking asylum to help with their settlement journey.

Ebrahim fled to Australia seeking safety and the opportunity for a new life while carrying extraordinary trauma, loss and terror. Ebrahim's long-held dream came true when he received a bridging visa in March. He had waited for seven years in offshore detention, then three years in residence determination in Melbourne and Sydney. The uncertainty and time taken in the resolution of his immigration case affected his mental health, and he also felt isolated from his community.

He was thrilled about the visa grant, but he now faced navigating new systems and unfamiliar processes to set up his new life. He did not have to do it alone. Our NISS team partnered with Ebrahim, supporting him with enrolling in Medicare, obtaining a tax file number, finding accommodation, connecting with employment and emergency relief services, and accessing funding to help with bond and rent costs. Most of all, his NISS team were there to support him.

Ebrahim worked in his home country as a barber, and opened his own barber shop in Nauru when he lived there in the community. Determined to find work, Ebrahim visited several barbers before gaining a job at a barber shop. He drives an hour each way to work and is happy to be using his barber skills again. He also recently got married and this has been another highlight since receiving the bridging visa.

"I feel hopeful about my future, especially since receiving the visa grant and meeting my new wife. I am proud to work again as a barber. I am excited about the next chapter of my life," he said.

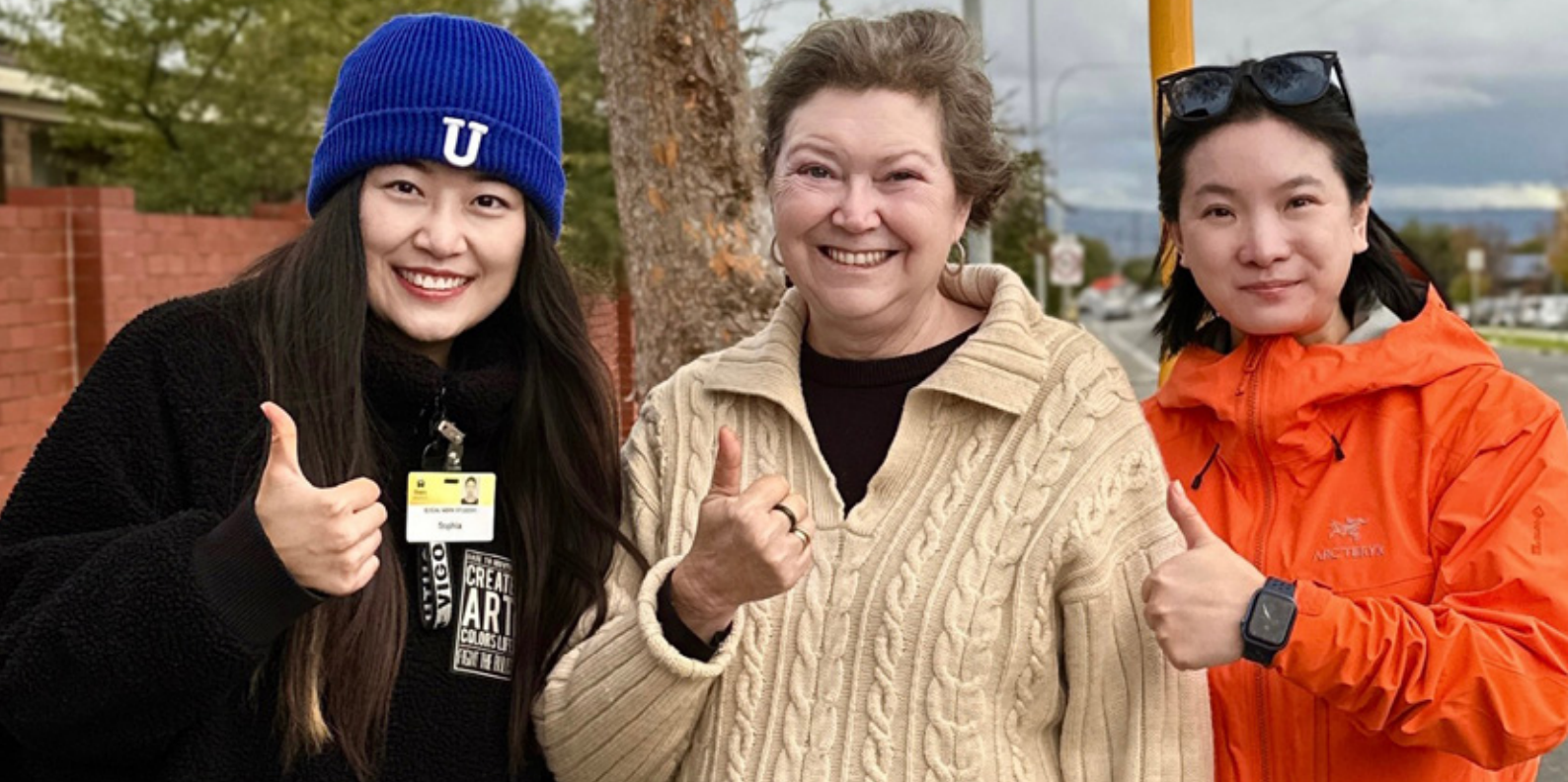
Ebrahim is one of 1150 asylum seekers who have been supported by Life Without Barriers' NISS team in the past year. In 2009, Life Without Barriers started supporting people seeking a life free from terror and in 2014 we began providing Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS). It is a program that provides people seeking asylum with temporary needs-based support while they wait for their immigration status to be resolved.

After successfully tendering and obtaining the SRSS contract with the Federal Department of Home Affairs, Life Without Barriers is one of two national providers of the SRSS program across Australia as at July 2023.

Having practice models, frameworks and relevant policies allows us to innovate and meet people's needs in different ways. We leverage the benefits of operating at a national level while working at the grassroots level in partnership with people to meet their needs and milestones, empowering and equipping them to live well independently in the community.

In Western Australia, Life Without Barriers partners with MercyCare to provide all SRSS.

## Delivering great service



Sophia, Ellen and Song stand next to a red brick wall by the side of a road.

## Sharing our best practice

Each day we connect with 23,740 people, often at very personal moments. They and their families trust us to provide high quality support services. We never take this for granted. Continuously we assess and improve our approach, systems and processes.

## Delivering great service

### Practice and Governance Framework

Practice is not just the responsibility of direct care staff – it must be owned and developed systematically by the whole organisation. A Practice Governance Framework is an overarching approach that says what our fundamental principles, elements, processes and systems that support quality in practice across the whole organisation.

We have undertaken significant work in the practice governance space over several years. We partnered with the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) to review our practice governance approaches. Throughout the year, the PRC worked closely with us and presented an approach to the “refreshed” Practice Governance Framework. This framework helps our Board understand and govern our practice with our leadership team and helps them clearly see the positive changes we are making with the people we support.

We have partnered with other organisations and openly shared our Practice Governance Framework, supporting our partners on their governance journeys.

Life Without Barriers worked with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) to share our Practice Governance Framework with emerging Directors, and we also shared access to our Framework on our website. Deputy Chair Gill Calvert has invested time over the year talking with AICD members and in other forums about the importance of practice governance, and encouraging Board members in the care sector to embrace their responsibility for practice governance. She said, “The Board plays a central role in the stewardship of practice governance – one which puts practice improvement at the heart of our decision-making.”

## Delivering great service

### Safeguarding the rights of people we support

We are responsible for promoting the safety and wellbeing of the people we support. Safeguarding is about the steps we take to protect the welfare and human rights of every person trusting us to provide support across all the services we provide.

In November 2020, Life Without Barriers established the National Safeguarding Unit (NSU) by bringing together different functions from across the organisation for the purpose of strengthening our approach to safeguarding. In 2023, our NSU released the Life Without Barriers Safeguarding Framework. The Framework helps us work together in understanding our individual and collective responsibilities to promote people's rights to experience life choices and support the way they choose, and their right to experience safety. It also guides how we need to respond when we do not meet people's expectations through our service delivery. The Framework comes at an opportune time, prior to the release of the Disability Royal Commission's Final Report, which confirms the sector's responsibility to place people with disability at the forefront of service provision, while preventing and better protecting

them from abuse and neglect. Life Without Barriers commits to being a sector leader in this space and sharing our knowledge of safeguarding.

Also released in 2023, the Life Without Barriers Apology Framework is our pledge to open disclosure and is a corrective safeguard under the Safeguarding Framework; it reaffirms our dedication to building and sustaining relationships through open, transparent, two-way dialogue. An important part of doing our work is acknowledging things can go wrong, and when they do, authentically apologising to those we support, their families or other significant people in their lives. This Framework, consistent with our values, is a cornerstone to strengthening our relationships while delivering great services. By setting consistent expectations for our staff when they are addressing adverse client events or complaints, we ensure that every person we support receives the respect, honesty and disclosure they deserve. Acknowledging an adverse event, apologising or expressing regret ensures we continue to learn, improve our services and reduce occurrences of similar events in the future.



## Delivering great service

### Improving our response to complaints and feedback

We've introduced an enhanced complaints management process to improve our responsiveness and the experience of people who raise concerns. During the pilot phase, over 60 cases were addressed, and the resolution rate increased from 25% to 35%.

"I wish to convey my very grateful thanks in resolving my problems. A suitable resolution was

reached," said one complainant. "Appreciative of contact with Complaints Management Team – felt like Life Without Barriers was really listening," another said.

This new process not only prioritises swift responses and respect for those we support but also aids in our ongoing service improvement efforts.

### Strengthening our ability to weather emergencies and crisis

This year, we established a new Risk and Resilience unit to improve our resilience and help us respond to emergencies and disruptions. This includes dealing with the ongoing Covid-19 situation, cyber security issues and bad weather. This year, we finalised a National Business Continuity Plan and separate Continuity Plans for different services. These plans outline the activation of the National Emergency Management Protocol, Pandemic Plan, Cyber Crisis Management Plan, Health and Safety Emergency Management Plan and ICT Disaster

Recovery Plan. They help us keep our community safe, and make sure important services keep running.

As part of the National Business Continuity Plan, we started special briefings about severe weather before summer. The Board and Executive team practised what to do in the event of a serious cyber breach. Program-specific plans identified those services that are most essential and how long they can be down in the event of a crisis.



**Jeevani Korathota**  
**Office of Special Counsel**

Jeevani is the organisation's senior legal expert, leading the office of Special Counsel with responsibility for our in-house legal team, including providing strategic legal counsel to the CEO and Board.

# Influencing systemic barriers



A video without sound is playing. A young person we are helping with employment bends down and plants a seedling in soil. Eduardo, his employment coach, is helping him.

## Influencing systemic barriers

# A fair, equitable and inclusive future requires organisational commitment and collaboration

**This year, we invested in policy and advocacy initiatives through a range of partnerships to disrupt barriers central to many social justice issues in Australia.**

## Transparency in choice of home and living options for people with disability

The home and living options available to people with disability have historically not been informed or designed by the very people who need them. This means they often fall short of meeting individuals' choices and preferences.

Until now, it has also been common for the same provider to own or manage the “bricks and mortar” of a house and deliver the daily living support services to residents living there. These arrangements can deny residents the right to make the same choices about their support providers available to all other participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

This year, over 1200 people nationally chose our disability support services, including 293 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In some cases, we have provided supports and managed the housing.

In a new policy commitment, we committed to separating Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA),

which means we are actively withdrawing from managing homes in which we are providing supports.

The policy's core principles were shaped by direct consultation with individuals with lived experience as well as advocates.

This year we made significant progress, with around 70% of the homes we operate now fully separated and managed by separate providers.

We are collaborating with key partners who are building new, purpose-built homes across Australia, and NDIS registered SDA providers, who will manage these homes for the future.

Participants who choose to move into these new homes will be able to choose their daily living support provider. This collaborative work, underpinned by our policy commitment, will enable the people we support to have genuine choice and control over where and how they live, and to have access to new, contemporary housing that is purpose-built for their needs.

## Influencing systemic barriers



A woman with a pink jumper with “Brooklyn 86” on it stands next to Eurobodalla Shire Mayor Matt, who is wearing a green knitted top. They are smiling.

### Advocating for policy change so everyone has access to meaningful employment

More than 20% of Australians live with disability, yet only half who are of working age have secured employment. People with disability experience more barriers to employment than their peers and that needs to change.

### Policy development

Our Disability Employment Policy was developed during the reporting period and is the cornerstone for our advocacy work in this area. At its core, it commits us to ensuring people with disability have genuine choice and control over their employment and career development pathways, and can enjoy meaningful work that meets their expectations and fulfils their potential.

We made submissions to the Disability Royal Commission in relation to employment and hosted an Ideas Without Barriers forum on the topic, which brought representatives from the sector and government together for a robust discussion. We were frequently in the media espousing the benefits of employing people with disability, and our Chief Innovation Officer Emma Bennison wrote an opinion piece on the subject for International Day of People with Disability.

## Influencing systemic barriers

### Creating employment opportunities for the people we support

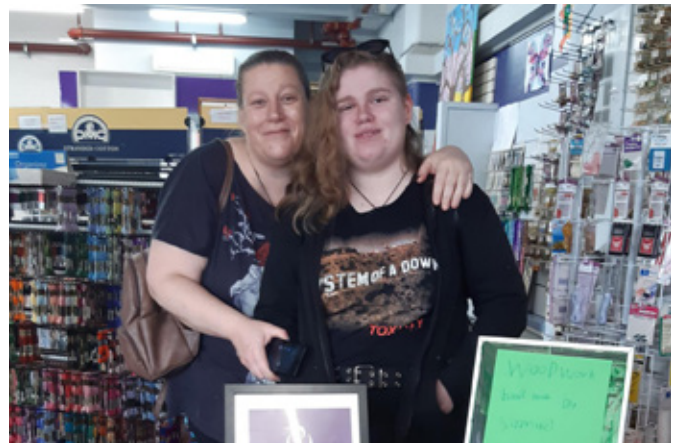
Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged cohorts in the labour market. They are twice as likely to be unemployed than older adults with disability (24.7% compared to 7.9%).

People with disability are less likely to successfully transition from school to work or further study than people without disability. As 18% of school leavers with disability do not enter the labour force for up to seven years after leaving school (compared to 5% for people without disability), our work has remained focused on developing our Young Peoples Employment Pathways (YPEP).

Our YPEP employment team supports youth to gain job-readiness skills and to find meaningful employment. Together with our coaches, each person undertakes a discovery process to get to understand likes and dislikes, hobbies, goals and current skills to co-design an individualised employment pathway plan. The plan includes the opportunity to explore a range of employment options to determine what career path meets their individual needs and interests. Over 60 young people have joined YPEP and achieved some significant milestones:

- 14 young people have gone on to further studies at TAFE and university.
- 15 young people have secured employment.
- 5 young people have started up their own micro business.
- Many are undertaking a range of job sampling and work experience opportunities at radio stations, community gardens, cafes and more.

Georgia, an Employment Pathway participant, worked with her Employment Pathways Coach Eduardo to map out what her career goals were,



Georgia and her mum at their Witchy Bath Bomb stall with their bath products.

what areas she was interested in and what skills she needed to build on. After exploring different options, Georgia decided she would like to become a business partner with her mum in creating bath products, so Eduardo worked with her on her goal.

“Eddie’s been helping me get my head around it all and helping me get set up. I’m pretty thankful he’s helping out with this. I was worried about starting this due to my lack of knowledge, but now I’m feeling alright with it and I feel like I can do this,” said Georgia. As part of her launch phase, Georgia took Witchy Bombs to Life Without Barriers’ Hand-to-Hand craft shop in Newcastle Mall.

Eduardo also works with Georgia to grow her skills in other areas she will need throughout her working life. “In the future, Georgia might think ‘OK, do I want to keep doing this?’ So we look at how we are going to set up goals after this experience. It’s about a career path and exploring what options are available,” said Eduardo.

## Influencing systemic barriers

# Educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care

Joe's small primary school made several adjustments to support his learning and engagement, but he encountered immediate difficulties when he started high school. Unable to understand Joe's trauma background and provide the necessary support, the school's response to his behaviour was limited to discipline. This ultimately led to Joe's expulsion, the breakdown of his placement and further disruption in his life.

**Sadly, Joe's experience is more common than it should be among children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC).**

**We know that:**

**Children and young people in OOHC experience double the number of absences from school.**

**1 in 5 children in OOHC are not at school on any given day.**

**The proportion of students in care who were suspended is almost four times higher than those without a care experience.**

**53% of young care leavers (aged 18-25) completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared to the national average of 85%.**

To create a different outcome for Joe and young people like him who have experienced trauma, a coordinated approach that involves co-creating education plans, considering the voice of the young person and implementing trauma-informed practices was crucial.

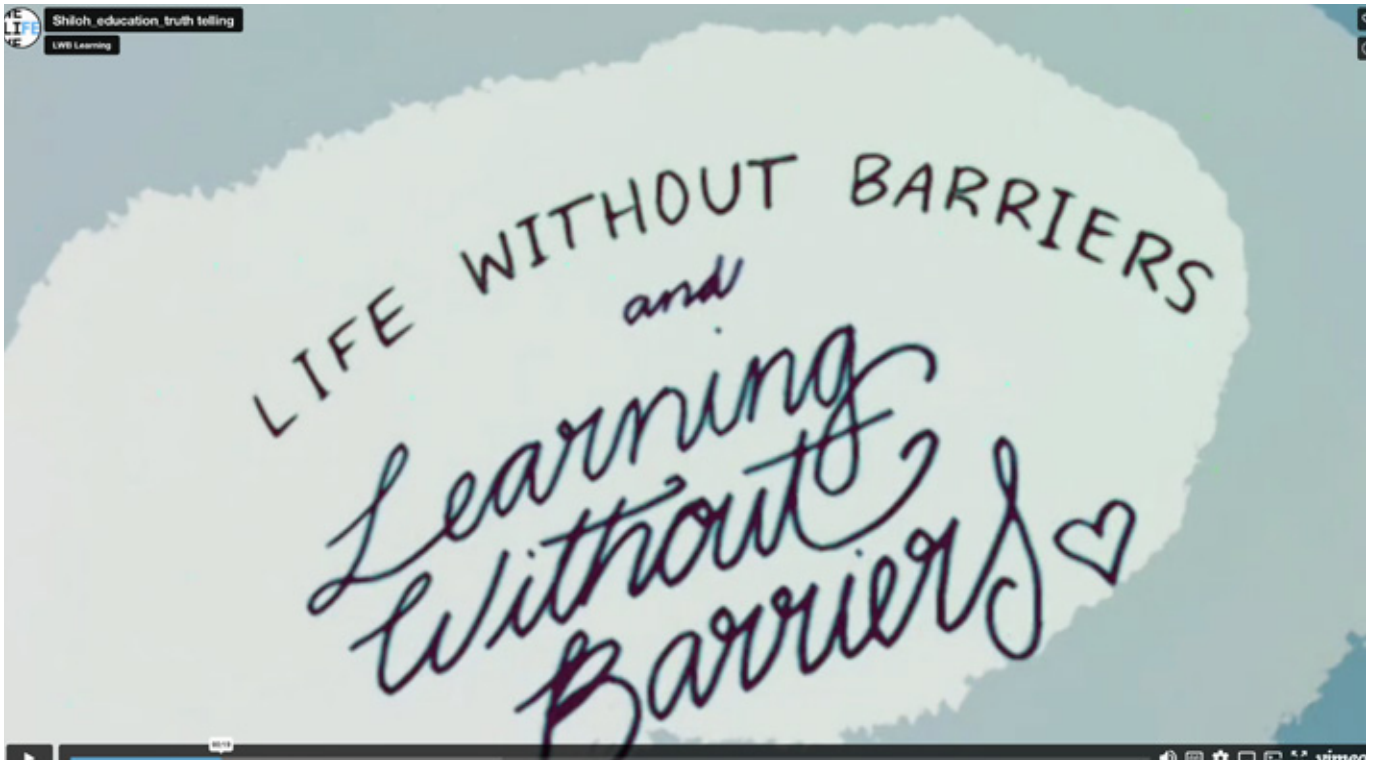
In 2023, we launched the Learning Without Barriers Education Strategy 2023-2025 to address challenges and create inclusive learning environments and opportunities that enable children and young people to thrive academically, socially and personally. The strategy emphasises the creation of supportive learning environments, increased engagement in early learning and school, individualised education and learning plans, and partnerships with organisations, universities and stakeholders to influence systemic barriers.

Within the education strategy, Life Without Barriers has been actively involved in ongoing research this year, including:

Australian Research Council Linkage Project – Fostering school attendance for students in OOHC. This project is led by UTAS with UniSA, ACU and ANU. Life Without Barriers is a Partner Investigator alongside CREATE Foundation and Berry Street.

I Am Me Project – The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Deakin University. This project explores the creation of a digital backpack to hold artefacts and memories that support the maintenance of identity for children in care.

## Influencing systemic barriers



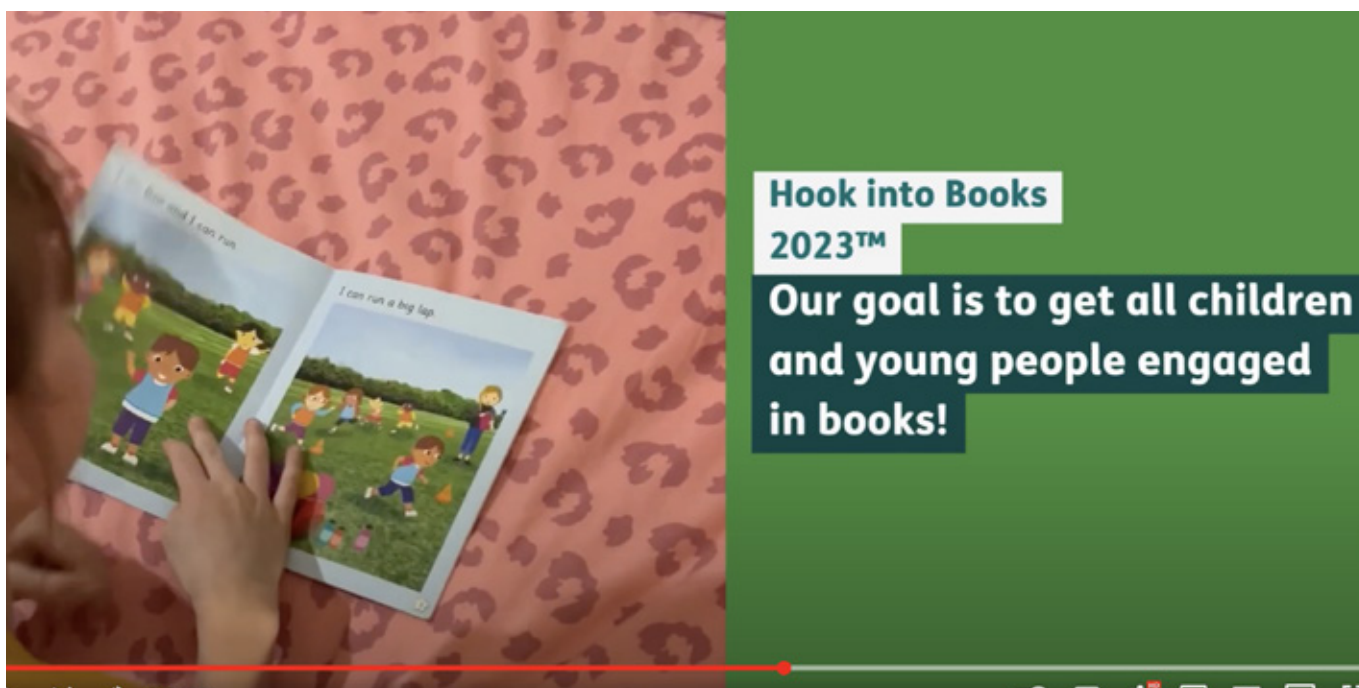
Video of Shiloh, a young person from the Gunggari Nation, who shares how education is instrumental in creating positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. “It all begins with education because quality and culturally responsive education can create equality.”

## Amplifying young people’s voices

This year, the five Education Consultants in the Learning Without Barriers team partnered with hundreds of children and young people to amplify their voices and help them reach their full educational potential through dedicated child- and youth-led groups and projects. The Education Consultants work collaboratively with the Life Without Barriers staff, carers, children and young people across various systems to support educational engagement and learning pathways.

To enable our workforce and carers to better partner with children and young people, the Learning Without Barriers team developed a suite of educationally focused resources and delivered professional development webinars to build the capacity of our community to strengthen their understanding and advocacy skills, to support our children and young people to have positive experiences in education and learning settings.

## Influencing systemic barriers



Video of Hook into Books, which continued its success in 2022 with more book backpacks and suitcases distributed for children in care than previous years.

## Helping children get hooked into books

In 2022, our Education Unit teamed up with our Child, Youth and Family directorate, parents and carers, and 21 leading Australian authors to promote a love of stories in children and young people through Life Without Barriers' National Hook into Books™ Campaign.

In the campaign's second year, 2500 books were distributed to children and young people nationally, including 2000 book donations received from our supporters Queensland University Press, CBCA (QLD), Pan Macmillan Australia, Hachette Australia, and Wildflowers and Reading Hours. We produced 23 Human Library podcast episodes and seven podcast episodes featuring books of resilience and hope, and distributed 20 travelling bookcases and 42 book backpacks to individual children and young people.

We partnered with other out-of-home care providers Key Assets and Berry Street, who delivered condensed versions of Hook into Books to their staff, carers, children and young people and within flexible learning centres in Queensland and Victoria.

**We extend our thanks to authors Jackie French, Sophie Beer, Zoe Norton-Lodge, Carl Merrison & Hakea Hussler, Michael Gerard Bauer, Mick Elliott, Tess Rowley, Katherine Battersby, Gabrielle Wang, Breanna Humes, Pip Harry, Nova Weetman, Samantha Wheeler, Michelle Worthington, Patrick Guest, Noah Guest, Megan Daley, Zanni Louise, Yvette Poshoglian and Steven Herrick.**



## Influencing systemic barriers



The SAFE Activity Book cover. There is a white rectangle with cartoon children and text. It is surrounded by a pink rectangle.

## Educational outcomes for children in out-of-home care

We have been providing SAFE Series kits to two- to ten-year-old children we support in out-of-home care since 2018, as part of our We Put Children First child safety campaign. The SAFE Series, a set of four children's books containing personal safety messages developed by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, helps children understand their emotions, helps children in difficult or unsafe situations, and promotes the concept of them having a voice.

Last year, through funding from the 2022 Perpetual IMPACT Philanthropy Application Program and in partnership with other organisations, we provided 4000 SAFE Series kits to children in out-of-home care across Australia. We partnered with state and territory peak bodies to share the books. The Queensland Family and Child Commission provided additional funding so that more children in Queensland can access these important safety resources.

## Influencing systemic barriers

# Forming impactful partnerships to break down barriers

**To bring about lasting change and break down significant barriers that people in our communities face, we need collaboration across the care and corporate sector.**

## Alliance20

Life Without Barriers continued to be an active member of Alliance20 and coordinated the secretariat functions for the group. Alliance20 is a group of 25 major disability providers that have come together to work with governments and all stakeholders to support and improve the NDIS. Key issues that Alliance20 has pursued in the last year include improving employment opportunities for people with disability in service organisations and the wider community, improving services in rural and remote areas, promoting more transparent, fairer and better pricing arrangements that truly

empower people with disability and ensure the ongoing provision of viable services, and reforming models of accommodation and home and living services. With input from Life Without Barriers, Alliance20 made several submissions, including submissions to the National Disability Insurance Agency to assist with its Annual Pricing Review, as well as submissions and representations on the need to reform home and living models. Similarly, Alliance20 has worked very closely with the Independent Review, of the NDIS to promote the interests of the people we support.



**Chris Chippendale**  
**Executive Lead – Disability Engagement**

Chris leads Life Without Barriers' engagement in Alliance20, a multi-organisation and provider partnership designed to work collaboratively to strengthen the NDIS.

## Influencing systemic barriers

### Allies for Children

This year, we joined as a founding member of the Allies for Children, which was launched at the end of the financial year. The Allies for Children is a committed partnership of several founding organisations working within the Child, Youth and Family sector. The Allies was formed through a shared belief and commitment that seismic change to advance improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families is best achieved through a partnership approach. While relatively new in formation, the Allies' CEOs and their organisations are seeking to advance improved social policy responses and reform within state child protection jurisdictions at scale. The Allies immediate priority reform agenda includes specifically contributing to Target 12 in Closing the Gap and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.

This reform commitment includes advocating for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector to be supported with resourcing capacity so future child protection system responses are informed directly by First Nations leadership and ACCOs, built on shared decision-making and with recognition of cultural authority. The future goal of this commitment from the Allies is to support First Nations communities to thrive, with children growing in culture and with kin, and where child protection responses are needed, they reside within the leadership of community.

## Influencing systemic barriers

### The Possibility Partnership

Our Chief Executive, Claire Robbs, was invited to represent Life Without Barriers on the Possibility Partnership, which is examining ways that the non-government sector can better collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to improve the outcomes for the people we support. This project brings together high-profile stakeholders from a range of government, business and non-government organisations. It embeds self-determination principles and lived

experience leadership and voice at the heart of this project. Over time, the Possibility Partnership is aiming to provide a range of innovative ideas to increase the capacity of the broad sectors in which we operate. It is an approach that will force some fundamental rethinking about power, purpose, relationships and resources. It will help to reset how we think about the role, operation and impact of a fit-for-purpose human services systems for a very different and rapidly changing world.



**Tabatha Feher**  
**Chief Advisor – Public Affairs and Advocacy**

Tabatha leads the design and implementation of Life Without Barriers Public Affairs, external communications and advocacy strategy, including relationships with key strategic partners.

### Thank you to our many partners

**Genuine and lasting change can happen when we are united by a drive to make a difference. We thank our partners and allies who collaborate with us to build a better future for the people we support.**

## Influencing systemic barriers

# Being the change we want to see by changing ourselves

## Strengthening our commitment to workplace diversity, equity and inclusion

Life Without Barriers continued to ensure our workforce is reflective of the diverse communities in which we live and work. This year, our employees and carers with lived experience have contributed important views and insights that have shaped how we work and created safe spaces for people to come together. Increasing lived experience in our workforce has been a significant focus for us this year.

## Our commitment to access, inclusion and employment of people with disability

In October 2022, we launched our third Access, Inclusion and Employment Plan (2022–2025) (AIEP) at an event in Newcastle that attracted over 430 people in person and online. The event was hosted by Emily Reaper, Co-Chair of our Disability, Ability Wellness Network (DAWN), and featured employees and board members with disability sharing their aspirations for the future of disability employment at Life without Barriers.

The plan commits us to 15% of our workforce comfortably and openly identifying as people with disability at all levels of our organisation. Not only is this an ambitious target, but it has also inspired us to take stock of why Life Without Barriers (like many organisations) struggles to reassure our employees that it is safe or beneficial to share disability-related information with us. Currently, 14% of our employees identify as people with disability through anonymous surveys, yet only 3% share this information with us formally. This has led to important pieces of work relating to data collection and how we ensure employees feel safe and supported to share diversity data with us.

In addition to this target, the plan commits the organisation to 66 actions across four key areas:

- Our role as an inclusive, progressive and welcoming employer.
- Creating employment opportunities through our service offerings.
- Engaging in reforms to the Disability Employment Services system.
- Influencing social policy in employment – the DAWN Committee Co-Chairs are part of the AIEP Strategy Governance Group, which governs our Plan and measures our AIEP's impact through key metrics.

## Influencing systemic barriers

The plan commits us to creating an accessible work environment that ensures all employees can bring their whole selves to work and contribute to delivering great services to the people we support. Our achievements in this area include:

- Committing to accessible communication best practice across all aspects of our internal and external communications.
- Improving accessibility and quality assurance for our employee training and induction processes.
- Ensuring information about our DAWN Committee and our workplace adjustments process are part of all induction packs.
- Continuing to assess and refurbish our properties to ensure they meet employee access requirements.

### Our role as an inclusive employer

We know that around 93% of people with disability of working age experience barriers to finding and keeping a job and less than half are employed. As one of Australia's top industries for employment growth, the care and support sector can lead the way in the employment of people with disability and encourage government and corporate employers to follow.

With this in mind, some of the highlights since we launched the AIEP have included:

- Maintaining our status as a Disability Confident Recruiter with the Australian Network on Disability (AND), which conducts detailed annual assessments of our recruitment processes to ensure they meet best practice standards.
- Maintaining and growing DAWN, which continued collaborating across our organisation to improve access and inclusion and to strengthen the voice of people with disability through videos, conversations, events and meetings with our Chair and Chief Executive.
- Continuing our commitment to employing graduate interns through the AND's Stepping Into Program, and we are proud to be an inaugural sponsor of their alumni Connect Network, Australia's first alumni network for university graduates with disability.
- Being invited to collaborate with The Achieve Foundation to establish the Disability Employment Catalyst program, which would see people with disability employed at speed and at scale in human services organisations. This initiative received funding from the Paul Ramsay Foundation and Life Without Barriers is a key partner alongside Yorralla and Achieve Australia.



**Emma Bennison**  
Chief Innovation Officer

Emma leads the organisation's innovation portfolio, including key strategic relationships that enable us to achieve our diversity and inclusion and our Access, Inclusion and Employment strategy.

**Influencing systemic barriers**

## Celebrating WorldPride with our LGBTQIA+ community

Life Without Barriers joined the 2023 Sydney Mardi Gras Parade, a celebration of WorldPride and the LGBTQIA+ community. Sixty staff members, foster carers, people we support and their families came together from across the country to march with the Life Without Barriers float. This year was the fourth time we have had the honour of participating in the Mardi Gras Parade.

Our goal is to create a great place to work for everyone by embracing the individual skills, perspectives and experiences our people bring to the workplace. We support this through Pride Without Barriers, our employee network for LGBTQIA+ employees and their allies.

We started our LGBTQIA+ inclusion journey by being one of the first organisations to offer same-gender couples the opportunity to become foster carers. We were delighted to have had carers from the LGBTQIA+ community march with us in the Parade.

Deputy Chair of the Board, Gillian Calvert AO, joined us in the parade and said, “I’m so proud of Life Without Barrier’s commitment to inclusion and diversity for all.”



Life Without Barriers’ float at the 2023 Mardi Gras parade on Oxford Street. There are swings and people dressed in rainbow on top of the float.



Deputy Chief Executive Disability & Mental Health Leanne Johnson, House Supervisor Vasileios Haldezos and Digital Content Lead Jacintha Roberts stand next to a fluffy green mascot. They are standing in front of the Life Without Barriers float at Mardi Gras.

## Influencing systemic barriers



Director Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University, Martha Holden observes as Life Without Barriers First Nations leads participate in a cultural care cards activity at the International Foster Care Organisation.



Attendees sit around round tables, listening to a speaker at a Family Inclusion Strategies at the Hunter High Tea.



Life Without Barriers Child Youth and Family leaders, Claire Robbs, SNAICC and Victoria Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) partners at a partnership meeting in March.



Life Without Barriers staff and partners at the Home Stretch conference.



Claire Robbs, Catherine Liddle (CEO SNAICC) and Karen Mundine (CEO Reconciliation Australia) at the launch of Family Matters at Parliament House.



Strategy Day at the Life Without Barriers head office for the Children in Care Collective.



# Impact for future generations

## Reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation is a nation where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children, young people and families, and prioritising self-determination to strengthen connection to culture, community and Country.

A video with no sound is playing. A hand turns the pages of Life Without Barriers' Elevate RAP booklet while a faint image of an Aboriginal boy painted for traditional performance is seen at the same time.

## Impact for future generations



Video shows the official launch of Life Without Barriers' Elevate RAP.

## Elevating our commitment to Reconciliation

In March, Life Without Barriers partnered with Reconciliation Australia and SNAICC – National Voice for our Children to share the joint commitments in our ELEVATE RAP with roundtable discussions in Canberra.

The gathering took place against the backdrop of the announcement of the proposed Constitutional Reform by the Prime Minister and included around 200 leaders from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Control Organisations, corporate, government and non-government agencies.

The roundtables focused on leadership in reconciliation and how organisations can work together across different sectors, and discussed measures to reduce the over-representation of First Nations children in child protection.

The event was an opportunity to forge relationships and connect leadership in reconciliation on pressing justice issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right now.

Catherine Liddle said, “The future of decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is community controlled. Our communities are the experts. We know that culturally appropriate services designed, led and delivered by our services get better outcomes,”

Karen Mundine, Reconciliation Australia CEO, said the Elevate RAP was a game-changer for the wellbeing of First Nations children and families.”

“This RAP includes substantive action that will have a profound impact on the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities for years to come,” she said.

## Impact for future generations

### Joining together in support of the Uluru Statement From The Heart

Life Without Barriers continued its active support for the Uluru Statement From The Heart and its calls for a First Nations Voice as the referendum was announced.

Life Without Barriers leaders attended the YES lab in February and immediately kicked off a translation and accessible resources program to share with community organisations across Australia. Between March and July, Life Without Barriers and our partners developed hundreds of community assets with critical, factual information about the Voice to Parliament, including videos, audio files, social media assets and fact sheets. The resources were developed in over 50 community languages, including five Aboriginal languages, and share widely across the non-government and corporate sector.

Life Without Barriers joined as a signatory to joint letters of support, including with Reconciliation Australia, First Peoples Network on Disability, the Allies for Uluru and Australian Council of Social Service.



Prime Minister Albanese and Voice Week of Action event attendees.



A group of people wearing Uluru Statement of the Heart t-shirts and caps at a Week of Action event.

## Impact for future generations

### Restoring the cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families

The Transformation Project is Life Without Barriers' commitment to contribute towards reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by working in partnership with SNAICC and other ACCOs.

This year, we worked in partnership with Aboriginal Social Policy experts and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to design the central policy commitment, with principles guiding our approach to transfer children to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control.

The policy frames Life Without Barriers' commitment to contributing to reform of child protection systems in three central commitments:

- Influence the sector to adopt and implement priority reforms to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.
- Advocate for ACCOs to receive support to commission and operate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through the investment of resources traditionally awarded to non-Indigenous organisations.
- Transition all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our care to ACCOs within 10 years.



Seven traditional dancers – four men and three boys – are painted with white paint for their performance at the Marunguka Corroboree.



Cultural support planner Silvia Jones-Terare stands with artist Stephen Hogart in front of a mural they created.



Five men and a boy perform a smoking ceremony at the Whinpullin land handover celebration.

## Impact for future generations



Girl standing with a feather cloak on her back.

### Collaborating for sector reform

While Life Without Barriers' commitment to transition away from care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is critical, it is also important we share our progress and encourage and support other organisations on their journey too. Senior leadership from our organisations have met with Executives and Boards from sector organisations to support their thinking and commitment to reforming child protection for First Nations children. We have briefed government

on the reform work within our organisations and engaged with key Commissioners and State Ministers on jurisdictional opportunities for child protection reform.

This year, we shared key progress and insights of our journey with the Productivity Commission, including some of the opportunities for Closing the Gap targets to be improved through greater contribution of the care sector.

## Impact for future generations

### Acknowledging Reconciliation Week

From the Awabakal lands to Tasmania, Life Without Barriers acknowledged National Reconciliation Week (NRW) around the nation. Staff and people we support attended NRW events and could find local events from a Reconciliation Week calendar we compiled. Over 400 staff attended an online event with a panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who talked about the NRW theme.

We also chose to act on NRW's theme 'Be a Voice for Generations' by supporting a constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. We collaborated with partners like Reconciliation Australia, From the Heart and SNAICC to help people to be informed as they prepare to place their vote.



Life Without Barriers staff at the National Sorry Day event in Queensland.



Dancers from Dinanwans Connection at the Reconciliation Week event in Orange.



Four men raise their hands in the air around a barbecue at a National Reconciliation Week celebration in Alice Springs.

## Impact for future generations



Five Life Without Barriers staff at a NAIDOC Week event hold signs saying “Get Up, Stand Up, Show Up” and “Listen Up & Stand Together”.



Two women are sitting on a floor and doing traditional Aboriginal weaving.

## How we celebrated NAIDOC Week

During NAIDOC Week, staff and people we support took full advantage of the chance to meet local Elders, engage with local communities and celebrate the history, cultures and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at events around the country. We proudly embraced the 2022 NAIDOC Week

theme, “Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!” – a call for action to bring about systemic change and to continue to rally around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Life Without Barriers sponsored and supported national NAIDOC Week events and supported the staff and people we support to attend their local events.



### **Servena McIntyre** **Chief Transformation Lead – Elevate RAP**

Servena leads the Child, Youth and Family Sector Reform policy and advocacy work focused on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in care. A proud Wadi Wadi, Wemba Wemba, Wiradajuri woman, she also leads Cultural Governance work organisation-wide and with sector partners, promoting cultural leadership and authority as key enablers in sector reform.

## Impact for future generations



Michael Cardillo, who chooses our mental health support services, is wearing a tartan print jacket with a faux fur collar.



Caroline, who chooses our Supported Independent Living services, is getting her hair and make-up done for her 40th birthday celebrations.

## Measuring our impact

To deliver great services, we need to know that we are getting it right every day. Measuring our impact brings transparency, encourages improvement and fosters accountability.

This year the Impact Measurement Framework was finalised and endorsed by the Board. It includes the Organisational Theory of Change, which outlines how we understand change and our approach to impact measurement. The Framework emphasises the importance of using qualitative, story-based methods to capture the impacts of our work for people we support, families and the community. We know that utilising qualitative data can provide context and additional meaning to quantitative data, as well as empowering and elevating the views, perspectives and insights of people using our services. We've identified six high-level shared Impact Areas, ensuring we focus on the most important outcomes across all our service areas and programs.

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural identity and connection is recognised and included.
2. People are more empowered, and their voices are heard and acted on.
3. People feel safe and stable.
4. People have improved connection with culture, family and community.
5. People have improved physical and emotional health and wellbeing.
6. People have increased opportunities.

With the Framework in place, our work has continued this year on a detailed implementation plan. Our objective is to build a sustainable impact measurement system that flows from data easily collected during the course of providing services.



# Governance



A Life Without Barriers support worker talks to a woman wearing a cap. They are outdoors and sitting in front of a table with party food.

## Governance

# Financial snapshot

## Audited Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2023.

FY23 was a challenging and important year for Life Without Barriers financially. After navigating the highly complex Covid environment, the organisation reshaped to ensure its ongoing success in a rapidly evolving environment, while still delivering on its strategic ambitions. These achievements, combined with prudent financial management, allowed the organisation to post a modest operating surplus for the year. Life Without Barriers continued to direct over 90% of funding into direct care services to ensure that people supported by Life Without Barriers continue to benefit from the delivery of great services.

2-year summary \$'000	2022-2023	2021-2022
<b>Revenue and Expenditure</b>		
Total Revenue and other income	804,853	798,045
Total Expenditure	801,132	806,308
Operating (Deficit)/ Surplus	3,721	(8,263)

Services offered	Program funding 23
Disability	455,198
Child, Youth and Family	248,079
Aged Care (home and community)	45,907
Refugee and Asylum Seeker	18,770
Mental Health	12,510
Youth Justice	548
Homelessness	600
Domestic Violence	173
Other income	23,068
Total	793,280

<b>Assets and Liabilities</b>		
Total Assets	259,001	261,588
Total Liabilities	214,583	222,366
Net Assets	44,418	39,222

Direct investment  
of funds into  
service delivery  
**90%**

Total Revenue and  
other income  
**\$804.85m**

## Governance

### Board Members



**Greg Ridder**  
**Chair of the Board**

Special Responsibilities: Chair. Member of the Finance and Audit Committee. Member of the Remuneration, Nomination and Succession Committee. Member of the Risk Management Committee.



**Gillian Calvert AO**  
**Deputy Chair of the Board**

Special Responsibilities: Chair of the Practice Governance Committee. Member of the Risk Management Committee. Chair of LWB Disability Services South Limited. Chair of LWB Disability Services Central Limited.



**Dr Elizabeth McEntyre**  
**Non-Executive Director**

Special Responsibilities: Member of the Practice Governance Committee.



**Dr Helen Szoke AO**  
**Director**

Special Responsibilities: Chair of the Risk Management Committee. Member of the Practice Governance Committee.



**Rajiv Viswanathan**  
**Director**

Special Responsibilities: Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee. Member of the Risk Management Committee. Member of the Remuneration, Nomination and Succession Committee.



**Natalie Walker**  
**Director**

Special Responsibilities: Chair of the Remuneration, Nomination and Succession Committee.

Governance

## Executive Team



**Claire Robbs**  
Chief Executive



**Jane French**  
Deputy Chief Executive,  
Child, Youth and Family



**Leanne Johnson**  
Deputy Chief Executive,  
Disability and Mental Health



**Mark Leigh**  
Chief Operating Officer



**Mary McKinnon**  
Chief Risk and  
Assurance Officer



**Brad Swan**  
Deputy Chief Executive,  
Emerging Business



**Paula Head**  
Chief Strategy and  
Governance Officer

## Paying our respects

We wish to acknowledge the lives of people in our community who have passed away this year.

We extend our sympathy and respect to their family, friends and loved ones.

LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS

# Collaborating for **Impact**

Annual Report 2022-23

The essence of Life Without Barriers has always been the importance we place on our values and relationships.

Carer Jessica is wearing a purple singlet, kneeling and tending to a young lemon plant in her garden. There is a turquoise watering can and her dog is next to her.