



Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Mercy Connect acknowledges First Nations people as the Traditional 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

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.

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.



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

Strategic Priorities

2024 - 2027



Community Services

Develop holistic, innovative, high quality and inclusive community services to respond where there is an identified need.

- Grow through innovation to expand our community services.
- Develop greater capacity for early intervention with families.
- Nurture confidence and resilience through access to quality education and support.
- Embed best practice in all our services.
- Support former clients to access their records and understand their family history.
- Address Royal Commission responses and to engage with participants, their families and guardians.



Social Justice

To steward the Mercy Ministry Companions theological formation process and advocate for social justice.

- Embed the commitment to Catholic Social Teaching across all programs.
- Promote awareness and an understanding of the MMC theological framework.
- Develop, evaluate and scale up innovative programs and emerging practice.
- Advocate on critical issues informed by the voices of vulnerable members of the community.
- Develop a focused and innovative research and evaluation agenda.

CALD - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
MMC - Mercy Ministry Companions
RAPs - Reconciliation Action Plans
ACCOS - Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations



Respect

Deepen our commitment to respect the dignity of every person with a preferential option for the poor and marginalised.

- Establish new and develop existing community services programs that are people-centred.
- Listen deeply to the Aboriginal voice and CALD voices and, as appropriate, implement RAPs.
- Proactively engage with Aboriginal Communities and ACCOs to build respectful partnerships.



Safety and Wellbeing

Ensure accountable and integrated systems that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of those we service and those we work alongside.

- Embed through leadership, strong governance and professional development.
- Drive leadership development and Work Health & Safety improvements for ministry volunteers and staff.
- Develop and maintain robust, integrated systems in place to measure and increase the quality of services provided to the community.
- Attract, develop and retain the most capable and engaged workforce.
- Strengthen the culture of continuous improvement and participation, through feedback from all clients and workforce.



Sustainability

Strengthen organisational and financial Sustainability.

- Ensure strong governance, risk management and integration strategies are successfully implemented.
- Maintain stringent financial oversight and adherence to financial budgets and operational plans.
- Enhance and diversify the income streams to strengthen their financial sustainability.
- Promote environmental responsibility and connection to our community ecological footprint and systems.

Chair Report

This past year has been one of resilience, growth, and purposeful action. The disability sector continues to face uncertainty, with ongoing funding pressures and reforms to the NDIS shaping a complex environment. Yet through all of this, Mercy Connect has remained strong, responsive, and unwavering in its commitment to supporting people with disability to live the lives they choose.

The Board is particularly proud that we close the year in a solid financial position. In a time when many providers are struggling, this is a significant achievement. More than stability, it provides us with the confidence to invest in the future, to innovate, and to continue expanding the reach and impact of our services.

This year also brought moments of recognition and celebration. Being awarded Highly Commended in the Albury Wodonga Business Awards for Outstanding Community Organisation affirmed the value of the work Mercy Connect does and the positive difference it makes in the community. At the same time, the expansion into the Central West of New South Wales means more families now have access to the support they need, closer to home. These milestones reflect both the strength of our strategy and the dedication of our people.

As a Board, we are also focused on the long-term. We have overseen investments in systems and governance that support quality and efficiency, ensuring adherence to continuous improvement. These decisions are about positioning the organisation for the future while staying true to our values today.

Importantly, this year Mercy Connect has also advanced its commitment to reconciliation, with the development of our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. This is an important milestone in the journey to be an organisation that not only serves, but also listens, includes, and grows through meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Looking ahead, the Board's focus remains clear: to ensure the organisation is well-governed, financially sustainable, and strategically positioned to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We know there will be more reform and more pressure on the system. But we also know we have the people, partnerships, and resilience to navigate that future with confidence.

Following 30 June, three of our Board Members tendered their resignation. These were Vicki Clark OAM, Dr Linda Mellors and Brigid Connors. We thank each of these Board members for bringing their wisdom, knowledge, insights and professional experience to the important work of Mercy Connect.

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank our CEO, leadership team, and staff for their tireless work, and our participants and families for their trust and engagement. It is your voices and experiences that guide us, and your achievements that inspire us.

Together, we step into the future with optimism, purpose, and resolve.



Charles Reis
Chair
Mercy Connect

CEO Report

This past year has been a reminder of the strength, resilience, and determination that define our organisation. Despite the ongoing challenges presented by the changing NDIS landscape, our staff have demonstrated remarkable adaptability, ensuring that the people we support remain at the heart of everything we do.

In December 2024, I was honoured to step into the permanent CEO role. This milestone is not just a reflection of my journey, but of the trust, support, and collaboration of our Board, staff, and community, for which I am deeply grateful.

Growth has been an important focus of our strategy. Since its establishment, our Transition Respite and Youth Service has gone from strength to strength, delivering incredible outcomes for young people who deserve every opportunity to thrive. We have also expanded our services in the Central West region of NSW, providing much-needed support to more communities, families, and individuals.

We have also been investing in improving how we operate. New systems and enhancements to existing ones are helping us work more efficiently while lifting the quality of care we deliver. We have also continued to invest in our properties, ensuring our homes are not only functional but also inclusive, welcoming, and places that people are proud to call their own.

I have particularly enjoyed witnessing the creativity of our staff in action. From gamification in our Learning and Development programs to fun and practical activities like Cooking with Care and Smash Sessions, we are finding new ways to learn, connect, and improve outcomes for participants. These initiatives reflect the culture we are nurturing, one that is engaging, collaborative, and always focused on making a real difference.

A meaningful milestone this year has been the development of our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. While still in draft, it represents a significant step forward in our commitment to reconciliation. I sincerely thank everyone who has contributed, your insights, dedication, and collaboration are helping us lay the foundations for meaningful and lasting change.

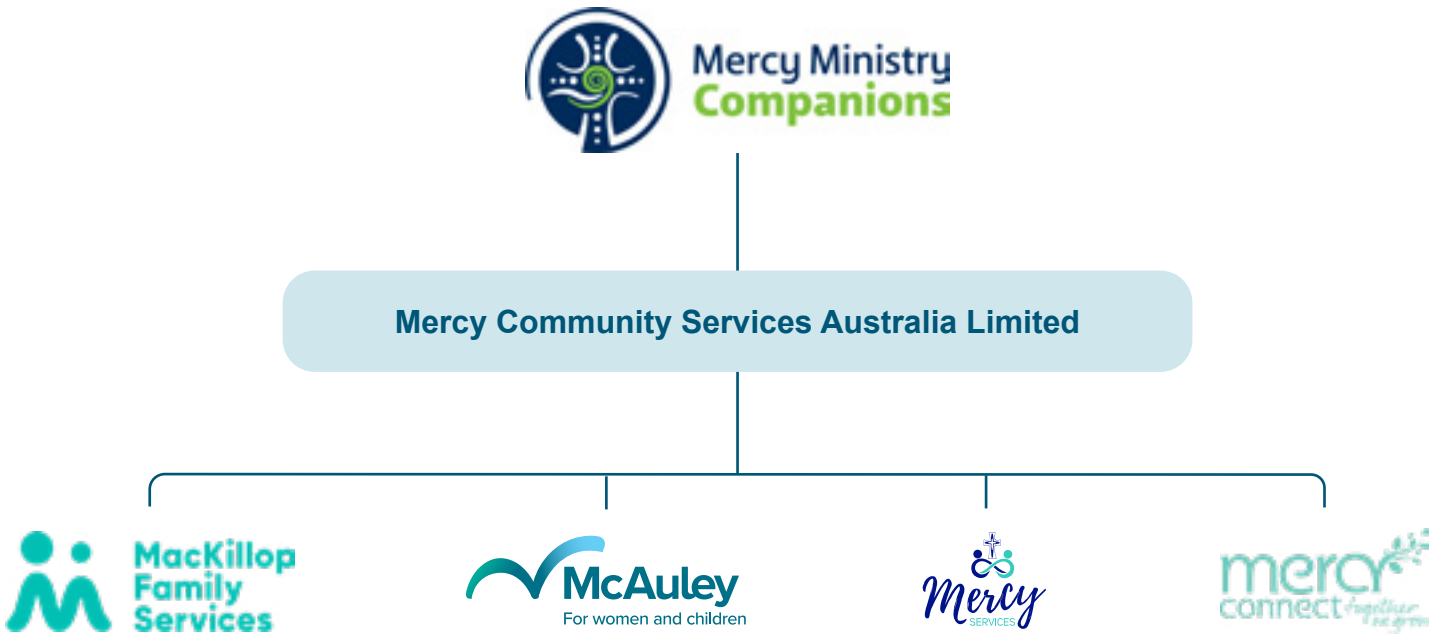
Financially, we close the year in a strong position. This is a remarkable achievement given the challenging environment, and it reflects the dedication and hard work of our staff and leadership. Beyond stability, this result provides a platform for growth, innovation, and the ability to respond quickly to emerging needs. It positions us with confidence to invest in our future and continue expanding the impact of our work.

As I reflect on the year, what stands out most is not only what we have achieved, but how we have achieved it, through teamwork, creativity, and a shared commitment to making a difference. I thank every member of our staff, Board, partners, and supporters for being part of this journey. Each challenge we overcome by working together helps us to build a stronger, more hopeful, and inclusive future.



Caroline Cummins
Chief Executive Officer
Mercy Connect

Governance - Our Board



Our Board

- **Chair** - Charles Reis
- **Independent Director** - Michelle Cotter
- **Independent Director** - Brigid Connors
- **Independent Director** - Ella McPherson
- **Independent Director** - Marcelle Mogg
- **Independent Director** - Janet Farrow
- **Independent Director** - John Sutherland
- **Independent Director** - Libby Mears
- **Independent Director** - Stephen Mamouny
- **Independent Director** - Peter Lavis
- **Independent Director** - Elizabeth Clear
- **Independent Director** - Vicki Clark
- **Independent Director** - Linda Mellors
- **Company Secretary** - Graham Boal

Organisational Chart - Our Team





Our People at the Centre

Participant Welfare Update

The role of Participant Welfare Officer has given me the privilege of working closely with many of our participants, offering direct support while also providing information and guidance to staff.

Over the past twelve months, a wide range of social activities have been organised, many of which were planned and delivered by working groups of participants and staff. These events included:

- Halloween celebrations
- Participant and Staff Christmas Party
- Pancake Tuesday fundraiser, which raised funds to support future social activities
- Biggest Morning Tea for the Cancer Council, raising approximately \$370
- Our first Easter Hat Parade, which was a great success. Participants proudly showcased their creative hats while walking the red carpet. A special thank you goes to the staff who supported participants in designing and making their hats, as well as those who joined in the fun by wearing their own creations.

In addition to these activities, monthly environmental audits continue to be conducted both here and in the Central West. These audits enable Mercy Connect to continually improve practices and ensure a safe, homely environment for participants, as well as a welcoming space for families and staff.

I remain available to provide one-on-one support to participants as needed. This year, I:

- Supported an individual to successfully complete a 10-week leadership course through the Regional Disability Advocacy Service. Initially hesitant to contribute, this participant gradually grew in confidence and made valuable contributions to group discussions.

- Alongside the Stakeholder Engagement & Intake Officer, supported a participant to engage in a co-design workshop (“Help Make Virtual Care Better for People with Intellectual Disability”). The participant shared meaningful insights, some of which will be incorporated into the committee’s final report.
- Assisted one participant over several months to secure rental accommodation. In the current housing climate, this process took six to seven months and highlighted the critical need for more affordable housing options that do not consume the majority of a person’s pension.

The AFL group continues to go from strength to strength. At times we have even outgrown the space at the Social Hub, and discussions are underway about possibly moving the group to Catherine’s Corner to accommodate its popularity.

Overall, the past year has been filled with growth, creativity, and collaboration. I look forward to continuing to support participants, staff, and families in the year ahead.



Lee O'Connor

Participant Welfare Officer

Growing Together Through Inclusion

At Mercy Connect, the Community Inclusion Day Program is more than a calendar of activities, it's a place where lives intersect, friendships flourish, and participants find joy in shared experiences. Among the many stories that have emerged from this service, one stands out for its warmth, resilience, and the power of connection.

Ella and James have developed a strong and supportive relationship through their involvement in Mercy Connect's Day Program. Their connection has grown steadily over time, nurtured by a welcoming environment and the encouragement of staff and support workers. Whether participating in group activities or spending time together outside of scheduled programs, their bond reflects the values of inclusion, respect, and mutual support that Mercy Connect strives to uphold. Their relationship brings joy not only to themselves but also to those around them, serving as a positive example of the meaningful relationships that can flourish within a caring community.

Staff have observed how the relationship between Ella and James has had a positive influence on their overall engagement and wellbeing. Their interactions reflect a sense of encouragement and respect, contributing to a more confident and connected experience within the program. With support and guidance of staff, both have embraced opportunities to participate more fully and explore new aspects of their personal growth. They continue to look forward to seeing each other at the Day Program, where their connection brings joy and a sense of belonging.

Their relationship didn't stop at the Day Program. With the support of their SIL (Supported Independent Living) staff, Ella and James began spending time together outside of Day Program.

Their support workers coordinated visits, helped with transport, and ensured that their social time was safe and enriching.

Support workers played a vital role in nurturing this relationship. They recognised the positive impact it had on both participants and worked collaboratively to accommodate them. Staff helped facilitate communication, encouraged shared goals, and celebrated milestones.

Today, Ella and James are proud of their relationship and happy to share it with others. Their story is a beautiful example of what Mercy Connect stands for, creating spaces where people are seen, heard, and supported to live their best lives.

** Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.*



Building Connections through Coffee, Conversation & Community

What began as a simple weekly coffee catch-up between the Participant Welfare Officer (PWO) and a participant, has blossomed into a vibrant social network that continues to grow and thrive.

Every Thursday morning, the PWO met with the participant for a coffee and a chat. These regular meetings became a safe and welcoming space for connection, reflection, and friendship.

Over time, the participant expressed interest in exploring social activities beyond their weekly catch-ups. Responding to this, the PWO suggested inviting two more participants to join in. This small gesture sparked the beginning of a meaningful friendship between the three individuals, built on shared interests and mutual support.

As the group's bond strengthened, their social calendar expanded. From fortnightly dinners and dancing at the Commercial Club to movie nights and local dining experiences, the trio embraced every opportunity to connect and enjoy life together. They even joined Mercy Connect's AFL Group, a participant-led initiative to watch AFL games, which further strengthened their sense of community.

When the PWO was unavailable, the participants' Support Workers stepped in to ensure the catch-ups continued uninterrupted, highlighting the collaborative spirit and commitment to participant wellbeing across the organisation.

The group's enthusiasm for social outings grew into a weekly Wednesday night tradition. This regular engagement inspired them to explore even more activities, including attending tribute shows and live performances on Saturdays. Their shared excitement for music and entertainment has become a cornerstone of their friendship.

This story is a testament to the power of consistent, compassionate engagement. Through the dedication of the PWO and the support of the wider community, participants have not only formed lasting friendships but also discovered new passions and built a social life filled with joy, laughter, and connection.





Shining Lamp Award 2023 - 2024: Gloire Bashimbe

Each year, Mercy Connect proudly presents the Shining Lamp Award to a staff member who exemplifies the organisation's core values of Compassion, Hospitality, Respect, Innovation, Teamwork, and Accountability.

This peer nominated recognition celebrates individuals who go above and beyond in their roles, making a lasting impact on the lives of participants and the broader Mercy Connect community.

For the 2023 - 2024 period, the Shining Lamp Award was presented to Gloire Bashimbe, a dedicated and compassionate member of the Mercy Connect team. Gloire had been with the organisation for over two years and had stepped into the role of Assistant Team Leader, a testament to his leadership potential and unwavering commitment to service.

Gloire's journey at Mercy Connect had been marked by his exceptional work ethic and his ability to connect deeply with participants. His approach to care went far beyond routine responsibilities - he consistently provided encouragement, emotional support, and a sense of belonging to those he worked with. His colleagues described him as someone who brings warmth and positivity to every interaction, creating an environment where participants feel safe, respected, and empowered.

The award was formally announced during Mercy Day celebrations on 24 September 2024, a day that commemorates the legacy of Catherine McAuley and the founding of the first House of Mercy in Dublin. The timing of the award was especially meaningful, as Mercy Day is a moment to reflect on the values that underpin the organisation's mission. Gloire's recognition on this day highlighted his embodiment of those values in action.

Behind the scenes, the award process involved peer nominations, where staff were invited to nominate colleagues who consistently demonstrated Mercy Connect's values. Gloire's name stood out among the nominations, not only for his professional contributions but also for the genuine care and leadership he brings to his role.

The Shining Lamp Award is more than recognition from peers, it is a reflection of the heart and soul of Mercy Connect. It honours those who light the way for others, just as Gloire has done throughout his time with the organisation. His story serves as an inspiration to all staff, reminding us that leadership is not just about titles, but about the everyday actions that uplift and empower others.

As Mercy Connect continues to grow and evolve, it is individuals like Gloire who ensure that the spirit of Mercy remains strong. We congratulate him on this well-deserved honour and thank him for his continued dedication to supporting participants to live connected and meaningful lives.



Cooking Up Confidence at Bottlebrush Café

At the Bottlebrush Café, two enthusiastic participants are gaining more than just cooking skills, they're building confidence, teamwork, and a sense of pride in their contributions. Through their involvement in the café's lunch program, they've become valued members of a team that brings joy and delicious meals to Head Office staff.

Each week, the team comes together to decide what to cook based on a term menu developed in advance. Staff place their lunch orders online, which helps the café team plan ahead and purchase the correct amount of ingredients. This process teaches participants how to manage resources, follow a schedule, and work collaboratively to meet deadlines.

On lunch days, the participants work alongside an experienced staff member to prepare meals from scratch. From chopping vegetables to plating dishes, every step is a hands-on learning opportunity. The team works together to ensure meals are ready in time for lunch, developing essential skills in time management, food preparation, and hygiene practices. They also learn how to serve meals and handle payments, gaining experience in customer service.

The Bottlebrush Café has quickly become a highlight for Head Office staff. The lunches are not only tasty and well-prepared, but they also carry a special meaning. Staff regularly express their appreciation for the effort and care that goes into each meal. The café has become a place where food brings people together and where participants feel valued and appreciated for their contributions.

Beyond the kitchen, the program fosters personal growth. Participants learn to communicate effectively, follow instructions, and take initiative. They build relationships with staff and peers, and their confidence grows with each successful lunch service. The supportive environment encourages learning and celebrates progress, no matter how small.

The program also provides a structured routine that helps participants develop a sense of responsibility and ownership. They are involved in every stage of the process, from planning and preparation to cooking and serving, which gives them a deeper understanding of how a food service operation runs. This approach ensures that participants are not only learning practical skills but also developing the mindset needed for future employment or independent living.

The Bottlebrush Café is more than just a lunch service, it's a platform for empowerment. It provides a structured, inclusive space where participants can develop real-world skills while making meaningful contributions to their community. With each meal served, they're not only feeding others, they're nourishing their own potential.

This program is a testament to the power of practical learning and the impact of inclusive programs. The Bottlebrush Café continues to be a place where participants thrive, staff connect, and everyone leaves a little more fulfilled, one lunch at a time.



Programs & Services



Marg's Heartfelt Impact at Mercy Connect's 'Computer Lovers' Program

Every Tuesday and Thursday, the Mercy Connect Day Program room in Thurgoona comes alive with laughter, curiosity, and the gentle hum of computers booting up. At the heart of this energy is Marg, a dedicated volunteer whose warmth and patience have made her a beloved fixture of the Computer Lovers program.

Marg's journey with Mercy Connect began with a simple desire to give back. "I just wanted to help people feel seen and supported," she says. "Now I look forward to those two days every week. The participants have become like family."

The Computer Lovers program is designed to empower participants through technology. With the guidance of a skilled computer teacher, individuals explore areas of personal interest, whether it's solving puzzles, learning to use Google, writing stories with pictures, or experimenting with digital colouring. Each session is tailored to meet the unique needs and preferences of the participants, fostering both skill development and self-expression.

Marg plays a vital role in this process. She patiently supports participants as they learn to turn on the computer, open their chosen programs, save their work, and shut down safely. Her gentle encouragement helps build confidence, especially for those who are new to technology. "It's not just about learning computers," Marg explains. "It's about discovering what brings each person joy, and watching them light up when they do."

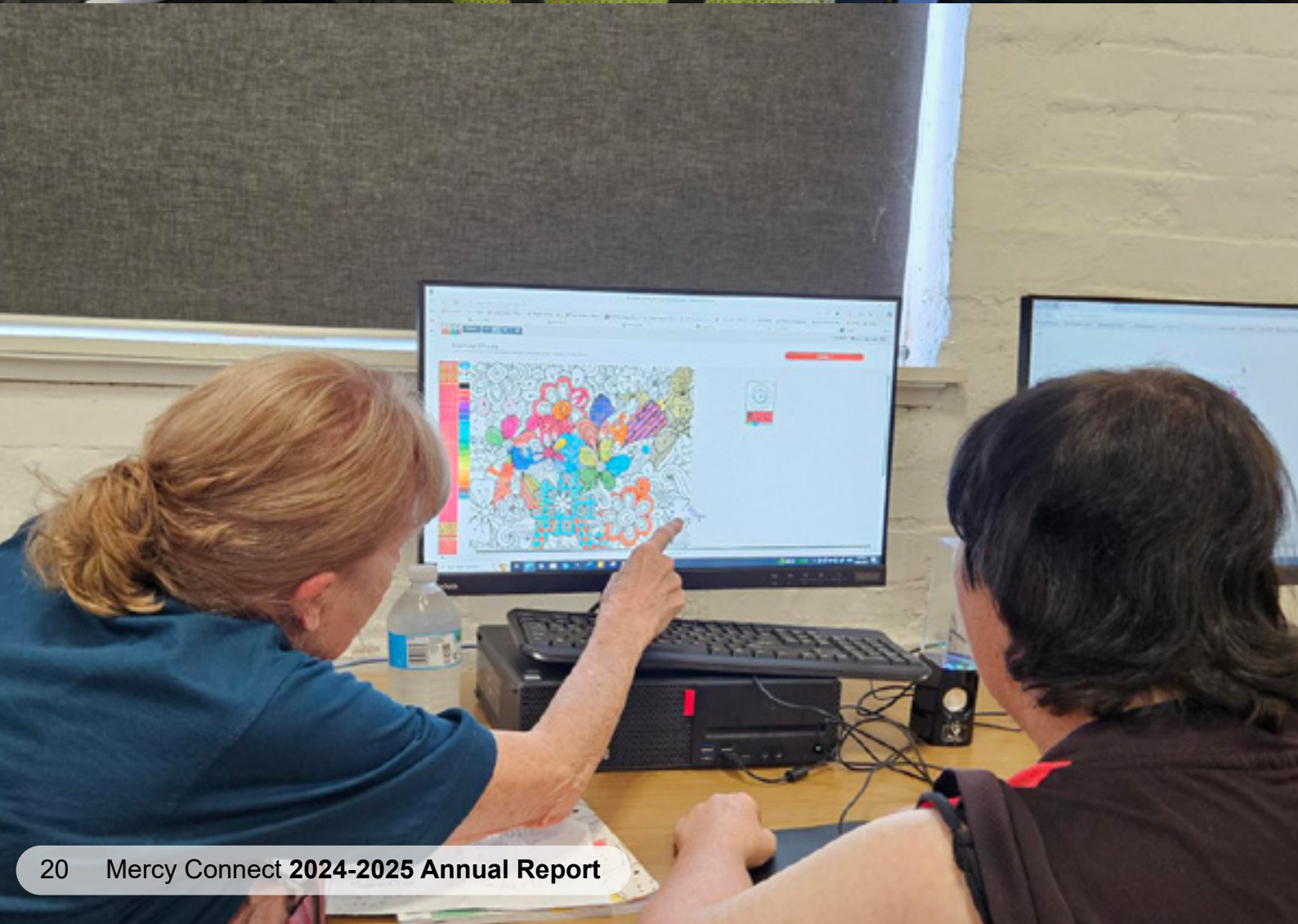
One participant recently printed a colourful digital artwork and proudly showcased it, while another participant has learned how to use different programs. These small victories are celebrated with genuine enthusiasm, and Marg is often the first to cheer.

Her presence has fostered genuine connections. Participants seek her out for help, conversation, and companionship. Staff have noted the positive impact Marg has had on the group's morale and engagement. "She brings a calm, caring energy that makes everyone feel safe to try something new," says one team member.

As Mercy Connect continues to grow its programs, the need for volunteers like Marg is more important than ever. Volunteers bring diversity, warmth, and community spirit to every session. Whether you're tech-savvy or simply passionate about helping others, there's a place for you.

Marg encourages others to get involved. "You don't need to be an expert. Just show up, be kind, and listen. You'll be amazed at what you can learn."

Her story is a testament to the power of connection, compassion, and community. Through her time and heart, Marg has helped make Computer Lovers not just a program, but a place where people thrive.





Innovation & Growth

Information Technology Update

Over the 2024/25 financial year, the IT team delivered a range of initiatives that helped improve infrastructure, streamline operations, and support the organisation's growth. One of the most significant changes was the transition of IT support services to our Managed Services Provider, Infotech. This shift has helped consolidate support channels, improve response times, and free up internal resources to focus on more strategic work. The transition was managed carefully to ensure a smooth handover, with minimal disruption to day-to-day operations. It also included the onboarding of new support processes and tools, which have contributed to a more consistent and transparent service experience for staff across all departments. Feedback from users has been positive, with noticeable improvements in issue resolution and communication.

Following this, we rolled out new networking equipment across several sites. This upgrade replaced older hardware with modern, high performance devices, resulting in faster, more reliable connectivity and improved security. These improvements have made a noticeable difference in how teams access systems and collaborate, especially in environments that rely heavily on cloud-based tools and remote access. The new equipment has also simplified ongoing maintenance and monitoring, allowing for quicker identification and resolution of issues.

We also completed upgrades from Fibre to the Node (FTTN) to Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) at key locations. This change has significantly boosted internet performance, reducing latency and increasing bandwidth to better support data heavy applications and real-time communication. These upgrades are part of our broader strategy to future-proof our infrastructure and ensure it can scale with the organisation's needs.

We supported the opening of several new sites during the year, including a full office fit-out at the new Lords Place location. This involved providing all necessary equipment to establish a functional workspace, as well as coordinating the relocation of training equipment from our Illamatta Way site to ensure continuity of operations. These efforts helped ensure that staff at new locations were equipped and ready to work from day one.

In addition to infrastructure and operational support, we worked closely with developers to improve how our systems interact. This included efforts to automate routine processes and create smoother integration between platforms. These improvements have helped reduce manual work, improve data consistency, and make it easier for teams to access the information they need. The collaboration has also opened up opportunities for future enhancements that will further streamline business processes.

Overall, the past financial year has been a productive one for IT, with meaningful progress made across several fronts. The work completed has not only addressed current needs but also laid the groundwork for continued improvement and innovation. We're well-positioned to support the organisation's evolving requirements in the year ahead.

Learning & Development

Over the past 12 months, Mercy Connect's Learning and Development (L&D) team has continued to deliver high-quality training while introducing innovative initiatives to enhance staff engagement, streamline processes, and strengthen organisational capability.

Innovative Training Delivery *Gamified Learning with Kahoot*

A key highlight this year was the integration of gamification into refresher training through the use of Kahoot. This interactive, quiz based approach significantly increased staff engagement and allowed facilitators to identify knowledge gaps in real time. Staff feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many describing the sessions as "engaging, informative, and a fun way to learn". The shift from traditional presentations to mobile-based participation has transformed the learning experience.

Transition to a Paperless System

The L&D team successfully implemented a paperless training system using QR codes and Microsoft Forms. This initiative eliminated the need for printed materials such as attendance sheets, schedules, assessments, and feedback forms. The result has been a reduction in administrative workload and printing costs, alongside improved training delivery and more robust data collection.

Strategic Training Partnerships

Mercy Connect strengthened its partnership with Wodonga TAFE to deliver nationally recognised qualifications that support both leadership and frontline development:

- **Certificate IV and Diploma of Leadership and Management** programs are currently underway, building leadership capability across the organisation.
- **Certificate III in Individualised Support** is scheduled to commence in early 2026, further supporting the delivery of high-quality, person-centred care.

We also continued to collaborate with specialist providers to meet targeted training needs:

- **Steve Bartlett** delivered High Intensity Support training, equipping staff to manage complex care requirements.
- **Matthew Smallwood Consulting** provided First Aid and Emergency Management training, enhancing staff preparedness and response capabilities.

Training and Workshops Delivered

Throughout the year, the L&D team facilitated a wide range of training sessions, including:

- 12 Staff Induction Programs
- Team Leader Workshops
- Assistant Team Leader Workshop
- Community Inclusion Workshop
- 20 CPI Refresher Training Classes
- 18 Annual Refresher Classes
- 23 First Aid and CPR Classes
- 40+ Training sessions led at Team Meetings

I am proud to report that our training initiatives are not only well-received but are also delivering tangible results. With a 93% satisfaction rating, staff have described our training as "engaging, informative, and the best training I've ever had".

These outcomes reflect our commitment to delivering learning experiences that meet both organisational goals and staff development needs.



Gavin Rowell

*Organisational
Development Manager*

Growth in the Central West: Expanding Our Footprint to Meet Regional Needs

In the past year, Mercy Connect has made significant strides in expanding our presence and capabilities across the Central West region of New South Wales. This growth reflects our ongoing commitment to meeting the evolving needs of the communities we serve and ensuring our teams are equipped with the resources and infrastructure necessary to deliver high-quality support and services.

A major milestone in this journey has been the establishment of two new office locations, one in Cowra and another in Orange. These additions mark a strategic investment in regional capacity building, staff development, and participant support.

The new Cowra office has been purposefully designed to foster collaboration and professional development. It features dedicated office space for our local team and a fully equipped training room to support ongoing staff learning and development. This facility enables us to deliver in-person training sessions and team meetings, ensuring our staff remain confident and capable in their roles. The Cowra office also serves as a central hub for community engagement and outreach, strengthening our connection with local stakeholders.

In Orange, we have opened a larger facility with multiple offices to accommodate the growing demand for back-of-house roles, ensuring the smooth delivery of services across the region. The Orange office also includes a fully equipped training room, providing a flexible space for team collaboration, professional development, and strategic planning. This investment not only enhances our internal capabilities but also reinforces our commitment to staff wellbeing and continuous improvement.

Beyond office infrastructure, we have also taken steps to expand our direct support offerings in Cowra. This year, we acquired two leased properties specifically to support more participants. These homes provide safe, comfortable, and well-supported living environments tailored to individual needs. The acquisition of these properties reflects our person-centred approach and our dedication to creating opportunities for independence and inclusion within the community.

Together, these developments represent a significant leap forward in our regional strategy. By investing in physical infrastructure, staff development, and participant housing, we are laying the foundation for sustainable growth and enhanced service delivery. The new offices and leased properties not only increase our operational capacity but also demonstrate our responsiveness to local needs and our vision for a more connected and empowered Central West.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to strengthening our regional presence, fostering innovation, and ensuring that every participant and staff member has access to the resources they need to thrive. The growth in Cowra and Orange is just the beginning of a broader journey to build resilient, inclusive, and future ready communities across New South Wales.



Mercy Connect Reflection Garden:

On Mercy Day, 24 September 2024, Mercy Connect proudly commemorated the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy with the official opening of the Mercy Connect Reflection Garden, a serene and symbolic space designed to honour the spirit of compassion, justice, and service that has guided our organisation since its inception.

The garden stands as a living tribute to Catherine McAuley, founder of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin. Her vision, to uplift the vulnerable through education, compassion, and justice, sparked a global movement that continues to shape lives today. The Reflection Garden also honours the contributions of Ursula Frayne and Mother Mary Ignatius Murphy, whose leadership and commitment to Mercy values have left a lasting impact on communities across Australia.

Designed as a space for contemplation, connection, and inspiration, the garden embodies the core values of Mercy, hospitality, service, justice, and compassion. It invites all who enter to pause, reflect, and consider how we might continue the work of these pioneering women in our own lives and communities.

This meaningful project was born from a commitment made by participants of the 2023 Mercy Leadership Program, including Trent Dean, Former CEO, and Jessie Arney, Executive Leader People and Communications. Their vision was to create a space that not only honours Mercy's legacy but also provides a peaceful environment for reflection and renewal.

The creation of the Reflection Garden was made possible through the generous support and collaboration of many individuals and organisations:

A Living Tribute to Mercy Values

- Ben Hooper from Henty Respite Trust, who provided the original garden design
- Thurgoona Golf Club, for their generous grant funding
- The Reflection Garden Committee: Caroline Cummins, Max Wang, Rosie Busuttil, Kaine Brennan, and Pat Godde, whose dedication and coordination brought the project to life
- Pete Bowen and his landscaping team
- Bunnings Albury, for donating three bench seats that offer comfort and rest to visitors
- Carter and Co Creative, for designing the plaques and panels that tell the story of Mercy
- Peards Albury, for providing the centrepiece pots and plants that add beauty and vibrancy
- Indigo Woodworks, for crafting custom bench seating that enhances the garden's welcoming atmosphere
- Yackandandah Valley Nursery, for the timely delivery of plants that now flourish in the space

The Reflection Garden is more than a physical space, it is a symbol of Mercy Connect's ongoing commitment to uphold the values of our founders. It serves as a daily reminder of the importance of compassion in action, and the power of community in creating lasting change. As we look to the future, the garden will continue to be a place where staff, participants, families, and visitors can gather, reflect, and be inspired by the enduring legacy of Mercy.



Future Focus Planning: Shaping the Road Ahead

In December 2024, Mercy Connect convened its pivotal Future Focus Planning session, bringing together leaders and staff from across the organisation to chart the way for the next 12 months. The session was designed to identify strategic priorities and energise teams around shared goals for 2025.

A Vision Grounded in Growth and Inclusion

The planning session focused on four core priority areas: Recruitment and Retention, IT and Business Intelligence, Growth, and The Participant Voice. These themes emerged from a collaborative workshop that encouraged staff to reflect on organisational strengths, explore new service regions, and propose innovative activities to support expansion.

The presentation titled Future Focus Combined highlighted Mercy Connect’s evolution, from consolidating day programs and launching new facilities, to forging strategic partnerships and creating new funding pathways. It also showcased participant growth projections and opportunities in Cowra and Wagga, underscoring the organisation’s commitment to regional outreach.

Turning Ideas into Action

Following the planning session, dedicated working groups were formed to transform ideas into actionable initiatives.

Key initiatives included:

- Establishing a Participant Advisory Group.
- Investigating IPADs for each of our SIL Properties.
- Creating a Participant led newsletter.
- Enhancing Accessible Information and Feedback Methods.
- Expanding Day Program Choices and Communication.
- Improving Participant Meetings structure and engagement.
- Investigate a Social Enterprise Cafe.

A Culture of Collaboration and Innovation

The success of the Future Focus Planning initiative reflects Mercy Connect’s culture of collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness. Staff engagement was high, with contributions spanning practical solutions and visionary strategies. The planning process not only clarified organisational direction but also empowered teams to take ownership of change.

As Mercy Connect moves forward, the outcomes of the Future Focus Planning session will continue to shape its trajectory, driving excellence in service delivery, strengthening community connections, and ensuring that participant voices remain at the heart of every decision.

Looking Ahead

As Mercy Connect continues to evolve, the Future Focus Planning initiative stands as a testament to the organisation’s proactive approach to growth, inclusion, and excellence.

By fostering a culture of shared leadership and strategic foresight, Mercy Connect is not only preparing for the challenges of tomorrow but also ensuring that every voice, especially those of participants is heard, valued, and reflected in the path forward.

The journey ahead is one of purpose, innovation, and community, and the foundations laid during this planning process will guide the organisation with clarity and confidence.





Our Reconciliation Action Plan Journey

Reconciliation Action Plan

We are committed to creating a workplace where respect, inclusion, and equity are at the heart of everything we do. Through this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we aim to strengthen our understanding of and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and work together to make a positive difference. Building on this commitment, Mercy Connect will take meaningful steps to embed cultural learning across our organisation, strengthen partnerships with First Nations peoples, and ensure our services reflect culturally safe and inclusive practices. This plan will guide us in building respectful partnerships, improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, staff, and stakeholders, and ensuring that reconciliation is an active and sustained part of our organisational values and operations.

Our RAP Champion is Caroline Cummins, Chief Executive Officer. Under her guidance, Mercy Connect established a RAP Working Group, which includes members from across our organisation from frontline staff to members of our executive team. The RAP Working Group is enriched by the voices of First Nations members, ensuring our approach is grounded in meaningful representation and culturally informed practice.

Mercy Connect is at the beginning of our reconciliation journey and has begun taking meaningful steps towards cultural recognition and inclusion. We now incorporate Acknowledgement of Country in both online and in-person meetings, and we honour significant dates that celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

As part of our commitment, Mercy Connect engaged a First Nations artist to create original artworks for our RAP. These pieces visually narrate our journey and celebrate the strength, diversity, and deep connection to Country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Featured throughout the RAP and proudly displayed at our head office, the artworks help foster culturally welcoming spaces and reinforce our dedication to truth-telling, respect, and inclusion.

Artist Information

Tamara Murray is a proud member of the **Barkandji** tribe originating from Coomealla, Lake Victoria, and the Mungo regions from her mother's ancestors. While also belonging to the **Yorta Yorta** and **Dhudaroah** tribes originating from the Shepparton area from her father's ancestors.

"Culture is everything to me, it's a way of life, it's my identity, it's who I represent - my people, my family. Culture is our way of healing, telling stories, keeping spirits and traditions alive. It's our connection to the land."

For **Tamara**, her art is not simply paint on a canvas. It's a story; it's a place; it's someone she has met along the way that has inspired her. It's a deep connection to the land and her culture. It is a story that has been passed down.

"I want my art to help break down barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I hope I can help educate and contribute to a more peaceful world where our children can all walk as one, hand in hand, no matter their skin colour or cultural identity."

The gift of art came to her in the form of healing, giving her a voice, a way of expression and connection to the land, her culture and her ancestors.

‘Spiritual Connections’ by Tamara Murray

Past

This artwork pays tribute to the foundations of Mercy Connect. On the left, three crosses symbolise three founding Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, Mother Superior Ursula Frayne, and Mother M. Ignatius Murphy. These crosses are connected to a large central circle, representing the legacy of Mercy Connect's past. Radiating from this circle, white dots symbolise the enduring spirit of the Sisters, continuing to guide and inspire the organisation. Branches and leaves emerge pointing towards the centre, illustrating strength and connection. Flowing lines extend outward, featuring three sets of dots, Mercy Connect at the centre, with family and community on one side, and clients and participants on the other, highlighting the interconnectedness that has shaped Mercy Connect from its inception.

Present

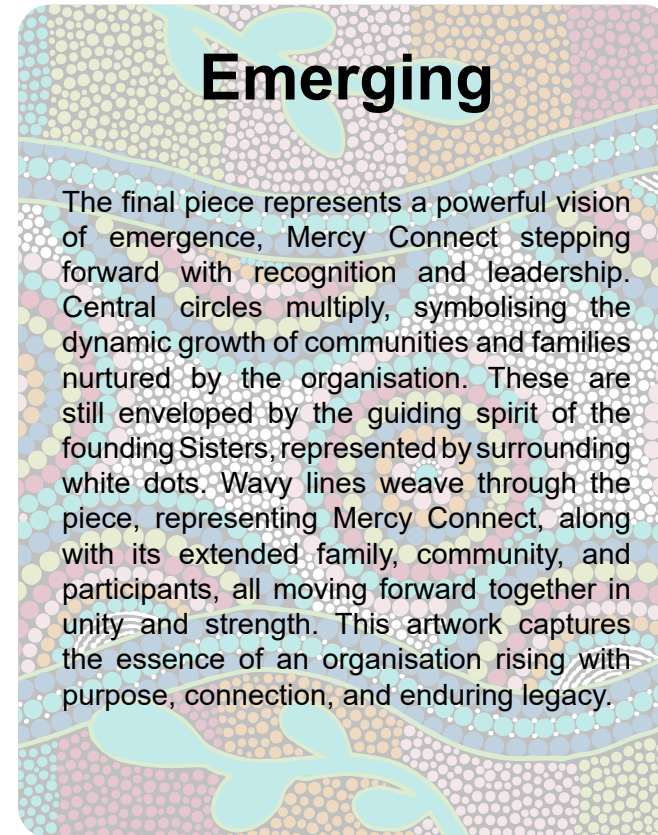
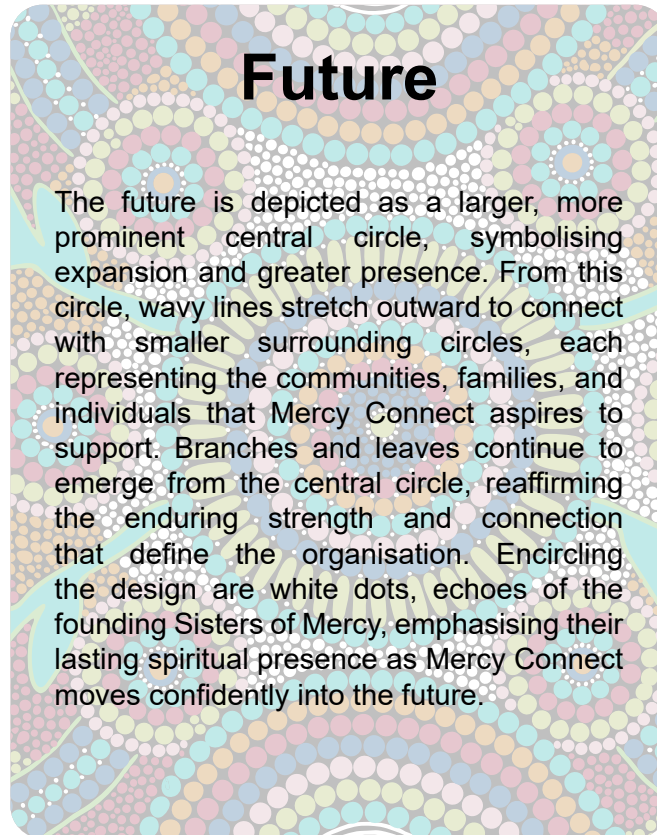
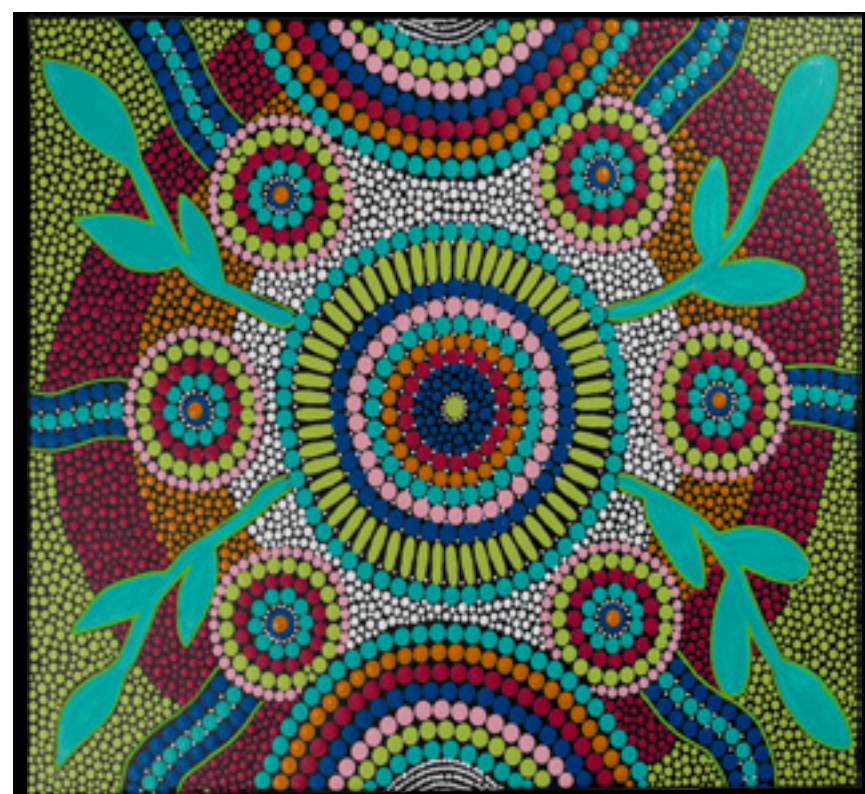
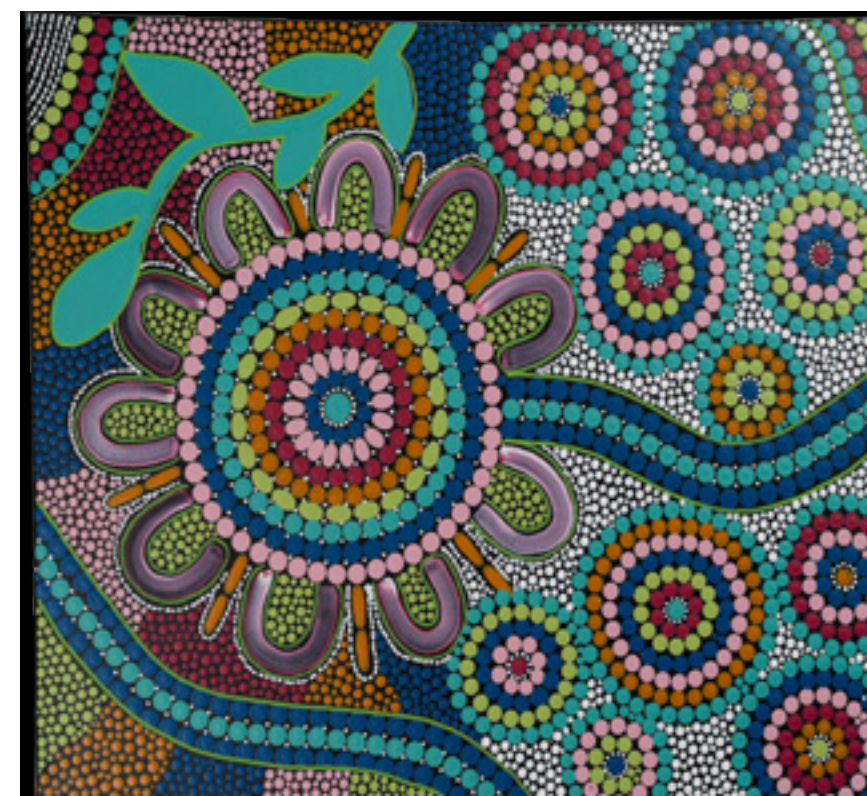
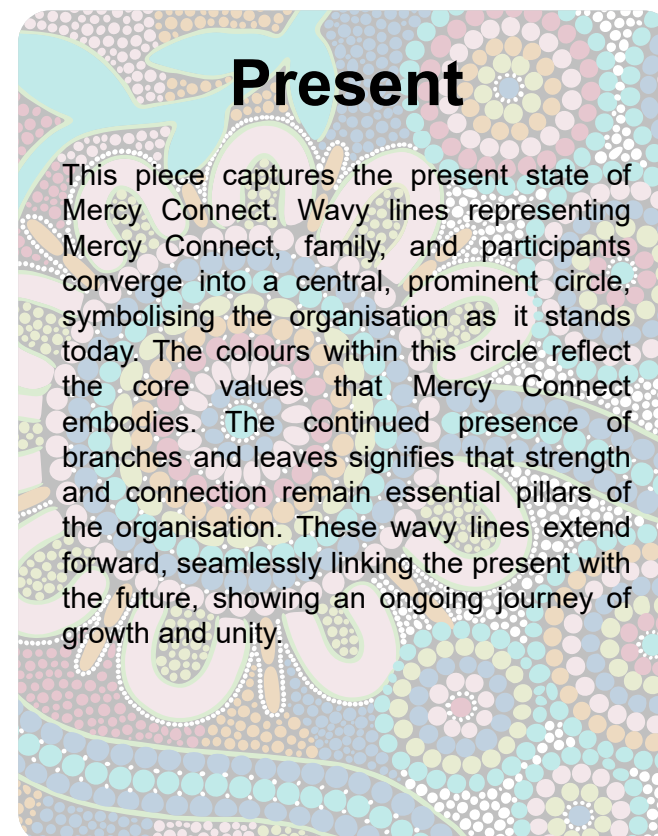
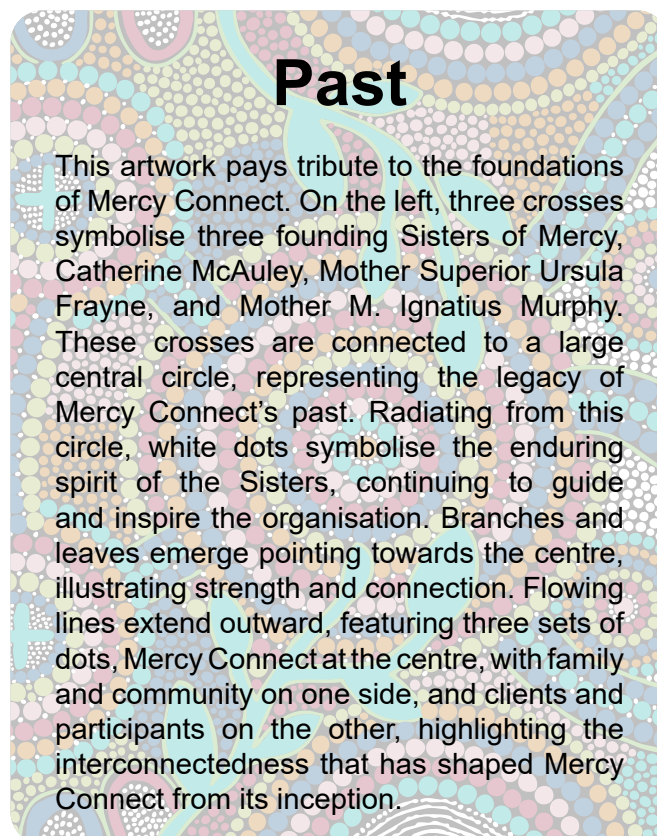
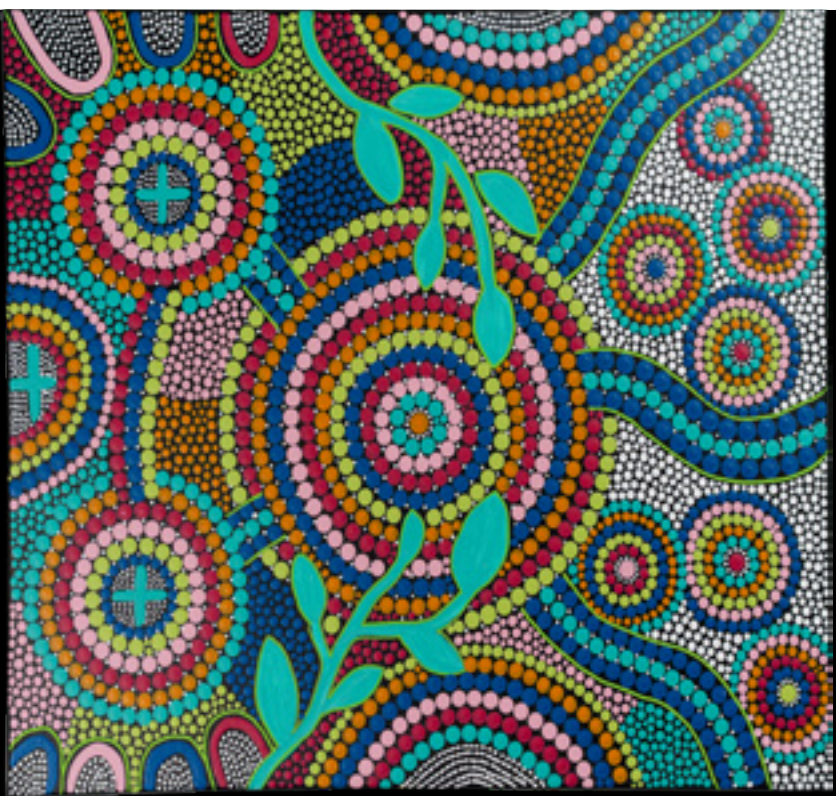
This piece captures the present state of Mercy Connect. Wavy lines representing Mercy Connect, family, and participants converge into a central, prominent circle, symbolising the organisation as it stands today. The colours within this circle reflect the core values that Mercy Connect embodies. The continued presence of branches and leaves signifies that strength and connection remain essential pillars of the organisation. These wavy lines extend forward, seamlessly linking the present with the future, showing an ongoing journey of growth and unity.

Future

The future is depicted as a larger, more prominent central circle, symbolising expansion and greater presence. From this circle, wavy lines stretch outward to connect with smaller surrounding circles, each representing the communities, families, and individuals that Mercy Connect aspires to support. Branches and leaves continue to emerge from the central circle, reaffirming the enduring strength and connection that define the organisation. Encircling the design are white dots, echoes of the founding Sisters of Mercy, emphasising their lasting spiritual presence as Mercy Connect moves confidently into the future.

Emerging

The final piece represents a powerful vision of emergence, Mercy Connect stepping forward with recognition and leadership. Central circles multiply, symbolising the dynamic growth of communities and families nurtured by the organisation. These are still enveloped by the guiding spirit of the founding Sisters, represented by surrounding white dots. Wavy lines weave through the piece, representing Mercy Connect, along with its extended family, community, and participants, all moving forward together in unity and strength. This artwork captures the essence of an organisation rising with purpose, connection, and enduring legacy.





Partnerships & Collaboration

Stakeholder Engagement Update

At Mercy Connect, we are committed to building an inclusive and empowering environment where every voice of our participants, families, caregivers, staff, community partners, and advocates, is valued and heard. Our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy is aligned with our Strategic Plan 2024 - 2027 and reflects our mission to foster meaningful relationships and community impact.

This year, seven staff members completed the Mercy Ministries Companions Middle Leadership Program, a cross-ministry initiative that deepens leadership capability and strengthens our connection to the Mercy Ministries theological framework. Ongoing engagement with our local Sisters of Mercy and ministries continues to shape our identity and values.

We proudly commenced our Reconciliation journey with the formal submission of our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), led by CEO Caroline Cummins and a diverse RAP Working Group. This plan will guide our efforts to build respectful partnerships and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

Our annual Charity Golf Day brought together over \$5,500 raising vital funds to support individuals with disabilities. We are grateful to our major sponsor, Audi Centre Albury, and silver sponsor, BIG 4 Albury Tourist Park, for their generous support.

Our Executive Leadership Team hosted an operational planning workshop to explore innovative strategies and address service delivery challenges. One key outcome was the launch of the Participant Voice initiative, which ensures that people who use our services are actively involved in shaping how those services are planned, delivered, and reviewed.

Throughout the year, Mercy Connect has continued to engage meaningfully with the broader community through:

- **Community Engagement** - Actively support and strengthen our local communities. Through initiatives like the Meals on Wheels Program, we've delivered over 700 meals to those in need. We also collaborate with local charities such as Carevan and Albury-Wodonga Foodshare, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to community wellbeing and social support.
- **Podcast Series** - Season 2 hosted seven episodes sharing lived experiences of disability, grassroots mentoring, and community care.
- **Advisory Group Participation** - Representing the voices of people with disability in Albury, Wodonga, and Orange Ageing & Access Advisory Committees.
- **Business Engagement** - Supporting local chambers of commerce and promoting inclusive business practices.
- **Co-Design Workshops** - Collaborating with government health departments and researchers to improve virtual care services for people with disability.

We sincerely thank all stakeholders for their continued support and collaboration. Your contributions are vital to our shared mission.

Together, we grow.



Rosie Busuttil
Stakeholder Engagement & Intake Officer

Honouring Sister Scholastica

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.

Sister Scholastica - legacy

Sister Scholastica’s passing marked the end of a remarkable chapter in Mercy Connect’s history, but her legacy continues to shine brightly. Her lifelong commitment to education, compassion, and community service left a profound impact on all who knew her. Through her gentle leadership and unwavering faith, Sr Schol inspired generations and helped shape the values we uphold today. Her spirit lives on in the scholarship that bears her name and in the hearts of those she served so faithfully.

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.

Our 2024 - 2025 Scholarship Recipient

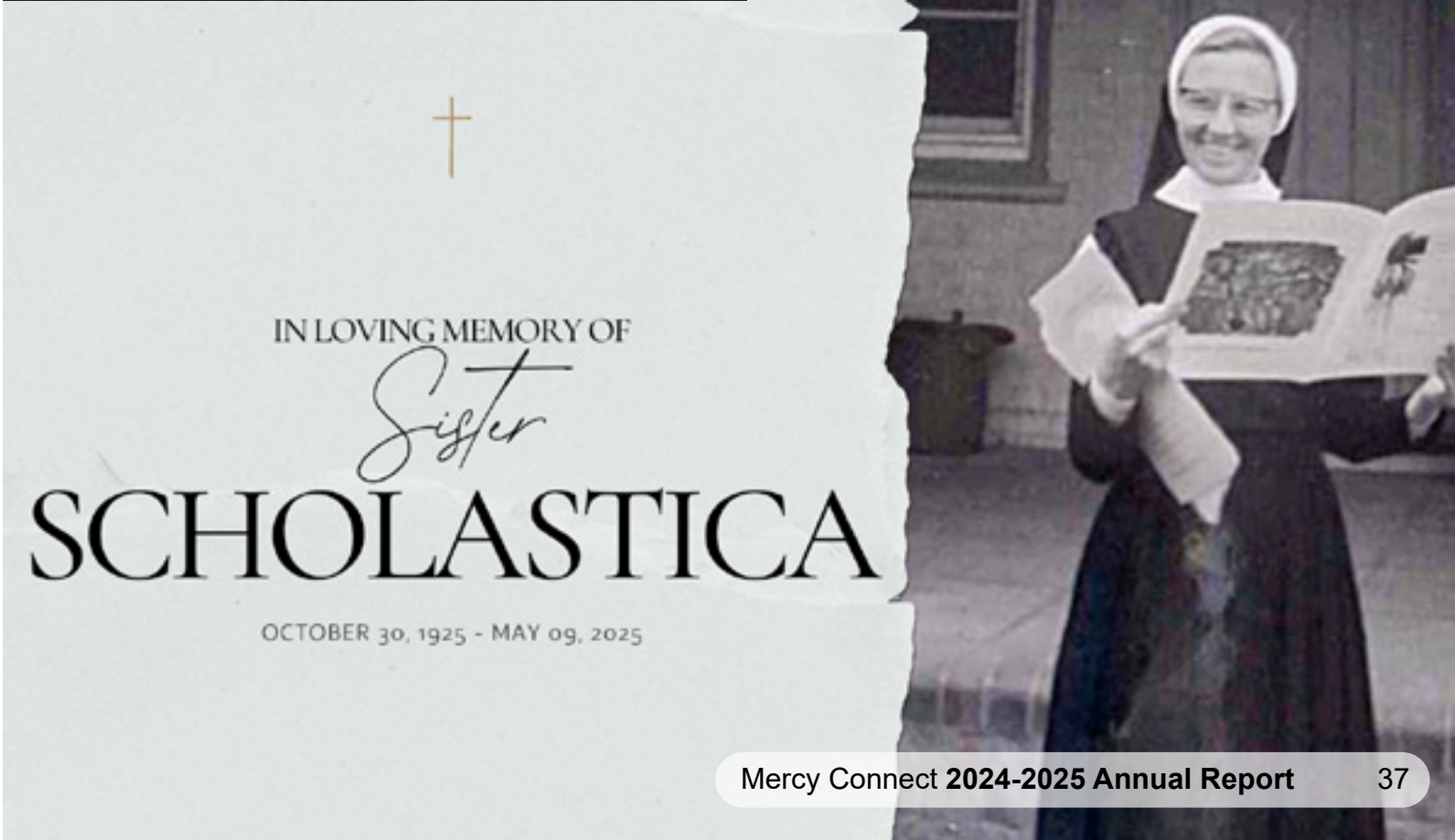
We are proud to share the inspiring story of one of one Year 10 student, a young Yazidi woman who has shown extraordinary determination since arriving in Australia just two years ago from Iraq.

As a refugee, Ghalia Sleman’s journey has not been easy. She and her family have faced incredible challenges, including the struggle to access consistent education and financial hardship as they rebuild their lives. Yet, through all of this, she has remained unwavering in her commitment to learn, grow, and succeed.

Since joining Wagga High School, she has worked tirelessly to improve her English and immerse herself fully in her studies. Her love of mathematics shines through in every lesson, and she has already set her sights on becoming a math teacher in the future, driven by a passion to give back to her community and help others just like her. Her strength, resilience, and quiet leadership have made a deep impression on staff and students alike.

It is with great joy that we awarded Ghalia the 2024 Sister Scholastica Scholarship. This annual scholarship is awarded to a female student who demonstrates not only potential but the courage and perseverance to rise above life’s challenges. It provides financial support to help Ghalia fully engage in her education and reach for the future she envisions.

This scholarship is not just a recognition of her past efforts, it is an investment in her future. We can’t wait to see where her journey leads, and we know she will continue to inspire others with her strength and heart.



Audi Centre Albury's Charity Golf Day

Mercy Connect's Charity Golf Day was a vibrant celebration of sport, generosity, and community spirit, held at the Thurgoona Golf Club. The event brought together players, sponsors, and supporters for a day of friendly competition with a powerful purpose: raising funds for the "Together We Grow" campaign. This initiative supports programs and equipment that enhance the lives of people living with disability, including specialised furniture and upgraded tools for day programs. Every dollar raised contributes to creating more inclusive and empowering environments for those we support.

Throughout the day, participants enjoyed a range of on-course activities designed to engage and entertain. The "Longest Drive" and "Closest to the Pin" competitions added excitement and gave players a chance to showcase their skills. These challenges were made possible by dedicated sponsors who helped elevate the experience for everyone involved. Sponsors of these key competition holes provided signage and prize presentation opportunities, while Bronze sponsors contributed through branded giveaways and acknowledgements during the event wrap-up. Mercy Connect's team ensured every detail, from player gift bags to event signage, was thoughtfully executed, creating a seamless and memorable experience for all attendees.

The day culminated in post-game presentations that celebrated both individual achievements and the collective impact of the event. The atmosphere was one of pride and possibility, as the community came together to support a shared vision of inclusion and growth.

The success of the Charity Golf Day was a testament to the power of collaboration and the generosity of our local community.

Leading the sponsorship lineup was Audi Centre Albury, the event's Gold Sponsor. Their support included naming rights to the day, premium logo placement across all marketing materials, signage at the prominent Hole 18, and complimentary registration for two teams. Audi Centre Albury's presence was felt throughout the event, reinforcing their commitment to community engagement and social impact. Big 4 Albury Tourist Park joined as the Silver Sponsor, contributing to the event's visibility and success. Their sponsorship included logo placement on event materials and social media, signage at a designated hole, and registration for one team. Their support helped ensure the day ran smoothly and was well attended.

As the final putt dropped and the last presentation concluded, Mercy Connect's Charity Golf Day closed with a sense of accomplishment and optimism. The event proved that when a community comes together with purpose, the impact is both immediate and lasting.

Mercy Connect is deeply grateful to all who participated, sponsored, and supported the day, helping us grow stronger together.



Together We Grow Podcast

During Season 2 of Mercy Connect's podcast, Together We Grow has continued to amplify the voices of carers, support workers, and community leaders, offering authentic stories that reflect the heart of our mission.

Across the episodes, our host and frontline support worker Karen Cronin explored topics including foster care, disability support work, and interviewed community organisations making terrific impacts in our region. Each episode provided listeners with honest insights into the challenges and triumphs of those working on the frontline of care, and those receiving it.

A special thank you goes out to our guests from within Mercy Connect, and our wider community of organisations delivering care to vulnerable people.

Karen, from the vital community service Meals on Wheels (MOW), discussed the essential role MOW plays in supporting seniors and vulnerable individuals, not just by delivering nutritious meals, but also fostering meaningful social connection.

Scott Moore, one of our caring front line support workers, spoke about the impact of the Meals on Wheels program, both for the people receiving meals and for the participants delivering them. Scott also shared details about his personal experience growing up with autism, providing a powerful perspective on inclusion and progress.

Leah, a foster carer from Albury shared her journey of creating a safe and healing home for children, while bringing light to issues within the foster system faced by our First Nations children. Her story offered valuable insights into trauma informed care, resilience, and the importance of unconditional support.

In our final episode Karen was joined by Jon, program manager at Boys to the Bush, to discuss how the grassroots organisation supported vulnerable boys across regional NSW and Victoria. Jon shared moving stories of growth, connection, and the role strong male mentors play in shaping resilient, respectful young men.

Amassing over 700 total listens, with over 600 monthly impressions by the final episode, the podcast was steadily growing into a valued platform for advocacy, education, and community. While Together We Grow is now on hiatus, its stories will continue to inspire, and its legacy of compassion and inclusion lives on.

If you would like to listen scan, the QR code below and find all of our 'Together We Grow' Podcast episodes.



Partnerships, Collaborations & Donations

With thanks

- Abbeyfield Australia
- Albury Business Connect
- Albury City Council
- AON
- Audi Centre Albury
- AW Commercial
- Baker Motors
- Balance Accountants and Advisers
- Ben Hooper
- Big 4 Albury Tourist Park
- Border Mail
- Border Trust
- Bowen’s Entertainment
- Bunnings (Albury, NSW)
- Carevan Foundation
- Carter & Co
- Chambers Whyte Design and Print
- Charles Sturt University
- Coles Thurgoona
- Commercial Club Albury
- Crisis Prevention Institute
- Drummond Golf
- EnhanceABILITY Bathurst
- Fitness Passport
- FM Clarity
- FoodShare
- Harwood Andrews
- Hume Bank
- Ideas (Tumut)
- Indigo Woodworks
- Matt Smallwood Consulting
- McGrath Builders
- Monumental Ice Creamery
- Murray Art Museum Albury
- Murray Conservatorium
- Minter Ellison
- Neural Networks Consulting
- Online Education Services
- Peards Nursery Albury
- Pete Brown Landscaping
- Pinchos Catering
- Quest Wodonga
- Regent Cinema
- RehabCo
- Rotary Club of Albury
- Rotary Club of North Albury
- RSM
- Salary Packaging Plus
- Sonder
- Thurgoona Golf Club
- Tim Mehrtens, My Everyday Wellbeing
- Training Services NSW
- Western Sydney University Online
- Whiskk
- Wodonga TAFE
- Xavier College
- X-Ref
- Yackandandah Valley Nursery



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