



Annual Report 2020 – 2021

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Mercy Connect acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country, and their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and to Elders past, present and emerging.



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Our Purpose

Mercy Connect supports people in need to live fulfilled lives.

Our Mission

Through the Mercy tradition to recognise the rights of adults, children and older people with a disability and to assist each person to achieve their life's ambitions in a connected and meaningful way.



**We are energised by the spirit of Mercy.
Our Mercy-led service binds us together.
It signifies growth, a journey to connect.
Our rich legacy unites and inspires us.
To move forward and make a difference to those in need.
We are grounded in our values.
They are a true reflection of who we are.
It is the spirit, that empowers and advocates changes.
We believe everyone can live a more connected and meaningful life.
Together we grow.**

Our Values

Our values reflect the ethos of the Sisters of Mercy; to enhance the well-being of others in our support. They are inspired by Catherine McAuley's legacy, guiding and empowering us to be better.

Our Mercy-led actions of Compassion, Hospitality, Respect, Innovation, Teamwork and Accountability bring us together in life and work.



Compassion

Supporting and listening with kindness and understanding.



Hospitality

Welcoming each other with openness and a smile.



Respect

Accepting and treating each other with integrity.



Innovation

Seeing opportunities and creating new solutions.



Teamwork

Working together with a shared view of success.



Accountability

Choosing courage and taking ownership of our actions.



St John's Orphanage to Mercy Connect

Father Dunne, an Albury Parish Priest and the Sisters of Mercy founded St John's as an orphanage for girls in Thurgoona in 1882.

The Sisters provided shelter, care and education to orphans, and daughters of families unable to provide adequately for their children. St John's was self sufficient, with an orchard, dairy, bakery, poultry run, sewing room and classrooms. Life was very difficult, involving hard work and long hours.

'Band Sunday' began in 1893 as part of the annual fete, becoming a major social and fundraising event until the 1990's.

The orphanage closed in 1978, with 'Family group homes' in Lavington established to provide foster care and safely house homeless children. The orphanage was taken over by the Mother of God Brothers as a home for men with disabilities.

St John's Family Care Centre, later known as Mercy Centre Lavington, chose to focus its services on meeting the needs of adults and children with disabilities. This followed from children in group homes to the unmet needs of

those of school leaving age. Services included living skills, community access, supported residential housing, respite and outreach programs.

In 2016, Mercy Centre Lavington became known as Mercy Connect and the NDIS as a funding model was introduced. Today, support is provided to over 150 participants in Albury, Orange, Cowra and Wagga Wagga, with close to 300 employees.

The clear and consistent aim of the Mercy Sisters of St John's over 115 years has been to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and families. Mercy Connect today continues to empower persons with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential as members of the community.



Strategic Priorities

Strategic Plan

Mercy Connect has a long history of supporting those with disability, including mental illness and other co-morbidities. A diverse range of services are offered within the broader Albury-Wodonga and Central Western regions, to meet existing and emerging needs.

We operate in a dynamic, evolving and rapidly changing regulatory environment, that is largely funded by a consumer-led model. This is an everyday experience for service providers. Shifting participant wants and needs has implications for service planning and personnel recruitment and development. In addition, technical advancements and digital developments calls for greater investment in these products.

Demographic and social changes are part of our everyday world. These influences must be monitored carefully and planning and service delivery models must be altered continuously and incrementally as changes are identified.

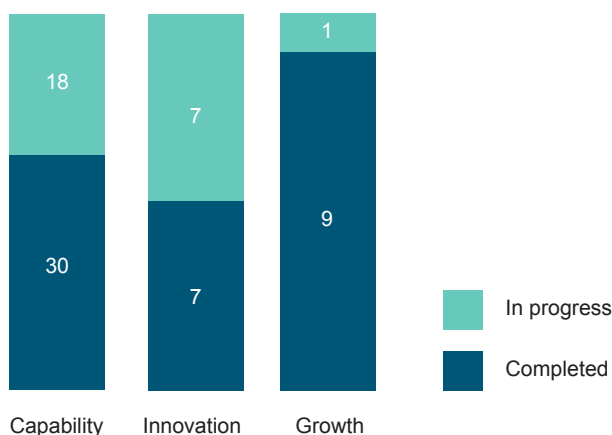
We are one year into the Mercy Connect Strategic Plan for 2021-2023. Our Strategic Plan plays a key role in the way that the organisation progresses and evolves. In the past year a significant number of key priorities have been achieved, with many more underway.

Strategic Plan

As a Christian organisation, in Catholic tradition, and underpinned and driven by the Mercy ethos, we will develop and drive the organisation through to 2023 via the following strategic priorities:

- Capability
- Innovation
- Growth

Strategic Priorities



*“You should remember that
not to advance is to go back”.*

Catherine McAuley

Capability

Strategic Priorities 2021-2023



Service capabilities to meet participants / families / guardians needs and wants



Future provision care and support services



Finalise organisation restructure



Enhance governance of properties and assets



Improve staff engagement and satisfaction



Increased capital investment in Information and Communication Technology



Introduce leadership development for all staff



Refine and develop policies and procedures



Disability Royal Commission - Response and transparency



Invest in training and capability building



Develop governance frameworks

KPIs met in 2020/21



Launch of new Mercy Connect website.



Organisational restructure and implementation of new staff rosters.



Increased overall participant satisfaction survey results.



Redesigned the delivery of asset and maintenance services.



Full deployment of fit for purpose ICT equipment across the organisation.

Organisation Restructure

During the last year, Mercy Connect underwent a restructure. This occurred to better serve our participants and ensure that our structure has the resources and skills required for continued improvement in the care we provide. It will also enable growth within the organisation.

A significant component of the restructure was the introduction of the Assistant Team Leader (ATL) positions, which saw an ATL assigned to every home and program.

A Rostering Review also took place, which saw a successful transition to an improved rostering process. The improved rostering process enables better, more predictable rostering patterns, ensuring the roster processes are transparent and fair for all employees and most importantly, improved participant care with the provision of consistent supports.

Strategic Priorities 2021-2023

Innovation



Recruit school leavers, TAFE and University graduates



Suitable assessment and transition accommodation



Participant / family / guardian experience pathway modelling and mapping



Research opportunities with Universities



Innovative disability housing models

Innovative Housing

We continue to develop and improve our overall service delivery, in line with our Strategic Plan.

Noting a lack of suitable affordable and local disability housing, we commenced construction of three fully accessible, innovative and integrated community housing sites. One in Albury and one in Orange are underway and one in Wagga Wagga is fully complete.

These exciting new developments are designed to promote the needs of residents, whilst increasing their accessibility to local facilities, transport, and community inclusion activities.

The construction will provide a range of Supported Independent Living (SIL) accommodation (and staff facilities), landscaping, pedestrian pathways, fencing, and a social hub.

The Mercy Connect team continue to work hard to deliver this new range of infrastructure, supports and services, as we help those in need to live fulfilled lives.

KPIs met in 2020/21



Development of three greenfield housing sites within an innovative community model.



Delivery of Virtual Reality module IMercyVE.



Year on year increase in staff retention.



Delivery of research projects from student placements.



Development of a recruitment plan.

Growth

Strategic Priorities 2021-2023



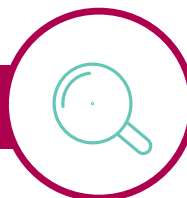
Increased collaboration with church and Mercy Ministries



NFP organisations future acquisition and or partnership



Additional services for participants / families / guardians wants and needs



Explore market areas

KPIs met in 2020/21



Development of suitable assessment and transition accommodation.



Improved health outcomes for participants.



Year on year increase in collaborations and partnerships for Mercy Connect programs.



Year on year increase in participant enrolment of Community Inclusion Programs.



Expansions of services within North-East Victoria, Murrumbidgee and Central West region.

Improving Participant Health

Dr Peter Wurth, a psychiatrist specializing in Autism spectrum disorders and intellectual disability, has worked with people with mental health and cognitive impairment diagnoses over the past three decades.

Mercy Connect introduced the Dr Wurth clinics to participants and community members in 2019. The clinics provide an essential service for our participants that is not available elsewhere in our community.

Dr Wurth would travel to Albury to undertake the clinics face to face. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions throughout the year, the Dr Wurth clinics were offered via Zoom video conferencing.

Dr Wurth consultations identify a diagnosis for the participant. Over time, this leads to change and a reduction in medication, and therefore a reduction in restrictive practices. The participant presents with less behaviours of concern, interacts with others more positively and appears to be happier.

Governance Our Board



Matthew Clancy

Chair
2020 - current
Director
2017 - current



Carmel Daley RSM

Director
2020 - current



Judith Doughty

Director
2017 - current



David Hicks

Director
2018 - 2020



Anthony McFarlane

Director
2018 - 2020



**Sr Lorraine Phelan
RSM**

Director
2018 - current



Marguerite Ryan

Deputy Chair
2020 - current
Director
2017 - current

Chair Report

Matthew Clancy



The clear and consistent aim of Mercy Connect, and its founders the Mercy Sisters, over the past 115 years has been to meet the needs of distressed or dependent individuals and families.

The Ministry founded by Catherine McAuley and brought to life in Australia through the Mercy Sisters, currently under the banner of Mercy Connect, continues today, as we seek to empower persons with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential as members of the community.

In this Annual Report, there is a common theme in all disciplinary areas, referring to the challenges our community has faced due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. While the pandemic impacts continue, we have persisted to address these obstacles, keeping sight of our mission that recognises the rights of our participants to achieve their life's ambitions in a connected and meaningful way.

As a registered NDIS provider, we are required to conduct our business and meet predetermined performance measures to achieve and retain the status of a Registered Provider.

Our Strategic Plan 2021-2023 provides the pathway for us to achieve our priorities and key performance indicators. We continued to meet and exceed performance expectations because of the commitment to implement the strategic priorities and initiatives.

It has been exciting to explore opportunities in greenfield developments across our locations. We have worked continuously in the other priorities of capability and innovation. Leadership and development programs have been introduced and well received from all staff, building a stronger accountable culture. In addition, investing in innovative solutions and digital transformation has been extremely successful.

We continue to strongly support the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability, by complying with and promoting the National Disability Services (NDS) Zero Tolerance initiative. Our qualified staff undertake mandatory training to improve practices that safeguard the rights of our participants. We achieve best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to any incidents relating to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disabilities.

In review, it is pleasing to see the stories of success to provide great care to our participants, families and guardians. With that being said, we are proud to announce that we have been presented as finalists in the Albury-Wodonga Business Awards 2021 in two categories: Outstanding Not for Profit Organisation and Excellence in Health, Education and Disability. Recognition in both categories, alongside other acclaimed organisations, is a testimony to our loyal staff and management.

I express my sincere appreciation to Trent Dean and our dedicated staff and teams, who through these challenging times, have displayed the utmost professionalism and dedication. The commitment from all, has contributed to the success stories that are outlined in this Annual Report.

Together we will continue to support and service people in need, advocate for choice and control and provide the best possible care to those in need to live fulfilled lives.

Together we grow.

Matthew Clancy
Chair

Organisational Chart Our Team

The Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) is a community of Catholic Religious Sisters in Australia, Papua New Guinea and further abroad.

The ISMAPNG story begins in Ireland on December 12, 1831 when Catherine McAuley, along with two companions, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley, professed their vows and became the first Sisters of Mercy. In 1846, just five years after Catherine's death, the first Sisters of Mercy arrived in Australia to make a foundation in Perth, Western Australia. The first Sisters of Mercy in Papua New Guinea came to Goroka from Australia in 1956. In 2010, the congregations of Adelaide, Ballarat East, Bathurst, Cairns, Goulburn, Grafton, Gunnedah, Melbourne, Perth, Rockhampton, Singleton, Townsville, West Perth, Wilcannia-Forbes, as well as the autonomous region of PNG, decided to ask the Holy See for permission to relinquish our independence and to come together as one new congregation. Rome granted this permission in July 2011, to become effective at

the commencement of the First Chapter of the new congregation on December 12, the 180th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland.

The new congregation is known as ISMAPNG.

Whatever and whenever their ministry is, ISMAPNG are part of the one Mercy mission, part of the ongoing mission of the compassionate Jesus. In furthering their charism, ISMAPNG partner with thousands of women and men as employees, associates and volunteers. Together ISMAPNG has a proud and continuing history of serving people suffering from injustices related to poverty, sickness or lack of education.

ISMAPNG's mission of Mercy today extends to responding to a range of local and global needs and are guided in their mission by the ISMAPNG 2017 Chapter statement which recognises that 'at this time of global vulnerability God's transforming mercy fires our hearts anew with deeper reverence for all creation'.



Mercy Connect Board of Directors

Executive Team



Jessie Arney
Executive Leader
People and
Communication



Caroline Cummins
Executive Leader
Clinical Services



Trent Dean
Chief Executive
Officer



Felicity Lawes
Executive Leader
Operations



Tom Krause
Chief Financial
Officer

Chief Executive Officer Report

Trent Dean



Heading into my third year with Mercy Connect, I remain very blessed to be serving this exceptional organisation.

Each day I witness our Values in action, and the Charism of Mercy being demonstrated and lived by our participants and staff. Whilst I never foreshadowed that we would still be responding to an evolving worldwide pandemic, our participants (including their families / guardians) and staff continue to accomplish amazing results each and every day, despite COVID-19.

Mercy Connect carries on the great Ministry whilst drawing inspiration from Sr Catherine McAuley, who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland in 1831. Catherine recognised the needs of those who were marginalised and oppressed by unjust social attitudes and practices of the day. As such, we remember and pay gratitude to all those whose shoulders the mission of Mercy stands on today. It is essential that everyone within our Mercy Connect family understands 'who we are', 'what we stand for' and 'what we are trying to do'.

Catherine and her Sisters of Mercy travelled the world to serve the poor and they provided free health care in a time of tuberculosis and cholera, which resulted in the death of some Sisters, including Catherine. There were no cures or vaccines during that time. They knew the danger, yet they put aside their lives to save others. Today, we follow in the footsteps of our Sisters of Mercy, perhaps not by literally putting our lives on the line as they did, but by wearing surgical masks, practising social distancing, handwashing, and seeking vaccinations to protect the more vulnerable people in our communities.

Australia had already been tested by floods, fires and drought, long before COVID-19 entered our nation to cause sickness and death, social and familial isolation, and significant business losses.

Nonetheless, we have held our own and will ultimately prevail.

Reflecting on the past year, it is evident that Mercy Connect has experienced a rapid period of revitalisation, whilst delivering effective responses to all identified opportunities and challenges. Our organisation has upheld its reputation as a high-quality provider, one that ensures participants have choice and control, and has achieved many wonderful outcomes that are reflected in this Annual Report.

I would like to personally thank Matthew Clancy (Chair) for his ongoing advice and guidance throughout 2020-2021, alongside our Mercy Connect Directors and the ISMAPNG Leadership Team. We remain blessed to have such knowledgeable and committed leaders providing exceptional governance for Mercy Connect.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge our Executive / Management teams, dedicated staff, volunteers, donors, and external stakeholders and local businesses for their unwavering commitment to support those in need to live fulfilled lives. Your Mercy-inspired work and commitment is valued and appreciated.

Together we grow.

Trent Dean
Chief Executive Officer

Sister Scholastica – Farewell

After more than 70 years of faithful, and Mercy-led service, Sister Scholastica (Sr Schol) was farewelled by Mercy Connect.

Sr Schol entered the Mercy Congregation in 1949, where she took the name Sister Scholastica. Saint Scholastica is the patron Saint of Benedictine nuns, education, and convulsive children. Taking the name Scholastica, greatly signifies Sr Schol's love, passion and dedication for education.

Commencing her work and volunteerism with the Mercy Centre in 1993, Sr Schol remains a dearly loved and respected member of our family and local community. Her presence and support at our Thurgoona Corporate Office and other services and programs will be greatly missed.

It is fair to say that Sr Schol is the living embodiment of this poignant Catherine McAuley quote "... no act of charity can be more productive or good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor and needy, than the careful instruction of women... since whatever be the station they are destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence...".



COVID-19 Pandemic

Background

Mercy Connect, like all organisations, experienced many challenges during the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Infection Control Working Group continued to meet on a regular basis, promptly providing advice and assistance to all staff, participants, families and guardians.

Challenges

Staff, participants and families endured lengthy periods of time either in lockdown and / or with restricted access. Being located on the border of Victoria and New South Wales, there were further challenges, with the introduction of government permit systems and border check points.

Participants who attended Day Programs, were challenged by disruptions to routines and community access. With ever changing regulations, the year proved to be difficult for all.

Despite the challenges, we acted positively, by developing resilience as a community and we continued our commitment to serve and support those in need to live fulfilled lives.

Response and Success

- Regular meetings to undertake review of every changing government notifications and restrictions.
- Rapid and regular communications to staff, participants and families that was clear, informative and provided avenues for feedback or concerns.
- Standard 'Infection Control and Code Safe Practices' reviewed and implemented.
- Development of 'COVID-19 Emergency, Risk and Response Plans' for each Mercy Connect site and facility.
- Preparation of an Infection Outbreak Isolation Unit – in case of any outbreaks.
- Creation of Easy English Documents – to assist participants to have a greater understanding of the pandemic and relevant restrictions and requirements.

- Development of a Digital Strategy - to enable our organisation to work remotely, whilst providing 24/7 care to participants.
- Review and restructure of Mercy Connect's roster system.

Focus

Mercy Connect's Board and Management, hold a strong position regarding COVID-19 vaccinations. "Wherever possible, all Australians should be vaccinated". Mercy Connect will continue to advocate and encourage all staff to receive their COVID-19 vaccination, and actively support our participants to receive theirs.

Australian workers in high-risk areas, including the disability sector, have been fortunate to be included in the first phases of vaccine roll out. It is pleasing that staff and participants have already commenced receiving the vaccine. Our view, at this time, is that we must consider our shared duty of care for each person that Mercy Connect serves, which includes our participants, their families and guardians, and our fellow colleagues.

Mercy Connect's Infection Control Working Group will continue to focus on the implementation of procedures, monitoring the regulations, providing advice, support and guidance. This will assist with further developments and improvements to our organisation's policies, procedures and plans.

Communication and Engagement



21

Newsletters produced



124

Communique



14

Newspaper articles



83

Day Programs



13

Media releases
and editorials



6

Hosted events



28,208

Total reach via social
media on 138+ posts



56,419

Unique website page
views



20,994

Unique website users

IMercyVE

Background

With one in five Australians living with disability, and many requiring specialised care and support to ensure their ongoing health needs and wellbeing are met, Mercy Connect commissioned the development of 'IMercyVE', a Virtual Reality (VR) application. IMercyVE was developed to increase empathy and understanding towards disability by able-bodied persons, by providing each user with a first-person viewpoint. The VR application is aimed at support staff who work directly with people with a range of disabilities, including intellectual disability and Autism.

IMercyVE Project

A Virtual Reality participant is placed into a typical environment where supports may be provided to a person with disability. The participant has the opportunity (and will be encouraged) to explore a range of objects and areas of interest within the virtual environment. During the experience, the participant is exposed to amplified sensory stimuli associated with sensory processing difficulties. Every-day ambient sounds, such as a ticking clock, are simulated to become an overwhelmingly loud distraction. The Virtual Reality participant may also be exposed to a 'simple' everyday task, which, within the IMercyVE environment, becomes difficult to complete. This reflects cognitive challenges that commonly exist for people with disability.

Aims

The IMercyVE experience aims to trigger a level of frustration, confusion, possibly fear and / or discomfort. This occurs in order to provide staff who work with people who deal with these same issues on a daily and possibly hourly basis, with an understanding and level of appreciation of the lived experience. Obviously, no Virtual Reality application will emulate a completely real experience, but it is hoped that with a greater level of understanding and empathy, staff members will be provided with a strong foundation on which to build their support skills.

Outcomes

People with disability often require targeted support to ensure optimal health and wellbeing. Empathy and awareness of living with disability are essential parts of health workforce training. IMercyVE has the potential to increase accessibility for flexible training for the health workforce in rural, regional and remote areas. The app provides proof of concept for a type of methodology for evaluation of VR application when training disability workers.



Dawn's Story

Having a job and feeling valued for our workplace contribution is something most of us take for granted. For Dawn, it makes a world of difference. For more than 12 months Dawn has been employed at KFC Lavington. Dawn said that she “likes cleaning the little area I need to clean in the three hours that I work” and “giving people a clean area to eat in”.

Supported by Mercy Connect and The Personnel Group, Dawn is part of a Supported Wage program which enables people with a disability the opportunity to gain employment that is aligned to their strengths and goals. Dawn was originally employed in 2019 by Mercy Connect and assisted with cleaning the Thurgoona Corporate Office. These experiences helped to build her confidence, develop communication skills, and improve the quality of her work. When Dawn identified that she would like to gain employment in the community, Mercy Connect staff supported her to learn what was involved in accessing community services, from reading timetables, to planning her time and traveling on the bus independently.

The Personnel Group connected Dawn with KFC Lavington and she successfully completed a trial with them before gaining ongoing employment. The Supported Wage Program has helped Dawn and others in similar circumstances. Dawn is now able to manage her money, set goals, gain more independence and improve her quality of life.

“Over the last year I have had the chance to be able to walk home when I finish work and this makes me feel independent” said Dawn. Dawn's story is an example of how we have worked together with another local not-for-profit organisation to provide a meaningful outcome for our participants.



Work, Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Mercy Connect's Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) Strategy was endorsed by the Board of Directors in December 2020. The Strategy communicates our current and ongoing commitment to maintain safe workplaces and safeguards the safety and wellbeing of our workers, participants and others.

Our priority has been to continue to review, develop and implement COVID-19 safe protocols and practices that are designed to protect employees, staff and the community from infection.

Key workplace WHS strategies included:

- Formation of a new WHS Committee which has representation across all locations of work.
- Development of a WHS Framework which underpins the WHS Strategy.
- Distribution of PPE and roll out of Infection Control training for staff and participants in response to COVID-19.
- Development of Emergency Response Manuals and Evacuation Kits for each location.
- Production of updated site-specific Evacuation Diagrams for every location.
- Monthly meetings with Mercy Connect's Workers Compensation Insurance Provider to manage and reduce the impact of worker injury claims.
- Development of site-specific training plans so that:
 - staff were trained appropriately based on the needs of the participants.
 - there is reduced risk of workplace injuries.
- Successful introduction of a Flu Vaccination Program for staff.

12%



Employees utilised the Employee Assistance Program

Covid-19 Personal Protective equipment (PPE) distributed across all locations

22400



Face masks (448 boxes)

93



Face shields

363



Bottles of sanitiser

540



Gowns

Operations



Operations



The Mercy Connect family has continued to provide consistent support and care for each other throughout the year.

The continued good work of our support staff to assist participants to realise their goals has seen participants engaged in a variety of meaningful activities and programs. Many of our participants have gained employment / volunteer opportunities, with two of our six Supported Wage participants being employed on a permanent basis by local employers. Others have engaged in important volunteer programs such as the Mercy Meals, Meals on Wheels, Carevan Cooking or Foodshare programs. These are all significant contributions by our participants to local organisations.

A key strategic priority for Mercy Connect is Growth and there have been a range of initiatives that have commenced over the past 12 months.

We have taken on a new group home located in Cowra. A fourth group home opened in Orange, ready to accommodate three new participants. Further growth has continued in the Albury-Wodonga region, with the onboarding of new participants who are supported 24/7 to live in their own homes. We also welcomed several new residents to our affordable accommodation units, with a waitlist of participants.

In February 2021, the Operations Team successfully restructured to provide improved supervision and support across all locations. The restructure provided opportunities for permanent employment and an increase in rostered hours per week. Tailored training for the respective groups builds the capability and skills of support staff.

The Learning Centre in Lavington closed as a Day Program Centre and will become a supported living space for two new residents. The design

process is being undertaken in collaboration with the new residents, who are excited to be moving in at the beginning of 2022.

These initiatives will go some way to meet the growing needs of the community. The plan for the coming year is to continue to develop and foster community relationships and partnerships, whilst providing meaningful opportunities for all participants.

There will be continued efforts to build high-performing support teams. Significant time and investment will occur to deliver dedicated training and development for all support staff that is tailored to the team that they are working in.

We will continue to plan and build a range of new properties to meet the needs of the community and continue to consult with key stakeholders.

Felicity Lawes
Executive Leader
Operations

Operations cont.

Kambora Court

A key highlight of the year was the general improvement and uplift of the Mercy Connect property portfolio. There has been significant investment in all of our group homes to ensure participants have properties that they are proud to call home.

Some of the improvements have included: updated bathrooms and kitchens; heating, ventilation and airconditioning (HVAC) systems; and backyard beautification; including paving, verandas and shade spaces. This work will continue into the next financial year. Our vehicle fleet has also been updated to ensure that we have the latest driver safety features available in all cars. Further updates will continue in the next financial year. Affordable accommodation and appropriate Supported Independent Living (SIL) places continue to be in short supply and this is a key focus of improvement for the 2021-2023 period. Investment, planning and construction has commenced with an integrated living build located in Kambora Court, Lavington, a transition home located at St John's, Thurgoona

and an integrated property development in Orange. The new builds will provide eleven new residential places and five affordable independent living units.



63

Accommodation
participants



122

Community Inclusion
participants



2

Supported wage
participants gaining
part-time employment



Clinical

Services



Clinical Services



Clinical Service practices have continued to evolve. This has enabled us to ensure that we keep on providing person-centered supports so that our participants can achieve their goals and lead a fulfilled life.

The IMercyVE program is an example of this. The introduction of this successful tool assists our staff to have empathy and a better understanding of our participants' needs.

As part of our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement, we commenced the mapping of a participant's journey. This focuses on the path our participants and their families follow, from an initial enquiry, through to service delivery and beyond. With the knowledge gained from this project, we have enhanced processes and resources to improve the participant experience. We have streamlined our on-boarding processes and introduced an exit survey which provides valuable insights into the way we meet our participants' needs and wants.

Providing diverse learning opportunities for students continues to remain a priority for us, in order to build the capacity of the allied health workforce in the disability sector. In conjunction with local universities, we have provided placements for five students over the past twelve months. These innovative student learning placements have resulted in the production a range of resources, including communication tools to facilitate more inclusive communicative environments for participants and staff.

This year we have also welcomed the introduction of registration for Behaviour Support Practitioners against the Positive Behaviour Support Capability Framework. This framework, implemented by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, aims to strengthen

the safeguards for people receiving behaviour support and to ensure that practitioners have the required skills to deliver high standards of practice. All Behaviour Support Practitioners at Mercy Connect have been assessed against the framework in order to continue to provide specialist behaviour support to participants.

A key focus for the coming year will be a review of our clinical governance and quality frameworks. The aim is to ensure that they are effective in continuously improving the quality and safety of our services and that they are fully integrated across all of our business operations.

While this year has thrown us a number of curve balls, our Clinical Services Teams have remained enthusiastic and committed to finding new and better ways to enhance the quality of life for the participants we support.

Caroline Cummins
Executive Leader
Clinical Services

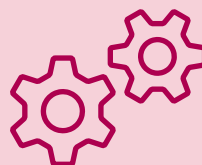
Clinical Services cont.

TOBII

Mercy Connect actively continued to offer people with a disability genuine choice and control of the decisions they make, enabling them to live a more fulfilled life. This year we introduced the use of Tobii, eye gazer technology, as a way to enable non-verbal participants to better communicate. This technology uses the participant's eye to give commands to a computer system, which then speaks for the participant. Tobii is an amazing and innovative piece of equipment that gives a voice to non-verbal participants, providing them with more control and independence.



Tobii has enabled Mercy Connect's non verbal participants with the opportunity to experience an improved way of life. One participant has been reported to have improved her pride and self-esteem. Tobii has enabled her to engage in more activities, such as ordering the shopping each week for her group home.



79

Participants accessed the Specialist Psychiatry Clinic (Dr Wurth)



2100+

Hours of support coordination delivered



3000+

Hours of behaviour support delivered



People and Communication

People and Communication



Throughout the year, our teams continued to work together, implementing a range of initiatives and responses to ensure that health, safety and wellbeing of staff was safeguarded.

Our dedicated frontline teams participated in a complete overhaul of the rosters, firstly in response to COVID-19 restrictions, followed shortly by the completion of the Roster Review project for our Albury teams. The result of the changes resulted in the creation of unified teams, which in turn enabled greater consistency and increased the quality of services provided to our participants. The newly created role of Assistant Team Leader has generated career opportunities for our frontline workers, as well as providing a greater level of support to Team Leaders, team members and participants.

The Transformational Leadership Program is now in its second year and has been a catalyst for changing the face of leadership in the organisation. The program has evolved to include Emerging Leaders and work is underway to make it accessible to all of our employees. This program is only one part of an impressive Learning and Development Program which was described as “Best Practice” during our Interim Audit Report.

Mercy Day celebrations in September were restricted to online messaging, during which time the winners of our Staff Values Awards were announced, including the winner of the inaugural Shining Lamp Award awarded to the staff member who was most recognised by her peers as demonstrating Mercy Connect Values.

The Annual Employee Satisfaction Survey results demonstrated that despite the upheaval of the year, our people were still happy to come to work. Employee satisfaction improved from

73% in 2019 to 77% in 2020. While the results were really positive, they are taken at one point in time, whereas we were more interested in understanding how staff are feeling at various points throughout the year. To address this, in March we launched bi-monthly pulse surveys. Each survey measures staff opinion against each of our values. Staff are also provided with the opportunity to nominate an individual or team who they believe has demonstrated behaviours in line with the selected value.

To top it all off, we refreshed Mercy Connect’s brand, which included the launch of a new website, increased social media presence and introduced new uniforms.

The list of all that we have achieved together could go on, and while not everyone and everything has been mentioned everything here, acknowledgement of the commitment of the People and Culture and Marketing and Communications Team is important. Together we have continued to work hard to improve the ways in which we can support, grow and build the capability of our people.

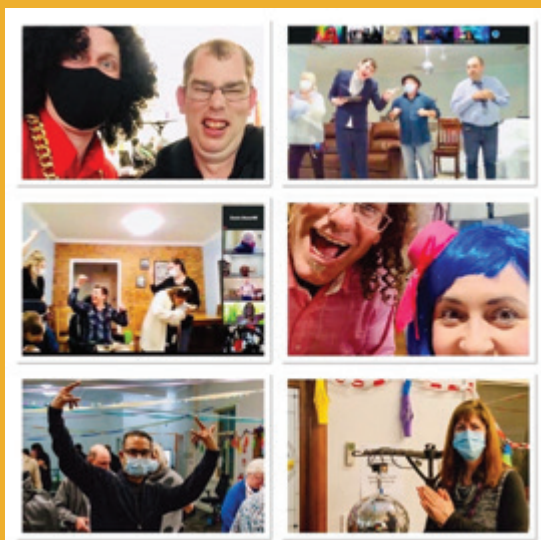
Jessie Arney
Executive Leader
People and Communication

People and Communication cont.

Annual Dinner Dance

Mercy Connect's Annual Dinner Dance is held for our participants, families and staff. This significant event is an opportunity to come together as one and to celebrate all of the participants' achievements with award presentations to nominees who, this year, best reflected the Mercy Connect Values of Compassion, Hospitality, Respect, Innovation, Teamwork and Accountability.

For the participants of Mercy Connect, the Dinner Dance is a major annual event, which is eagerly anticipated each year. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions that were in place, the traditional Dinner Dance was cancelled for 2020.



Taking an innovative approach, a Virtual Dinner Dance was designed so that participants and staff and families could celebrate together, within their own homes.

The Virtual Dinner Dance was held on Friday 21 August 2020 and included Albury, Cowra and Orange regions.



266

Number of employees



3500+

Hours of training completed across all locations



77%

Satisfaction in Annual Employee Satisfaction Survey

Business and Finance



Business and Finance



Mercy Connect reported a strong budget surplus for the year. This result continues to maintain our strong financial sustainability, ensuring that further investment into supports and services are possible.

We have consistently embraced changes made within the NDIS environment, which is ever evolving. Changes to the assessment levels of supports, weekly to hourly invoicing, introduction of Independent Living Options and reduction of support funding from 53 weeks to 52 weeks are just some of the material changes that have and continue to impact on Mercy Connect operations.

Significant progress has been achieved towards the Digital Strategy and we are on track to deliver on our three-year plan. We have put foundations in place to support the organisation's transition to digital platforms to support our service delivery. The impacts of the COVID-19 lockdowns have fast tracked some initiatives, particularly delivery of a remote working platform.

Major investment was made into a hardware refresh to support the Digital Strategy, including purchase of over 60 new laptops and desktops, 24 new printers, three meeting room upgrades and most considerably, a major network upgrade.

We have invested in the development of data and business intelligence capabilities with the recruitment of a Business Optimisation Manager. The intent of the appointment is to improve all business processes, increase access to data, improve data governance and data quality and work towards the generation of insights, to lead our services and supports to deliver the best outcomes for participants.

Prompted by a governance and compliance review, 90% of all Client Funds held in trust by Mercy Connect have been transferred to another party. This removes a perceived conflict of interest that existed.

A continuous improvement mindset, complimented by enabling technology and data insights, places us in a leading position to successfully fulfil the organisation's objectives. This aligns with the key strategic priority areas of Capability, Innovation and Growth.

Tom Krause
Chief Financial Officer

Business and Finance cont.

Upgrade of equipment

This year saw the full deployment of fit-for purpose ICT equipment across the organisation.

New PC's / Laptops were rolled out across all accommodation sites, providing Mercy Connect with a modern fleet of computers for all staff to more effectively do their jobs.



The digital transformation provided an internet upgrade for connections across all Mercy Connect sites to the National Broadband Network [NBN]. The NBN in turn provides staff with super-fast speeds and connections that are easier to work with and more reliable.

This year also saw an upgrade of printers across all sites at Mercy Connect. The new printers provide staff with significantly improved functions, features and print quality.



\$884k

Investment into property projects



\$216k

Invested into property maintenance



39

Properties either owned or leased by Mercy Connect

Partnerships, Collaborations and Donations

FoodShare

We have developed the Mercy Meals Program where participants and their support staff collect food items on a weekly basis, prepare, cook and package healthy meals in bulk, and deliver them to participants who live independently and receive outreach support.

Rotary Club of Albury Foundation

The Rotary Club of Albury has generously provided a grant to support and collaborate with the Mercy Meals Program, to create healthy and nutritious meals and deliver them to people in need.

Carevan

A small group of participants, along with members of the Carevan Foundation, meet to create delicious and nutritious meals from donated foods as part of the 'Cooking and Caring' Program.



Albury Wodonga Animal Rescue

Participants have the opportunity to spend time at the rescue centre engaging with the animals waiting for adoption.

The Personnel Group

Two participants are employed under a supported wages program, managed by the Personnel Group.

Wodonga TAFE

Seven Participants are enrolled in the Certificate 1 'Transition to Work,' and Certificate 1 'Transition to Employment.'

Albury City Council

Albury City Council provides free access to the Recycling Centre to Ecco Crew participants. The Ecco Crew volunteers their time and helps the community by cleaning up various public places.



Partnerships, Collaborations and Donations cont.

With thanks

- Alessi Motors
- Boys to the Bush
- Bunnings (Orange, NSW)
- Business Wodonga
- Carevan Foundation
- Commercial Club Albury
- CPR Communications and Public Relations
- Credible ICT
- Dahlsens Albury
- Dean Phelan
- Department of Rural Health
- Donovan Leadership
- Albury-Wodonga Foodshare
- Fraynetwork (*now Carter and Co)
- Get Smart Promo
- Huntsman Recruiting
- Kathleen and Keith Carlyon
- La Trobe University, John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research
- Mercure Albury
- MinterEllison
- Mitta Mitta Canoe Club
- Neural Networks Consulting
- Pat Godde Electrician
- Phil Day Plumbing
- Regional Disability Advocacy Service
- Rotary Club of Albury
- Shift Works
- Snap Printing
- Steve Bowen
- Three Rivers University
- Tierney Property Group
- Valley General Hospital
- Whiskk
- Wirlinga Pony Club

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