





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 and present.

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Who We Are

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.

Our Values

Our values reflect the ethos of the Sisters of Mercy; to enhance the wellbeing 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.

Annually, we recognise and celebrate our staff and participants. The recipients of the peer-nominated Values Awards are those who showcase our values in their everyday life.

Our Values



Compassion

Supporting and listening with kindness and understanding.



Innovation

Seeing opportunities and creating new solutions.



Hospitality

Welcoming each other with openness and a smile.



Teamwork

Working together safely with a shared view of success.



Respect

Accepting and treating each other with integrity.



Accountability

Choosing courage and taking ownership of our actions.

Strategic Plan

As a Christian organisation, in the Catholic tradition, underpinned and driven by the Mercy ethos, Mercy Connect will develop and drive its organisation in 2024 – 2027 through the following Strategic Priority Areas:

Community Services

Safety and Wellbeing

Social Justice

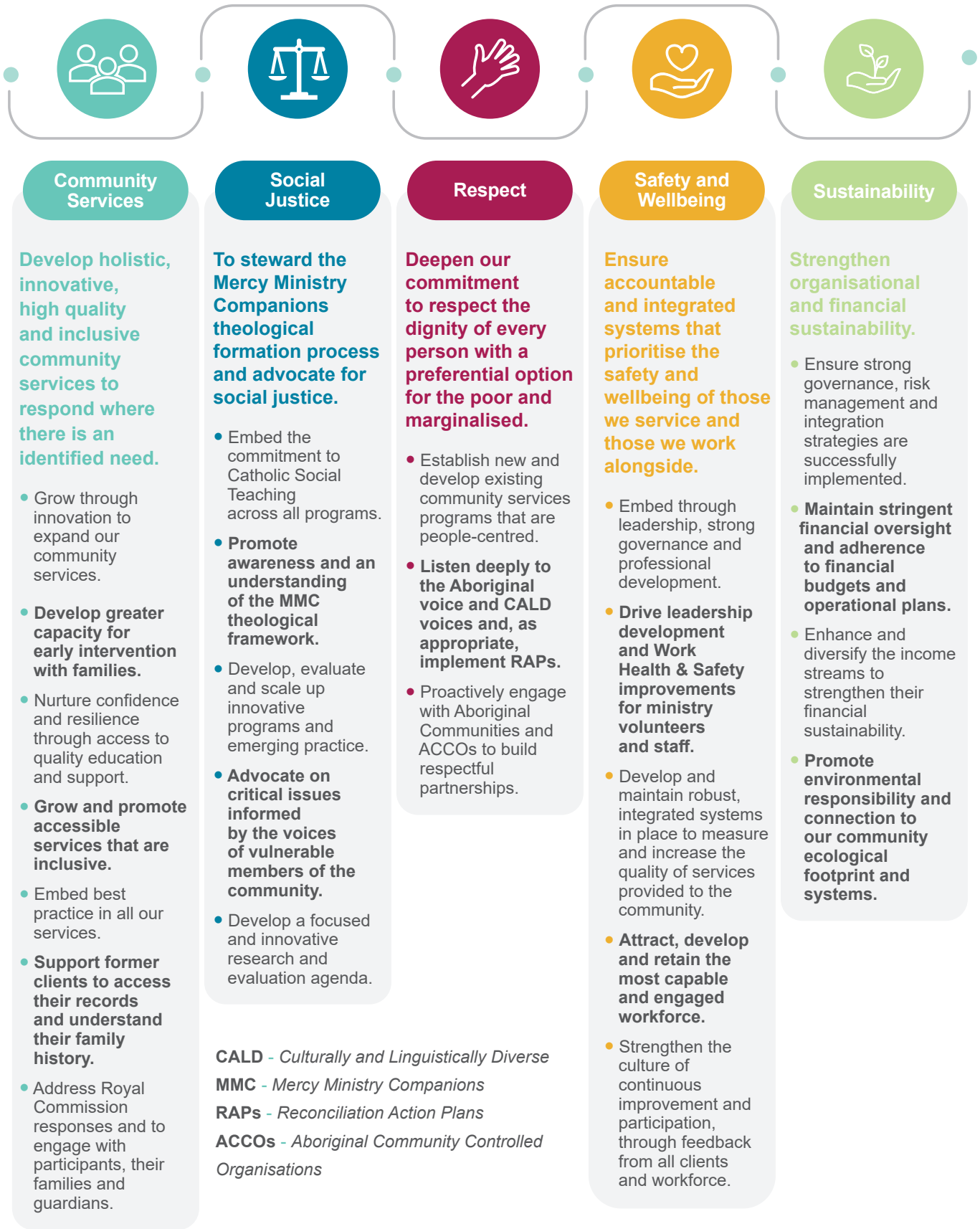
Sustainability

Respect



Strategic Priorities

2024 - 2027



Chair Report

To begin, I want to extend my deep thanks to my predecessor Matthew Clancy who retired as Chair in December 2023. Matthew made a valuable contribution to the ongoing governance of Mercy Connect during his tenure; and oversaw the organisation's solid growth and performance. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of Trent Dean, our former Chief Executive Officer, who left Mercy Connect in March to pursue his career interests at another organisation. In many ways, Trent was influential in shaping the breadth of our services that successfully operate today. Thank you also to Caroline Cummins who has since stepped into the role as Acting CEO, and Jessie Arney for her leadership support at Mercy Connect while Caroline attended the Mercy Pilgrimage in Ireland in 2024.

The past twelve months is best described as a transformative year, and the Board of Mercy Connect was reminded of this during its site visit in June. In the face of a dynamic policy and regulatory environment, the quality of our care, the commitment of staff, and the dedication of our volunteers has remained steadfast; the benefit of which can be seen in the eyes of our clients who rely on us to assist in enabling them to reach their potential and lead fulfilled lives.

At Mercy Connect, our mission is not simply to provide care and support, but to empower and enrich the lives of those we serve; to reflect the values of the Sisters of Mercy; and to create inclusive environments where everyone can thrive. The Mercy Connect team has the values, knowledge and skills to deliver all these elements in a professional and compassionate manner.

Our programs have continued to expand geographically during the year to meet the growing needs of regional New South Wales, offering services designed to promote independence, foster social connections, and enhance quality of life. The tyranny of distance can never be overcome, but we can make a difference by localising services as we have done in Orange and Cowra.

In April 2024, the Board received the recommendations of an independent Disability Services Review which it had commissioned in late 2023. The object of the review was to ensure that our efforts in the sector remain best practice. Several recommendations arose from the review which will help us remain compliant with all the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation recommendations affecting our service; improve our focus and efficiency as an organisation; and

provide valuable advice on where gaps currently exist in our growth strategy, particularly in under-served regions.

I am particularly pleased with the efforts to strengthen partnerships within the Riverina. The successful exhibition at the Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA); the opportunity for one of our clients to fulfil his dream of being interviewed on Radio 2REM; the collaboration with local businesses, educational institutions, and governmental agencies all of which has allowed us to broaden our reach and deepen our impact. Together, we are building a more inclusive society where diversity is celebrated and every individual is valued for their unique contributions.

Looking ahead, we face new challenges and opportunities. The landscape of disability support is evolving rapidly, and Mercy Connect is dedicated to staying at the forefront of innovation that extends beyond simply complying with Government regulation. By embracing new approaches and best practice, we aim to enhance our service delivery and empower those we support to achieve their full potential.

Finally, none of our achievements would be possible without the unwavering efforts of our staff, the support of our donors, volunteers, and community partners. Your generosity and commitment inspire us every day, and we are deeply grateful for your continued financial and in-kind support of Mercy Connect.



CHARLES REIS
Chair, Mercy Connect

CEO Report

It is with great privilege and enthusiasm that I present to you the Annual Report for 2023-24, marking a pivotal time of transition and growth for Mercy Connect. As the recently appointed Interim CEO, I am honoured to lead this organisation forward, building upon the solid foundation laid by my predecessor, Trent Dean.

The work undertaken by Mercy Connect continues to draw its inspiration from Catherine McAuley, who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland in 1831. Mercy was the motivating element underlying Catherine's devotion. She defined Mercy as "the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who wish to follow his example". Her work exemplified compassion, benevolence and kindness, which our organisation continues to strive to demonstrate in our contemporary times.

This year marks the commencement of our new three-year Strategic Plan (2024-2027), which is underpinned by five Strategic Priority Areas: Capability, Community Service, Social Justice, Respect, Safety and Wellbeing, and Sustainability. At the heart of our Strategic Plan is the desire to deeply enrich lives by putting our participants and their needs at the centre of what we do. Our focus will continue to be to provide care with compassion, dignity and integrity and by delivering a diverse range of innovative services and programs within a framework of excellent clinical practice.

As we reflect on the achievements of the past year, it is clear that our success has been profoundly shaped by the diverse range of strategic partnerships and collaborations we have cultivated. In a dynamic and interconnected world, no organisation operates in isolation. Our ability to leverage the expertise, resources, and perspectives of our partners has been a cornerstone of our accomplishments.

As part of our drive to provide high-quality, safe and effective services, we continue to invest in systems and process improvements to increase efficiency and reduce the burden of repetitive tasks for our staff. Our people are our most precious asset, and these improvements are designed to enhance the employee experience by enabling them more time to focus on the participant's experience and goal achievement.

This year has also seen the release of the Disability Royal Commission's Final Report into the violence, neglect, abuse, and exploitation of people with disability. The report sheds light on crucial issues within the disability sector, highlighting areas where reforms are needed to ensure safety, dignity, and equity for individuals with disabilities.

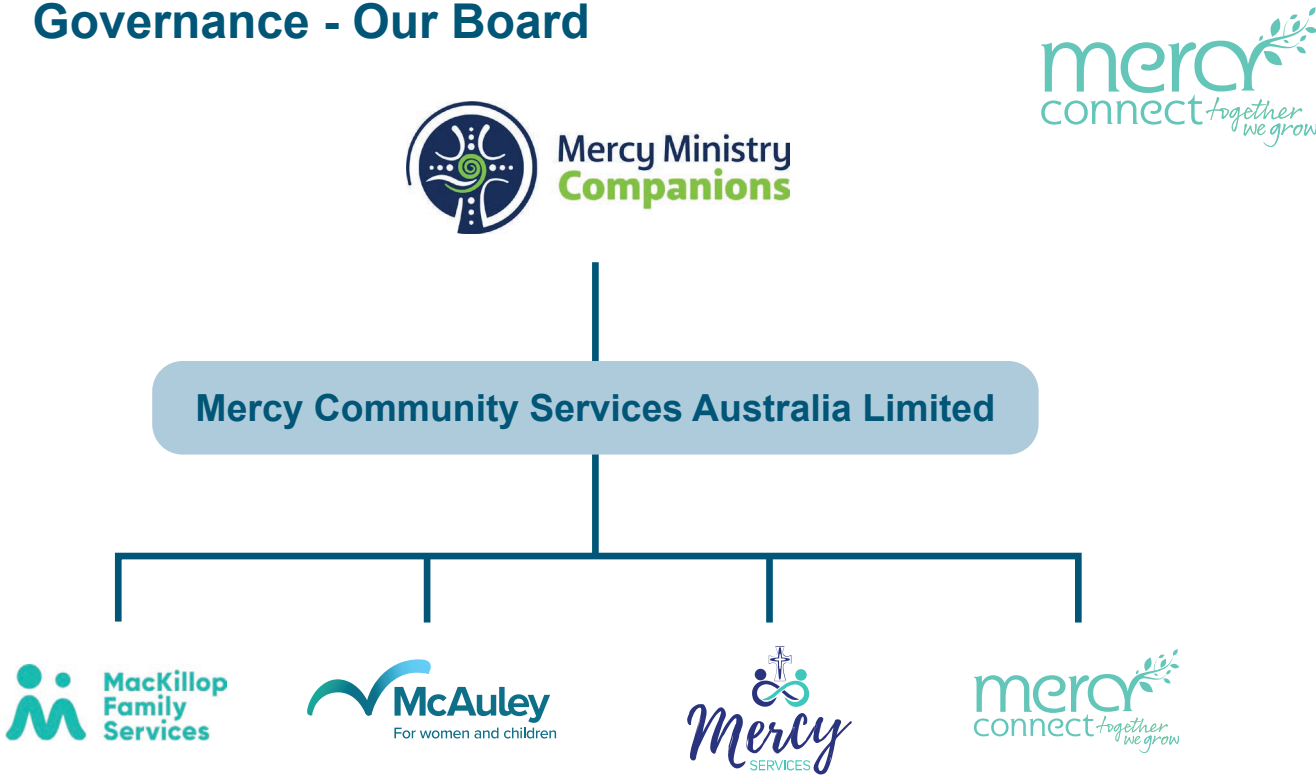
The Commission's recommendations emphasise the need for strengthening safeguards and protections, increasing accessibility and inclusivity, and promoting choice and control. In response, Mercy Connect is committed to ensuring these recommendations are incorporated into our service delivery and we continue to review our policies and procedures to align with best practices in safeguarding, accessibility and empowerment.

Finally, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated Executive / Management Teams, staff, volunteers, donors, external stakeholders and local businesses for their continued and unwavering commitment, hard work and collaborative spirit to support those in need to live fulfilled lives. Together, we have made significant strides, and it is with your continued dedication that we look forward to even greater achievements this coming year.



CAROLINE CUMMINS
Chief Executive Officer, Mercy Connect

Governance - Our Board



Our Board

- **Chair** - Mr Charles Reis
- **Independent Director** - Dr Michelle Cotter
- **Independent Director** - Brigid Connors
- **Independent Director** - Ella McPherson
- **Independent Director** - Marcelle Mogg
- **Independent Director** - Dr Janet Farrow OAM
- **Independent Director** - John Sutherland
- **Independent Director** - Stephen Mamouney
- **Independent Director** - Elizabeth (Libby) Mears
- **Independent Director** - Elizabeth Clear
- **Independent Director** - Peter Lavis
- **Independent Director** - Dr Linda Mellors
- **Independent Director** - Vicki Clark OAM

Organisational Chart



Mercy Community Services Australia Limited

Mercy Connect Executive Team



JESSIE ARNEY
Executive Leader
People &
Communications

People & Culture

Learning &
Development

Marketing &
Communications

Work Health
& Safety



GARETH EVANS
Executive Leader
Clinical Services

Support
Coordination

Quality
& Risk

Clinical Risk &
Safeguarding

Participant
Welfare

Behaviour
Support



CAROLINE CUMMINS
Chief Executive
Officer (Interim)



FELICITY LAWES
Executive Leader
Operations

Accommodation

Community
Inclusion



MAX WANG
Chief Financial
Officer

Finance

Digital
Transformation

Property
Maintenance

Assets

Executive Updates



Business & Finance

53

Properties either owned or leased



2

New properties constructed



2

Property renovations completed

The 2023-2024 financial year was both challenging and rewarding for Mercy Connect, as we navigated changes in the NDIS environment, including the new PACE rollout, while continuing to deliver quality services to our participants. Despite the challenges, we achieved several milestones and made significant progress in our strategic goals, emphasising partnerships and collaborations that foster participant growth and success stories.

One of our major achievements was the opening of two new facilities in July 2023 and February 2024. Basil House, located on the St Johns Campus in Thurgoona, is a two-bedroom house used for Short and Medium Term Accommodation services. Grevillea House, located in Orange NSW, is an architect-designed Specialised Disability Accommodation complex providing Supported Independent Living services. Both houses are fully accessible and equipped with modern amenities to accommodate the complex support needs of the community. The opening of these houses reflects our commitment to expanding our services and offering better facilities, more choices, and opportunities for our participants, further highlighting the success stories of individuals achieving greater independence through our support.

In addition to the newly built facilities, we leased additional properties in Lavington and Cowra, NSW, to provide more options for our participants. Our partnership with the Henty community has also seen the beautiful Avondale House being utilised. Two of our properties in Albury have been fully renovated during the year to provide a welcoming and modern living environment to support our participants.

The rebuilding of our Finance Team was another highlight of the year. I joined Mercy Connect as the Chief Financial Officer in July 2023, bringing with me many years of experience and expertise in the not-for-profit disability service sector. In September 2023, we appointed our new Finance Manager, Nicholas Barry, who brought his financial management expertise to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Finance Team with a keen focus on system and process optimisation. Additionally, the Finance Team incorporated a new branch financial reporting structure aimed at improving efficiency, accountability, and communication within our operations, demonstrating our commitment to collaboration and streamlined processes.

In December 2023, we utilised a payment protection platform to enhance payment security and prevent fraudulent payees. In March 2024, we introduced a new funds management system to support our client funds and day-to-day house expenditure management. These platforms not only streamlined our business processes with greater visibility of expenditure but also reduced the risk of fraud, error, and duplication. As a result of the successful implementation of a cloud-based payroll system, the Finance Team took over payroll processing from the People & Culture Team in June 2024. These advancements underscore our dedication to fostering successful outcomes through improved internal systems and collaborations.

We are also pleased to report a positive financial result before other comprehensive income for the 2023-2024 financial year. This achievement underscores our dedication to financial sustainability and growth. We are particularly grateful for the generous bequest

donations received for Grevillea House, totalling over \$900,000. These contributions have been instrumental in supporting the development and enhancement of our services, showcasing the powerful impact of community partnerships.

In the context of the Disability Royal Commission Report and the independent NDIS review, Mercy Connect remains committed to upholding the highest standards of care and support for our participants. These reports have provided valuable insights and recommendations that align with our strategic goals and continuous improvement initiatives. We are dedicated to implementing best practices and ensuring that our services are inclusive, accessible, and



MAX WANG
Chief Financial Officer



Clinical Services

92  Participants received Behaviour Support services

2,300+ Hours of Support Coordination services delivered

103 Mercy Connect Specialist Psychiatric Clinic appointments provided

The past year has been a period of significant progress and achievement for our Clinical Services Team. The team has been dedicated to delivering high-quality clinical support to individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions. Their commitment to Mercy Connect’s values has enabled them to make a profound impact on the lives of those we support.

Our Behaviour Support Team has continued to provide high quality clinical support to people of all age groups. The Behaviour Support Team provides person-centred evidence informed practice to improve the quality of life for the people they support. The team works collaboratively with the support networks of our participants to undertake assessment of their needs, strengths and limitations. Our practitioners provide appropriate training to ensure that everyone supporting a participant understands the most appropriate strategies that can be used to effectively support them to meet their goals and grow their capacity.

This year has seen growth of our Behaviour Support Team into the Central West with the addition of a practitioner based in Orange NSW who is helping us to expand our service offerings to new and existing participants. We anticipate this area will continue to grow across our footprint.

As part of our commitment to providing participants with high quality support for their mental health, we have continued to provide specialist psychiatric clinics in Albury. These clinics provide individuals with access to clinical supports that remains difficult to access in the local region. Fortunately, we were able to increase the number of clinics held this year which has allowed not only more of our directly supported participants, but additional community members to access this vital service.

Our Quality & Risk Team has been instrumental in continuing to ensure our clinical governance and quality frameworks are robust and meet the changing requirements under legislation and policy to achieve our external audit obligations. The team also ensures that our services continue to be designed and delivered to protect the health and wellbeing of all participants. The team has further developed and refined our risk management system to improve the way our incidents and risks are managed.

The Support Coordination Team has worked hard to keep up with the changes to the NDIS, such as the introduction of PACE and programs of support that have changed how services are implemented. The team always has a focus of ensuring that their participants are empowered to make their own choices as much as possible regarding the services they receive, to increase their independence and achieve their goals.

It has been a successful year for the Clinical Services Team as they continue to deliver high quality services in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders to ensure the best possible outcomes for the participants we support.



GARETH EVANS
Executive Leader Clinical Services



Collaboration Achieves Goals

Mercy Connect provides Support Coordination services for Adam, a young boy with Autism and other associated problems with day-to-day functioning, such as speech.

Our Support Coordinator has been successful in helping Adam’s kinship family navigate the NDIS and access the Allied Health supports he needs to be able to grow and develop.

Working alongside the Allied Health Team, our Support Coordinator has been successful in securing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device for Adam. This tool has helped Adam, who speaks few words, to communicate and participate in daily activities, such as school. His foster mother says the ‘Liberator’ AAC device allows Adam to reach his full potential.

*Adam is not his real name and has been used to protect his privacy.

Behaviour Support Story

Brian was referred to Mercy Connect Behaviour Support services by his support network, including his accommodation provider. Unfortunately, at times Brian uses some inappropriate social behaviours which have impacted his quality of life and has put stress on his relationships with others.

The Behaviour Support Practitioner, in collaboration with Brian’s support network, assessed Brian’s use of these behaviours before working alongside his team to implement a program designed to build Brian’s skills in the community and to provide Brian alternate ways to have his wants and needs met.

Since the implementation of this program, Brian has had a significant reduction in his use of these behaviours. This has enabled Brian to increase his engagement in the community more independently as he is now participating in activities without the need for constant supervision. His relationships have also improved as he is now engaging in more prosocial behaviours which is strengthening his bond with his support network.

*Brian is not his real name and has been used to protect his privacy.

People & Communication

Staff 
Satisfaction
82%

**LEADERS COMPLETION OF
TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM - 45**

**Voluntary
Turnover**

15%*

* Below industry
average



Our commitment to empowering our employees has been instrumental in fostering a collaborative culture, contributing to our recognition as finalists in the Employer of Choice - 21 employees and over category in the Riverina Murray Business Awards. The various programs we have implemented are designed to enhance professional development and promote a sense of belonging within our organisation, which has been reflected in our Employee Satisfaction results obtained through our annual staff survey and quarterly Values Surveys. These surveys are used to gather feedback from all employees to provide opportunities for them to feel heard, valued and contributors to decision-making processes. This year we had the highest response rate recorded to our survey – 74%, demonstrating increased trust in the process.

With a commitment to personal and professional growth, we continued to the next phase of our Transformational Leadership Program in collaboration with Neural Networks Consulting. Underpinned by Emotional Intelligence (EQ), the program includes EQ Assessments and debriefs, training, coaching and 360 degree feedback for the Executive and Senior Leadership Team. This program emphasises the importance of collaboration, strategic thinking, and developing a psychologically safe workplace culture.

During 2023-2024, we partnered with our Finance and Digital Transformation team to add ELMO payroll, recruitment and onboarding to our existing Learner Management System and HR Core. This project was designed to improve the engagement and experience of staff throughout each stage of the employment lifecycle. Our Digital Transformation Team also supported us with an upgrade of our internal communication platforms to facilitate real-time information sharing and collaboration.

These platforms include advanced intranet systems, collaborative tools, and regular virtual town hall meetings, ensuring that all employees are informed and engaged.

Our external communication strategies have been tailored to strengthen our relationships with partners and stakeholders. We kicked off Season 2 of our Podcast, 'Together We Grow' with the support of local radio station 2AY. whisKK assisted us to update our photos and videos of our staff and participants which created fresh and engaging material for us to use in our targeted social media campaigns and website.

With the changing industrial relations landscape throughout the year, we are fortunate to partner with Catholic Employment Relations, who provide Mercy Connect with valuable advice and support to ensure our ongoing workplace compliance. With their support we terminated the Mercy Centre Lavington Enterprise Agreement in line with the Fair Work Commission decision to terminate 'Zombie Agreements.' This project required significant consultation and collaboration between the People & Culture and Operations Teams to reduce the impact this decision had on staff contracts and service provided to our participants. Additionally, Human Resource Management students from Western Sydney University worked with us again this year to develop workplace policies, such as our Diversity and Inclusion Policy, as part of their workplace integration project.

We were also excited to add to our existing Wellness Programs. This year, Mercy Connect introduced additional resources and programs that support the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. These include a subscription to My Everyday Wellbeing (a platform that actively promotes, motivates and empowers

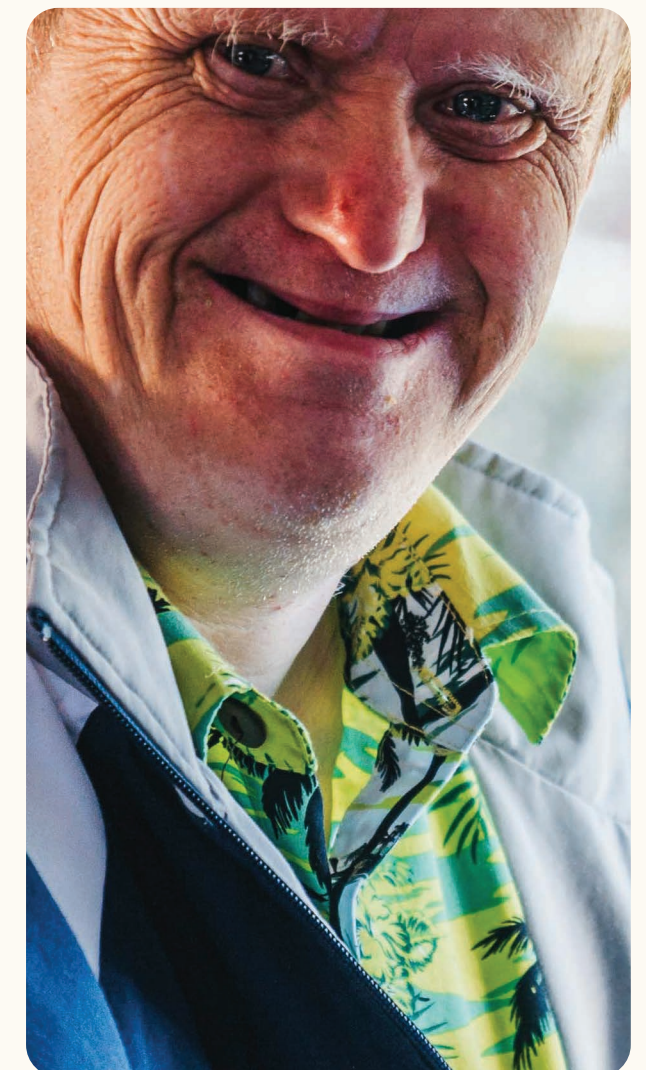


staff to be healthier) and Fitness Passport. In 2023, the Transformational Leadership Program included an emphasis on psychological safety and an organisational-wide culture audit was conducted using the 'Emotional Culture Deck' (ECD) tool. Leaders also completed 'Leading a Mentally Healthy Workplace' and 'Managing for Team Wellbeing' workshops facilitated by the Black Dog Institute.



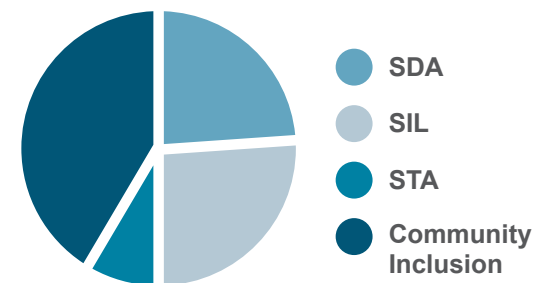
**JESSIE
ARNEY**

Executive
Leader People &
Communications



Operations

Breakdown of services



Collaboration and partnerships are integral to delivering true choice and control to participants. Over the past year, Mercy Connect has embraced the spirit of teamwork by working with numerous like-minded organisations. This approach has not only broadened our service offerings but also enhanced the quality of support provided to participants, ensuring their life goals are met.

The saying, "It takes a village," truly resonates with our experiences this year. Our efforts have been concentrated on improving communication with key stakeholders and elevating the quality of homes and properties available to participants. We are deeply grateful to the families and participants who have collaborated with us in making these improvements. Your support, feedback, and patience have been invaluable.

Expanding Our Services

One of our core focuses this year was to expand the number of available homes for individuals with disabilities. We prioritised building accessible homes and substantially renovating older properties to enhance their suitability. This endeavour has been significantly supported by partnerships with organisations that share our values.

Special appreciation goes to Rotary Albury North and Rotary of Albury for their generous donations of kitchen equipment, renovations, and sensory items. The Men's Shed also provided essential labour for renovating our commercial kitchen. Additionally, McGrath Builders and Balance Accountants have been instrumental in supporting our growth with their expertise and resources.

 **15** NEW HOMES / BEDS CREATED

17,120 

Hours provided for Youth, Transition and Respite

Community Engagement and Participant Success

Our Community Inclusion Team has continued a meaningful partnership with Carevan, a collaboration that has flourished over the years. This initiative involves participants preparing meals in our newly renovated commercial kitchen to assist those in need. The program not only serves the community but also fosters a sense of achievement and connection among participants.

Mercy Connect's engagement with Albury Meals on Wheels has also been a success. Participants and staff deliver meals three times a week, promoting interaction between individuals with disabilities and older adults in the community. This program has allowed participants to develop practical skills and gain a sense of pride from their contributions.

A notable highlight this year was our partnership with Flying Fox, a Melbourne-based organisation. For the first time, we organised a two-night holiday camp tailored for Mercy Connect participants at Lancefield. This camp, usually designed for younger city dwellers, was adapted to meet the needs of our participants from rural areas. The camp was a tremendous success, with glowing feedback from attendees, including a particularly touching affirmation from a largely nonverbal participant who expressed her desire to return. We are excited to continue providing such personalised and enjoyable experiences. In another exciting collaboration, we partnered with the



Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA) for an exhibition titled 'Everyday,' showcasing participant art that highlights their love for the Albury-Wodonga region. The exhibition not only celebrated their artistic talents but also boosted the confidence of our artists, thanks to the uplifting engagement with MAMA staff.

Personal Achievements

This year also saw individual triumphs among our participants. For example, Joe from Orange NSW participated in a fishing contest at Mookerawa Dam and earned third place by catching three impressive fish. This achievement underscores the dedication and skill of our participants, and we are incredibly proud of Joe's success.



Growth and Expansion

Mercy Connect has seen significant growth in the Central West region. The opening of new homes in Orange and Cowra, alongside the initiation of outreach services, has marked a notable expansion. Our ongoing collaboration with families, Support Coordinators, and SDA providers continues to meet the evolving needs of the community.

We also launched a new division this year focusing on Transition, Respite, and Youth services. This team addresses the increasing demand for support services

for young people with disabilities transitioning to new care environments. Our work with NSW and Victorian Government child and family services has led to the development of effective and safe supports and skill development programs for children and young people in the region. The team has received specialised training in areas such as child safety, trauma-informed care, and person-centred planning. We are committed to expanding this division to meet growing needs and enhance our support services.

Looking Ahead

As we continue to expand our services across regions from Henty to Wagga, Cowra, and Orange, our dedicated staff remain committed to providing outstanding support. The collaborative efforts and partnerships we have built over the past year are instrumental in achieving our mission of delivering high-quality, person-centred care to those who need it most.

We look forward to further growth and continued success in the coming year, guided by our core principles of partnership, collaboration, and participant-centred support.



FELICITY LAWES

Executive Leader Operations



Partnership with Foodshare: A Year of Community Support

Throughout the year, Mercy Connect has proudly partnered with Foodshare to support families and individuals in need within our community. This collaboration has been a cornerstone of our commitment to social responsibility and community well-being.

Making a Difference - Staff Donations

During the year Mercy Connect staff generously donated a variety of essential items, including pasta, rice, tinned vegetables, tinned fruit, tinned spaghetti, baked beans, instant coffee, teabags, jams, spreads, pasta sauce, and sweet and dry biscuits. These contributions directly supported Foodshare's mission to provide food assistance to those struggling to make ends meet. Every donation, no matter how small, has made a significant impact on the lives of our community members.

Utilising our Resources for Greater Good

In addition to collecting donations, Mercy Connect has opened its commercial kitchen to Foodshare. This facility has been used to cook and prepare delicious jams and spreads, and distributed to those in need. By leveraging our resources, we have been able to enhance Foodshare's ability to provide nutritious and enjoyable food options to the community.

Aligning with our Mission and Vision

This partnership with Foodshare aligns seamlessly with Mercy Connect's aim to foster a compassionate and inclusive community. By supporting Foodshare, Mercy Connect is not only addressing immediate food insecurity it is promoting dignity and respect for all individuals. Our vision of a connected and caring community is brought to life through these collaborative efforts. Moving forward, we are committed to deepening this partnership and exploring new initiatives that further our shared goals of support, inclusion, and community well-being.

Thank You to All Those Involved

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all our staff and partners who have contributed to this wonderful initiative. Your generosity and dedication have made a tangible difference in the lives of many in our community.





‘Everyday’ Murray Art Museum Albury (MAMA)

Our Community Inclusion programs support our participants to develop skills and become more actively involved in the community. A group of talented artists from our Arts program were invited by MAMA to create an art exhibition which ran from 23 February until 10 June 2024, ‘Everyday’ sponsored by MAMA, featured sixteen artists, who shared their individual and collective experience of life in our region.

The exhibition presented a large collaborative fabric work depicting the Murray River, alongside paintings that highlighted our region’s natural beauty. Artists worked together on sculptures of kangaroos, goannas, and large native birds fashioned from recycled materials. Recurrent images of ice cream cones, donuts and smiley faces, celebrate moments of everyday joy.

The exhibition also featured a short video where the artists shared what the experience of staging this project and offering their works to audiences meant to each of them.

Engaging with the community through the exhibition has fostered a sense of belonging and inclusion, breaking down barriers and promoting understanding. Additionally, working collaboratively on projects has helped our participants to build teamwork and communication skills, further enriching their personal and professional lives.

Mercy Connect acknowledges the following collaborators in this project; Michael Moran and Andrea McLean (MAMA), Kim Ciancio and Jamie McNeil (Documentary), Jeremy Weihrauch (Photography), Belinda Williams (Mercy Connect).

Featured artists:

Beverley Jones	Gerard Fox
Bradley Barrett	Geraldine Trimble
Daniel Quin	Haley Carroll
David Dick	Karen Trezise
Debbie Fox	Mark Inwood
Dianne Ruitenburg	Mark Pearsall
Elissa Thiele	Rose Croxford
Genevieve Grovers	Tara Dodd





Generous Donation from Rotary Club of Albury North Enhances Mercy Connect's Facilities and Programs

Mercy Connect was thrilled to receive the ongoing support of the Rotary Club of Albury North, whose generous donation enabled Mercy Connect to make significant advancements in our facilities and programs, directly benefiting our participants.

Enhancing Sensory Experiences

A portion of this donation was allocated to the creation of a new Sensory Room. This dedicated space has been meticulously designed to cater to the diverse sensory needs of our participants. The Sensory Room provides a safe environment where participants can build their confidence and ability to self-regulate. Adjustments can be made within the room to modify the level of stimulation based on the needs of the person. This initiative is a testament to our commitment to creating inclusive and supportive spaces that address the unique needs of those we serve.

Bolstering Daily Living Skills

In addition to the Sensory Room, the funding has also been utilised to purchase essential kitchen equipment. The new equipment has significantly bolstered our existing cooking programs, which are integral to helping participants develop and improve their daily living skills. These programs not only teach practical cooking skills but also foster independence and confidence, contributing to the overall well-being of our participants.

Looking Ahead

We are immensely grateful for the continued kind and generous support from the Rotary Club of Albury North. Their contribution not only provided us with the means to enhance our facilities and programs but has also reinforced the importance of community collaboration in achieving our purpose.

We look forward to continuing to utilise this specialised equipment to meet the diverse needs of our participants and to continue fostering an environment of growth, support, and inclusivity.



Telstra Best of Business Awards: Celebrating Excellence in Championing Health

The Telstra Best of Business Awards were established to honour the remarkable success, diversity, and innovation of small and medium businesses across Australia. The Awards process includes three rigorous stages, each assessing businesses against specific criteria to showcase their real-world expertise.

Mercy Connect’s commitment to health and innovation led to the organisation being recognised as a state finalist in two categories: Championing Health and Embracing Innovation. Out of the numerous businesses considered, Mercy Connect emerged as one of the highest-scoring finalists in New South Wales.

In November 2023, we were incredibly proud to be announced as the 2024 State Winner for Championing Health, a testament to the tireless dedication and passion of all Mercy Connect staff. This accolade highlights our continued efforts in delivering compassionate care and innovative solutions in the name of Mercy.

List of Achievements:

- Introduction of the (non-NDIS funded) Participant Welfare Officer role.
- Safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of our participants through the assessment, implementation and review of training / support programs.
- Providing dedicated support to teams to ensure that services are delivered that maintains the rights, standards and principles underpinning the NDIS.
- Creating opportunities for participants by supporting them to make decision about the services they receive.
- Developing and supporting frontline staff to successfully implement Person Centred Active Support enabling participants to maximise their strengths and opportunities to lead a meaningful and connected life.
- Monitoring and evaluating complex issues of individual participants and provision of support and advocacy.
- Managing risk by providing support to participants, or participants in crisis.

- Delivering Dual Diagnosis Psychiatric Clinics (in partnership with Dr Peter Wurth), which provide: integrated and comprehensive treatment for individuals with co-occurring disorder; tailored treatment plans to an individual’s needs.
- Delivering Participant Satisfaction Surveys using innovative delivery methods to ensure participants feedback is received.
- Regular Quality, Risk and Safeguarding Committee meetings which reviews all aspects of quality, safety, safeguarding and risk management.
- Achieving strategic priorities within our 2021-2023 Strategic Plan.
- Implementing Lumary; an end-to-end care management application.
- Designing a Social Impact Framework which measures our impact on the community and our participants.
- Creation of IMercyVE Virtual Reality empathy module and associated research.
- Delivering ‘Mercy Meals’ in partnership with other community agencies, including Carevan Foundation and Albury-Wodonga Foodshare.
- Building of new disability accommodation and facilities across NSW.





Opening of Grevillea Place: A New Chapter for Mercy Connect

Mercy Connect was proud to announce the opening of the highly anticipated facility, Grevillea Place, on Monday, 30 October 2023. This exciting development was a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to promoting the needs of our residents while enhancing their accessibility to local facilities, transport, and Community Inclusion activities.

A Community of Accessible Housing

Grevillea Place represents a groundbreaking step in creating an integrated community of accessible housing in Orange NSW for people living with disabilities. This fully landscaped site provides a home for up to nine individuals, offering a range of accommodations designed to meet diverse needs. The facility includes:

- A five-bedroom shared home, divided into two sections, designated as High Physical Support Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA), complete with a staff office and onsite accommodation.
- Two two-bedroom homes categorised under Robust SDA, providing a safe and supportive living environment.
- A Social Hub for onsite activities and gatherings, fostering a sense of community and engagement.
- Ample staff and visitor car parking to ensure convenience and accessibility.

Empowering Choice and Control

With one in five Australians living with a disability, it is crucial that genuine choice and control remains central to those we serve. Grevillea Place is designed to empower residents by providing them with more choices related to their living arrangements. This initiative underscores the importance of local communities working together to meet individual housing needs to ensure inclusive living environments for people living with disability.

A Generous Donation From The Mathews Family

The realisation of Grevillea Place would not have been possible without the substantial donation from the Mathews Family. Their generous contribution has been instrumental in bringing this vision to life, providing a safe and supportive home for our residents. The donation has enhanced the lives of individuals with disabilities, and their support for Grevillea Place is a testament to their dedication to community well-being.

Patrick Mathews, son of Patrick and Kathleen Mathews, said *“Mum and Dad would be delighted and proud to know their legacy lives on in a safe and comfortable home for the disabled so that other Aussies can live the same happy and productive life as their son Andy enjoyed. God Bless all who will live here and their dedicated carers”*.

Looking Ahead

Mercy Connect is extremely grateful for the substantial donation from the Mathews Family, which played a pivotal role in the development of Grevillea Place. This contribution not only enhances our current facilities but also paves the way for the continued growth of Mercy Connect services. We are committed to expanding our reach and impact, ensuring that more individuals with disabilities have access to the support and resources they need to thrive. As we look to the future, we remain dedicated to fostering an environment of growth, support, and inclusivity for all our participants.



Digital Transformation Update

Mercy Connect has continued its strong digital transformation and further strengthened its cloud-based environment. This year has been defined by building on the foundations of a complete systems update to bring new efficiencies and increased availability of information to all staff, fostering the buds of new innovations.

During the year we successfully implemented a cloud-based HR software stack, encompassing HR Core, Recruitment, Onboarding, and Payroll modules. This comprehensive suite of HR software solutions has modernised our internal processes, leading to a seamless recruitment and onboarding experience for our staff. The payroll management solution has provided Mercy Connect with an award-compliant, accurate system. They also empower our HR team with a single source of data for all employee information.

We completed an update of office hardware, providing staff with a fleet of current, modern devices that are fit for purpose. Devices are centrally configured through Microsoft Autopilot, greatly simplifying deployment by automating the setup and configuration of devices, ensuring simple deployment and consistent user settings. Mercy Connect has benefited from streamlined and simple deployment processes and from improved reliability and enhanced security across our network. This milestone reflects our dedication to leveraging cutting-edge solutions that enhance productivity and improve system security.

The team has completed the connection of three new properties in Orange, Cowra, and Albury to our network and upgrades of legacy copper NBN properties to NBN Fibre to the Premise. Existing properties in both Orange and Albury have had their connections upgraded to high-speed FTTP NBN connections. These improvements ensure that every Mercy Connect property enjoys access to high-speed internet, providing high-quality services to the participants who live in our properties and the staff that support them.

We are thrilled to announce the successful completion of our transition to a fully cloud-native infrastructure. This monumental achievement involved the removal of all legacy systems and hardware, marking a pivotal moment in our technological evolution. By migrating to the cloud, we have significantly increased the robustness, scalability, and availability of our systems. Our complete migration to the cloud represents a strategic leap forward in our

infrastructure modernisation efforts. By retiring legacy systems and embracing cloud-native solutions, we have enhanced the resilience, scalability, and accessibility of our IT environment. With improved redundancy and disaster recovery capabilities, we can confidently deliver uninterrupted services to our staff and participants.

These achievements highlight our organisation's commitment to leveraging technology to drive efficiency, innovation, and growth. Mercy Connect stands on a strong platform of modern systems, which will enable the move towards a data-driven culture. Whether through enhanced IT infrastructure, streamlined HR operations, or advanced deployment technologies, we remain dedicated to delivering exceptional value and service excellence. Looking ahead, we are excited about the transformative impact of these initiatives and are poised to capitalise on new opportunities in the ever-evolving digital landscape.



MATTHEW TAYLOR
Business Intelligence & Innovation Manager



Systems across 30 sites - Refreshed Dell Hardware

6 PROJECTS COMPLETED

3 Connected new sites to our network

Stakeholder Engagement Update

Mercy Connect is deeply committed to fostering strong relationships with our stakeholders, including participants, employees, families, vendors, community members, and other key partners. These relationships are vital as they provide the foundation for our shared goals and collective progress.

Over the past year, we have worked diligently to enhance our engagement strategies. Our partnerships have not only contributed to our growth, but have also reinforced our commitment to social responsibility and community development.

MercyConnecthasplacedgreatemphasisonimplementing new intake procedures offering opportunities to enhance both the inclusivity and efficiency of our services. The updated process focuses on a person-centred approach, ensuring that participants, families and associated providers feel respected and supported throughout their interactions in our intake / onboarding phases.

Our intake office has established key improvements, including the introduction of on-line system Lumary, and streamlining intake documentation and policies. Another main focus was to ensure that our documentation and processes are accessible and easy to understand, while offering assistance to those who may require help in completing forms. Additionally, our high standard customer service procedures, prioritises timely responses and ensures that enquiries are informed at every stage of their intake process.

Mercy Connect is strongly committed to serving and supporting the needs of our entire community. We recognise that diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and we value the unique perspectives and experiences that each individual brings to our organisation. In addition to our improved intake processes, we have further improved our feedback systems and processes, allowing participants and families to voice concerns and share suggestions, which can then be integrated into service improvements. By adopting these measures, our customer service will not only meet compliance standards but exceed our enquirers expectations, fostering a culture of trust and care.

Our achievements this year would not have been possible without the trust and support of our participants, families and all key stakeholders. Together, we look forward to another year of shared success and impactful contributions.



ROSIE BUSUTTIL
Stakeholder Engagement & Intake Officer

300
New enquiries for Supports and Services ?

65 NEW PARTICIPANTS ACROSS ALL SERVICES

\$946,020.87
Total grants / donations received

Participant Welfare Update

The role of Participant Welfare Officer continues to be integral to ensuring our participants receive the appropriate support needed to maintain their welfare and wellbeing. This position allows me to work closely with both participants and staff, gaining a deeper understanding of their needs and promoting high-quality, person-centred services.

This year has been particularly challenging for both staff and participants as we have navigated the emotional impact of losing valued participants and staff members. In supporting our participants through these times of grief, I have worked to help them process their feelings and find positive ways to cherish and celebrate the memories of those who have passed, reflecting on the joy of being part of our Mercy journey.

The Quality and Environmental audits remain a key component of my role, providing an independent review of participants' homes. These audits help identify best practices and areas for improvement while offering direct engagement with participants to understand their experiences. This process enables us to enhance our practices and ensure safer environments for everyone involved.

Creating social opportunities for participants to build meaningful relationships is another critical aspect of my role. This year, I have been involved in developing and implementing a diverse range of activities, including providing direct support for participants to attend when needed. The AFL group has seen remarkable growth, thanks to the dedication of Karen and John Cronin, whose continued efforts have made this group a standout activity. Additional events this year included a star-gazing activity,

regular attendance at the Commercial Club, a Halloween party, Albury and Thurgoona community carols, and a Christmas party with gifts for all participants. I am also regularly approached by individual participants seeking one-to-one time, which I always strive to accommodate, even if just for a regular coffee catch-up.

Looking ahead, we anticipate launching the open-air cinema and publishing a participant newsletter in the coming twelve months. I am eager to embrace the opportunities and challenges of the year ahead as we continue to support both our participants and staff.



LEE O'CONNER
Participant Welfare Officer

Learning & Development Update

In the past year, we have significantly bolstered our relationships with existing Learning & Development Partners, while forging new alliances to address the evolving needs of our participants, organisation, and staff.

Our internal partnerships and collaborative efforts have significantly contributed to a remarkable 97% completion rate of mandatory training for all staff. This achievement underscores our dedication to maintaining high standards of competency and safety across our organisation.

Acacia Training delivered the Certificate IV in Disability to a select group of frontline workers. We are proud to announce that eight staff members completed and received their certificates. Among them, three were trainees, for whom we engaged VERTO to manage the traineeship paperwork and ensure clear communication regarding their training experience.

The ability for our staff to provide exceptional care is paramount, especially for participants with complex medical conditions. We engaged with Steve Bartlett to deliver specialised High Intensity Support Training, covering areas such as Diabetes, Complex Bowel Conditions, Catheter Care, and Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy (PEG). Steve also contributed to the development of our High Intensity Support Work Instructions. Additionally, our new partnership with Enhance Ability has enriched our IDDSI Safe Swallowing and Key Word Sign training programs through quality Speech Pathology services in the Central West.

To ensure that all frontline staff maintain current First Aid certifications and that our Emergency Wardens receive necessary training, we collaborated with Matthew Smallwood Consulting. This partnership has enabled our internal trainers to deliver and assess both First Aid and Emergency Warden training in-house, with staff earning nationally recognised Certificates and Statements of Attainment upon completion.

Overall, this year's learning and development initiatives have not only enhanced critical skills of our staff, they also contributed to a more supportive and effective work environment. We look forward to continuing this momentum and exploring new opportunities for growth in the coming year.



GAVIN ROWELL
Organisational Development Manager

8 staff

Completed Certificate IV Disability



Completion Rate of Mandatory Core Training for all Staff

97%

107

NEW STAFF INDUCTED

15 Quality Environmental Audits completed

AFL GROUP
Met 18 times with an average of 8-10 participants attending



STAR GAZING ACTIVITY 50 PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

CHRISTMAS PARTY
Organised Christmas presents for all participants across all Mercy services, over 120 presents given out



Honouring Sister Scholastica: A Legacy of Service and Education

In recognition of more than 70 years of faithful and Mercy-led service, Mercy Connect continues to pay tribute to the remarkable work and volunteerism of Sister Scholastica (Sr Schol). Sr Schol entered the Mercy Congregation in 1949, taking the name Saint Scholastica, the patron saint of education. Her dedication and commitment have left an indelible mark on our community, inspiring generations through her tireless efforts.

The Sister Scholastica Scholarship

To honour Sr Schol's legacy, Mercy Connect proudly offers the Sister Scholastica Scholarship annually. This scholarship is awarded to a female student who demonstrates exceptional potential to thrive in the school environment. It provides financial assistance to help the recipient achieve their fullest potential and engage meaningfully with all aspects of their primary or high school education. The scholarship embodies Sr Schol's passion for education and her belief in the transformative power of learning.

Commitment to Supporting Education

Mercy Connect is deeply committed to supporting our community and believes that education is a cornerstone of personal growth and empowerment. By providing financial assistance through the Sister Scholastica Scholarship, we aim to remove barriers to education and create opportunities for students to excel academically and personally.

Announcing the 2023-2024 Scholarship Recipients

It is with great pleasure that Mercy Connect awarded two recipients for the 2023-2024 Sister Scholastica Scholarship. The awardees are Caitlyn from St Pauls College and Joyce from Xavier High School. Caitlyn and Joyce have both shown an outstanding work ethic and face challenges head-on with determination and resilience. Their dedication to their studies and their ability to overcome obstacles make them deserving recipients of the 2023-2024 Sister Scholastica Scholarship.

About the 2023-2024 Recipients

Caitlyn and Joyce have consistently demonstrated a high level of academic achievement and a commitment to their respective school communities. They are both known for their perseverance, positive attitude, and willingness to help others. Their teachers commend them both on their amazing qualities and ability to inspire those around them. With the support of the Sister Scholastica Scholarship both students will have the opportunity to further their education and continue to make a positive impact on our community.

Looking Ahead

Mercy Connect will continue to actively promote the Sister Scholastica Scholarship and investigate opportunities to expand its reach which supports the education of female students within our regions.



Work Health & Safety Update

We are pleased to present this year's Annual Report on Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), highlighting our steadfast commitment to creating and maintaining a safe and healthy work environment.

Throughout the year, our WHS initiatives and programs have resulted in some notable achievements, including a significant decrease in workplace injuries and workers compensation claims.

The initiatives and programs held during 2023-2024 include:

- **WHS Training and Awareness:** Face to Face refresher training of Code of Conduct, Preventing Bullying, Harassment, Discrimination and Occupational Violence (including updated legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace), Diversity and Inclusion and Incident Reporting policies.
- **Safety Audits and Inspections:** Transitioned to our online incident reporting program to capture completion rates and action items resulting from the audits and inspections.
- **WHS Committee:** The WHS Committee met quarterly to review incident reports, discuss ongoing safety issues and implement corrective actions.

Additionally, through our strategic collaborations, we have introduced a range of wellbeing offerings which are available for staff.

Initiatives undertaken include:

- Introduction of My Everyday Wellbeing, an online Health and Wellbeing Program.
- Access to Fitness Passport for staff and family members.
- Discounted movie tickets through Regent Cinemas.
- Neural Networks Consulting introduced us to the Emotional Culture Deck which was used to measure the emotional culture of our organisation.
- Partnered with Black Dog Institute to roll out two workshops for our leaders, 'Leading a Mentally Healthy Workplace' and 'Managing for Team Wellbeing'.



JEANIE KEETON
People & Culture Manager

100%
of WHS Committee meetings were held as scheduled

82%
OF STAFF FEEL SAFE AS THEY GO ABOUT THEIR WORK

87%

of staff are aware of the supports available to them if they are experiencing problems in their work and/or personal life

Shining Lamp Award: Celebrating Exemplary Service & Dedication

In the spirit of Catherine McAuley's enduring legacy, we are reminded of her words: "We should be shining lamps, giving light to all around us." This quote encapsulates the essence of the Shining Lamp Award, a peer-nominated award that recognises an employee who exemplifies our core values of Compassion, Respect, Innovation, Teamwork, Accountability and Hospitality through outstanding performance and dedicated service to the participants and staff of Mercy Connect.

The Shining Lamp Award

The Shining Lamp Award is presented annually on Mercy Day to honour an employee who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to our mission and values. This award celebrates those who go above and beyond in their roles, embodying the spirit of Mercy. The recipient of this award is someone who consistently shines a light on the path for others, inspiring their colleagues and making a significant impact on the lives of our participants.

Mercy Connect is proud to announce that the 2023-2024 recipient of the Mercy Day 'Shining Lamp' Award is Tanya Whiley. Tanya consistently demonstrates all Mercy Connect values in the workplace, and it is wonderful to see that her efforts have been acknowledged by her peers. Tanya's outstanding performance and unwavering commitment to the well-being of our participants and staff have set a remarkable example for all.

Tanya Whiley

Tanya works within our Central West Team and has been a valued member of Mercy Connect for just over three years. Throughout her career with Mercy Connect, Tanya has consistently demonstrated unwavering dedication to embodying our values in her interactions with all Mercy Connect participants and staff.

Mercy Connect is delighted to see Tanya's progression during her time at Mercy Connect and are thrilled to see her peers acknowledge her unwavering kindness, reliability, and the positive energy she consistently brings to the workplace each day.

Leading The Way

This award serves as a reminder of the profound impact that the service Mercy Connect provides has on those we serve and should remain committed to recognising and nurturing the talents and contributions of our staff, ensuring that our values are reflected in every aspect of our work. Together, we will continue to shine brightly, guided by the legacy of Catherine McAuley and the exemplary service of our Shining Lamp Award recipients.





Partnerships, Collaborations & Donations

With Thanks

- Abbeyfield Australia
- Acacia Training
- Albury City Council
- Amaranth Foundation
- Baker Motors
- Balance Accountants and Advisors
- Bickerton Masters
- Black Dog Institute
- Bunnings (Albury, NSW)
- Carevan Foundation
- Carter & Co
- Chambers Whyte Design and Print
- Commercial Club Albury
- Cristabel
- Crown Furniture
- Darktrace
- DARO
- Enhance Ability
- Fitness Passport
- FM Clarity
- FoodShare
- Flying Fox
- Harwood Andrews
- Henty Respite Trust
- Josh Antone Plumbing
- La Trobe University, John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research
- Lifeline
- Matthew Smallwood Consulting
- McGrath Builders & Associates
- Monumental Ice Creamery
- Murray Art Museum Albury
- Minter Ellison
- My Everyday Wellbeing
- Neutral Networks Consulting
- North Albury Rotary
- Online Education Services
- Quest (Orange, NSW)
- Quest (Wodonga, VIC)
- Regent Cinema
- RehabCo
- Rensascent
- Rotary Club of Albury
- RSM
- SS&A
- Steve Bartlett
- The Management Edge
- The Personnel Group
- Three Rivers Department of Rural Health: Charles Sturt University
- Training Services NSW
- Virtual IT Group
- Verto
- Western Sydney University Online
- whiskk
- Wodonga TAFE
- 2AY Radio

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