



Annual Report 2024

"We focus on getting people the support they need, when they need it"

We value each person's unique story, celebrating diversity and fostering connections. Our focus is on providing tailored support for families, youth, seniors, and carers, helping individuals live their best lives and contribute to the community.



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Who We Are

FOCUS Connect is a registered not-for-profit charity dedicated to supporting an inclusive community. We provide essential services and foster connections for individuals, families, older adults and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals and families.





Chairperson's Message

Darren Byrnes

Chairperson of the Board



It's hard to believe how quickly 2024 has passed, and we are once again reflecting on the achievements and challenges FOCUS Connect faced over the past year. Change is constant, and FOCUS Connect continues to evolve its services and programs in response to shifting government priorities in Aged Care and Disability.



This year, significant changes were driven by Federal Government negotiations around Aged Care. While delays have impacted key initiatives, we remain committed to preparing for the shift from block funding to a fee-for-service model. Simultaneously, challenges in the NDIS sector marked by unregistered providers and market fragmentation have intensified competition. These providers have lower compliance costs, but offer fewer services, making it vital for us to stay competitive across the board.

While Aged Care reform is a significant focus, we're also seeing new needs in the community post-pandemic, especially in areas like Domestic Violence. FOCUS is committed to addressing these emerging issues and expanding our community impact.

Operational Efficiency and Technology Integration

This past year, we implemented several initiatives to improve operational efficiency through our cloud-based IT systems. By integrating HR, financial, and client care systems, we've significantly streamlined processes, achieving up to 50% cost reductions in some areas. These improvements are critical as we prepare for a more competitive, fee-for-service landscape.

Strategic Shift: Exiting Disability Services

With better insights from our IT systems, we conducted a detailed analysis of our Disability services. Given the increasing risks, compliance costs, and market challenges, we made the difficult decision to exit this sector. Continuing would have stretched our resources and hindered growth in areas where we can deliver sustainable, impactful services.

Financial Stability & Future Focus

Despite the challenges, FOCUS Connect delivered strong financial results, including a budget surplus that allows us to invest in the future. I commend the entire team for their dedication to our mission. As we move into 2025, our preparations and focus on performance will be crucial in retaining clients and growing our services through innovation.

Gratitude

A heartfelt thank you to our funders—Good Shepherd, the Australian Government, DCJ, DSS, Multicultural NSW, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, NSW Fair Trading, and the Department of Education along with our board members, management, staff and volunteers. Together, we continue to ensure FOCUS Connect remains a vital service to the community.

Darren Byrnes

Chairperson



CEO's Message

Lee-Ann Byrnes

Chief Executive Officer



2024 has been a year of strategic planning, enhanced governance, and greater efficiency through technology.



Aged Care Services

In March 2024, we successfully completed the Aged Care Quality and Safeguarding Audit with no non-conformances, reaffirming our commitment to high standards. We are now preparing for the upcoming reforms under the new Aged Care Act and are excited to be part of the Enable NSW trial, which focuses on assistive technology for aged care.

Community Support

Throughout the year, we continued providing essential services like early education, casework, emergency relief, and no-interest loans. The rise in inflation and interest rates has increased demand, particularly in areas like domestic violence. A grant from Multicultural NSW has allowed us to expand support in this critical area, but the need for additional resources remains high.

Disability Services

Our Disability Services launched new youth programs and expanded life skills classes, while also upgrading our amenities and continuing our popular gardening program.

Looking Ahead

As we close out 2024, I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished. We remain focused on our mission to support those who need us most and look forward to new opportunities to expand our services and strengthen our impact in the community.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our success this year. Together, we'll continue leading with compassion and excellence into 2025.

Lee-Ann Byrnes

Chief Executive Officer



Our Footprint

This year, FOCUS Connect provided support to over 295 aged care clients, 41 disability services clients, and 2,181 participants engaged in various community support programs.



40+
years care and support



127
dedicated staff



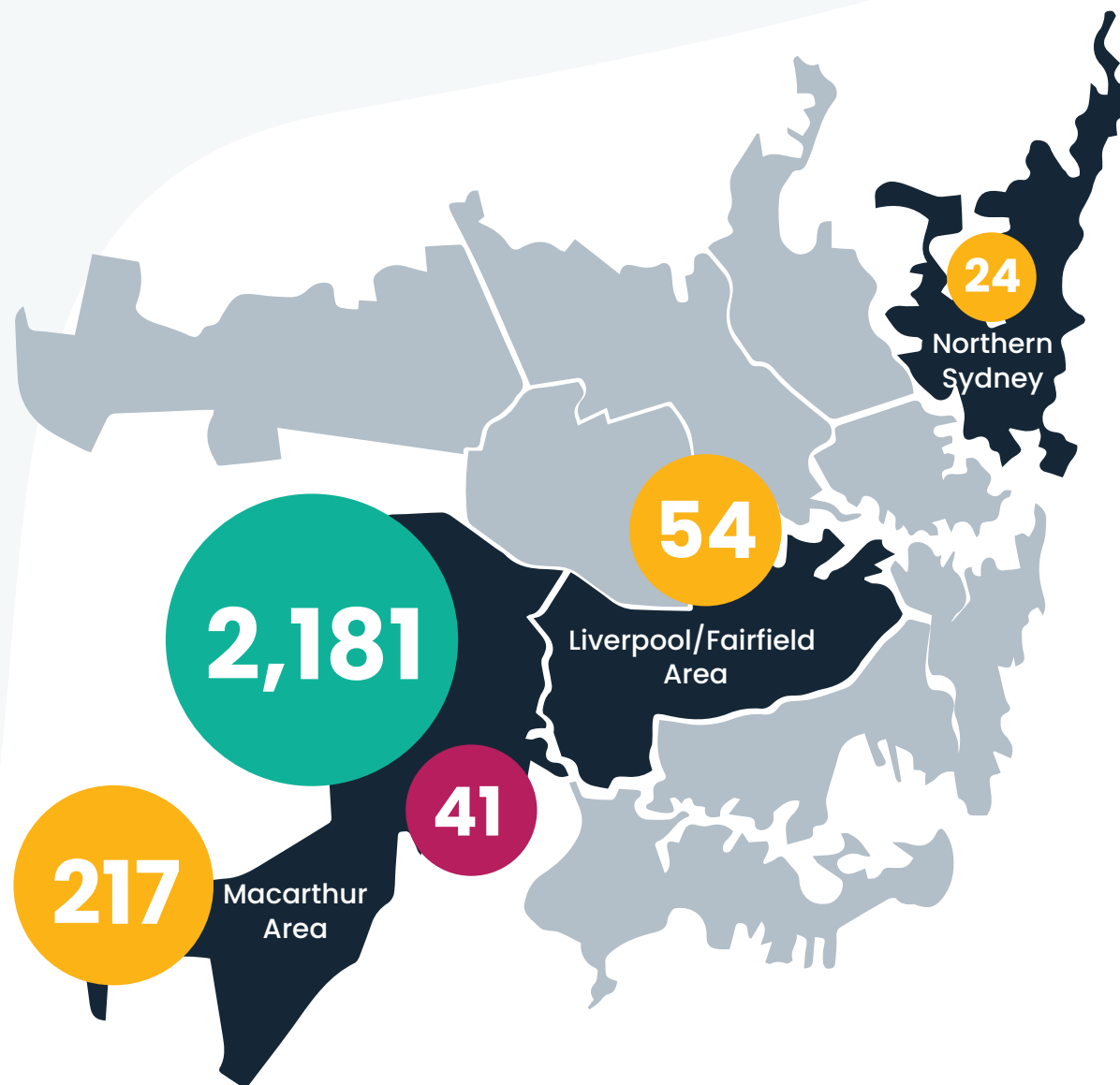
73
frontline workers



3
service locations



11%
increased in net assets



clients received
Aged Care Services



participants engaged in
various Community Support



clients supported through
Disability Support

Key Milestones

Throughout 2024, we made significant strides in improving our infrastructure, supporting our team, and driving efficiency. These efforts have prepared us for future challenges and growth.



Organisational Advancements

SEO and Marketing Enhancements

Our updated SEO strategies have boosted online visibility, driving greater engagement and awareness across our services.

Fleet Branding

We reskinned our buses with eye-catching new designs, increasing our community presence.

New Uniforms

Our office and frontline staff now wear newly designed uniforms, reinforcing our brand identity.

New Balcony Cover

A balcony cover was installed for staff comfort and protection during breaks.

New Fleet Vehicle

We added a Hyundai Staria to our fleet, improving transport capabilities.



Operational Growth and Governance

Strategic Plan Review

We completed a comprehensive review of our strategic plan, ensuring we remain aligned with our long-term goals.

New Quality, Risk, and Compliance Officer

Our newly appointed officer enhances our focus on governance, risk, and compliance.

HR Team Expansion

We expanded our HR team to two full-time employees, allowing for better support of our growing organisation.



Technological and Security Improvements

New Mobile-Friendly Website

We launched a mobile-responsive website to improve accessibility and user experience.

HRIS System Implementation

A new Human Resource Information System (HRIS) was implemented, streamlining HR processes.

Cybersecurity Enhancement

We advanced our cybersecurity measures, preparing for ISO 27001:2022 recertification.



Compliance and Accreditation Successes

Aged Care Quality Audit

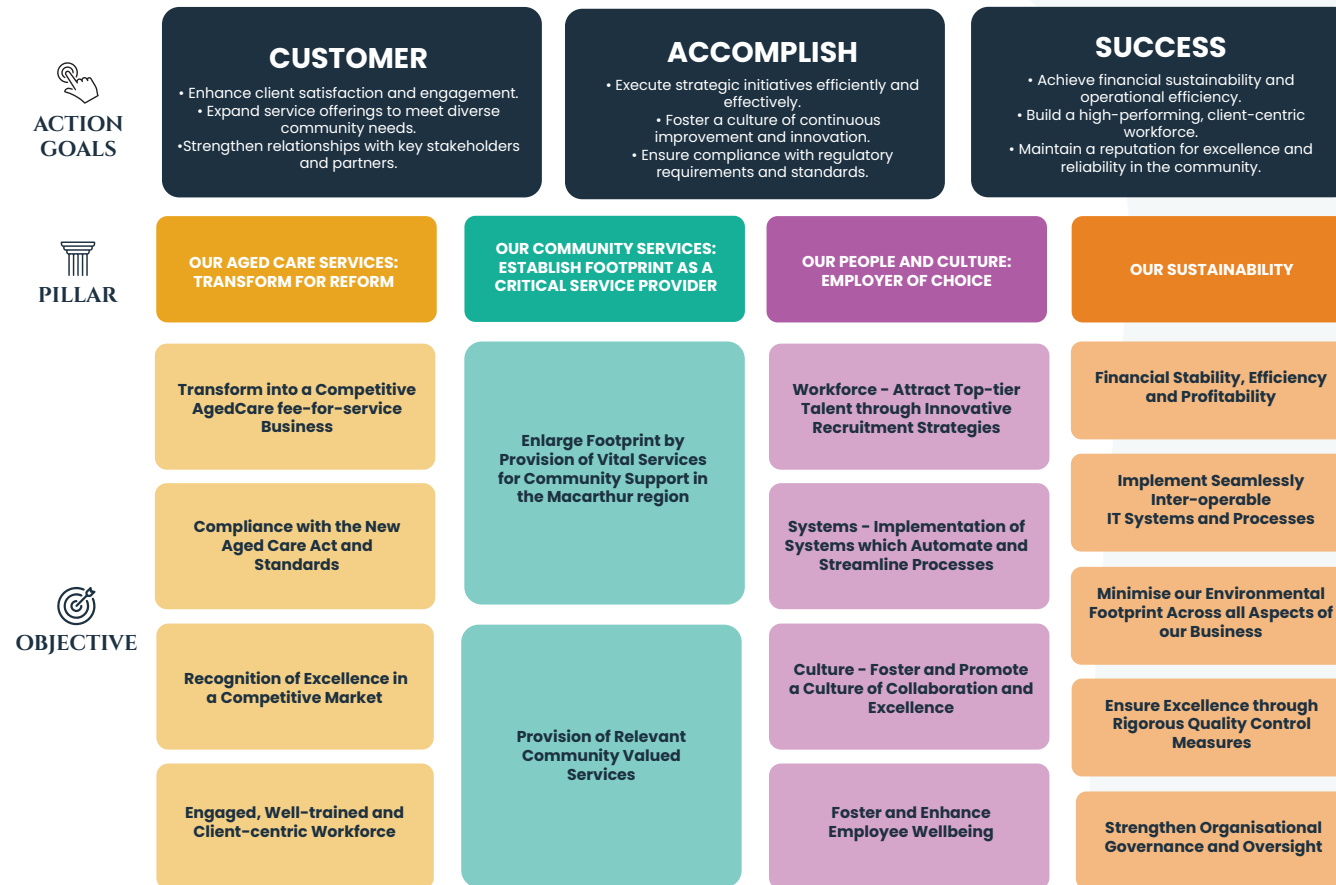
In March 2024, we achieved full compliance with the Aged Care Quality and Safeguarding Commission, with no non-conformances.

ISO 27001 Certification

We are on track for our ISO 27001 audit in October 2024, demonstrating our commitment to high standards of data protection and security.

Our Strategic Direction

As part of our FY2025 budget preparation and the review of our 5-year strategic plan, we recognised the need to reassess our current services. Our focus is to strengthen our business by leveraging our core strengths and addressing challenges in areas that require adjustment.



This strategic plan outlines the key objectives and initiatives that will guide FOCUS Connect over the next 3 to 5 years, ensuring we continue to provide high-quality, relevant, and accessible services to our community.

Community Services

We are dedicated to strengthening our position as a leading service provider in the Macarthur region by offering essential, high-quality community services. Our goal is to remain a centre of excellence, continually meeting the evolving needs of the community through impactful and relevant programs.

Aged Care

With upcoming reforms in the Aged Care sector, including the "Support at Home Program" in 2025 and CHSP integration by 2027, the sector is set for significant change. We are focused on expanding both our client base and service offerings to align with these reforms, positioning FOCUS Connect as a competitive, fee-for-service provider.

Disability Services

After a strategic review, we concluded that remaining in the NDIS sector is no longer sustainable due to the highly competitive landscape, financial risks, and compliance challenges. With over 12,000 registered providers and a growing number of unregistered competitors with lower overheads, the return on investment is insufficient. As a result, we have made the difficult decision to exit the Disability Services sector in 2024, allowing us to focus on areas with greater potential for growth and stability.

Looking Ahead

Our focus will shift to expanding Aged Care services and increasing support for community programs that benefit families, children, and youth. This strategic adjustment will allow FOCUS Connect to grow our client base, enhance staff capacity, and deliver greater value to the communities we serve.

Meet the Board

FOCUS Connect's Board of Directors is made up of committed volunteers from the community who provide essential oversight and strategic leadership. Drawing from diverse backgrounds, each board member brings valuable skills and experience to their role, helping to guide the organisation's mission.



Alexander Foster

Director

Executive Master of Business Administration, UTS; Bachelor of Information Technology; Graduate of Australian Institute of Company Directors

With over 20 years of leadership experience, Alex specialises in corporate strategy and retail operations. Known for driving positive change, he consistently delivers sustainable outcomes through collaboration. Having grown up in Southwest Sydney, Alex is eager to continue giving back to the community.



Caroline MacPhail

Company Secretary

Bachelor of Science (BSc) Hons, Business Administration and Ergonomics; Graduate of Australian Institute of Company Directors

Caroline brings over 20 years of leadership and board experience, with a strong background in general management. She excels in strategic development, financial management, and fostering team culture. Caroline is deeply committed to promoting diversity, inclusion, and community engagement.



Darren Byrnes

Chairperson

Master of Business and Technology Management, UNSW

Darren has been a Director at FOCUS Connect since 2019 and is the proprietor and Director of an IT software company. With a robust background as an IT Executive, he brings extensive local and global experience across various sectors, from SMEs to Fortune 500 corporations. His expertise spans operations, sales, R&D, project management, marketing, and people management. Darren is passionate about improving the lives and opportunities of vulnerable community members in Campbelltown and Greater South-West Sydney.



Naina Patel

Treasurer

Bachelor of Science (BSc) Hons, Economics and Management, International Certificate in Risk Management

As a Strategy and Risk Advisor for an Australian financial regulatory agency, Naina has over 16 years of experience in governance, risk management, and prudential regulation within the finance sector. Her board experience in the education sector adds depth to her role. Naina is dedicated to community service and brings her expertise to enrich FOCUS Connect.



Kathy Hubble

Clinician

Bachelor of Science (Nursing); Master of Pain Medicine (MPainMed)

With over 30 years of nursing experience, Kathy has worked across gynaecological oncology, high dependency surgical units, emergency rooms, and anaesthetics. Her passion for pain management has driven her to focus on this specialty for the past 20 years. Kathy is also the CEO and Founder of Amelia Health, an online chronic pain management program with operations in the USA and the UK.

Executive Leadership Team

The FOCUS Connect executive team has guided the organisation through a period of significant reform, ensuring the delivery of essential services while fostering innovation and adaptability.



Lee-Ann Byrnes **CEO**

With over 30 years of experience across various industries, Lee-Ann Byrnes is the CEO of FOCUS Connect, overseeing financial control, administration, asset management, human resources, and IT. Her leadership ensures the effective delivery of vital services in the Community, Aged Care, and NDIS Disability sectors. Lee-Ann's extensive career includes roles such as Financial Controller and Company Secretary, where she drove growth and stability across multiple sectors. A fellow member of the Institute of Public Accountants (FIPA FFA), she is committed to advancing FOCUS Connect's mission.



Tanya Fung **Finance Manager**

Tanya joined FOCUS Connect in 2020, bringing over 10 years of experience in not-for-profit, family office, and taxation sectors. A Chartered Accountant since 2017, Tanya holds a Bachelor of Business and Commerce from Western Sydney University, majoring in Accounting. She is dedicated to making a positive impact on the community through her passion for financial analysis and organisational improvement.



Tajudeen Fawehinmi **Quality Officer**

Tajudeen (TJ) is an accomplished Quality, Risk, and Compliance Manager with a background in healthcare and community services. He brings a deep understanding of regulatory requirements and a proven ability to implement quality management systems. TJ is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of care, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.



Ashish Dahiwalkar **HR Manager**

With more than 20 years of HR leadership across sectors like FMCG, technology, manufacturing, and not-for-profits, Ashish specialises in strategic HR, employee relations, and change management. At FOCUS Connect, he is committed to fostering a workplace where employees thrive, recognising the pivotal role of people initiatives in driving success.



Antonietta Bugge **Aged Care Manager**

Antonietta has extensive experience in both the disability and aged care sectors. She uses a person-centred approach to provide care management and individual support, helping individuals achieve their goals. Her inclusive leadership style encourages teamwork and creates opportunities for success, particularly in the areas of care management for children, youth, and adults.



Ashish Dahiwalkar

HR Manager



At FOCUS Connect, our employees are our greatest asset. Their dedication, passion, and commitment not only elevate the quality of service we provide but also shape the positive culture within our organisation.



Our People and Culture

This year, we focused on enhancing HR systems and processes, successfully implementing a new HR platform and streamlining procedures to ensure a smoother, more efficient experience for our staff.

A key challenge we faced was finding the right talent to meet our growing needs. Through an innovative recruitment strategy, we successfully filled all vacant positions, creating a strong foundation for FOCUS Connect's future growth.

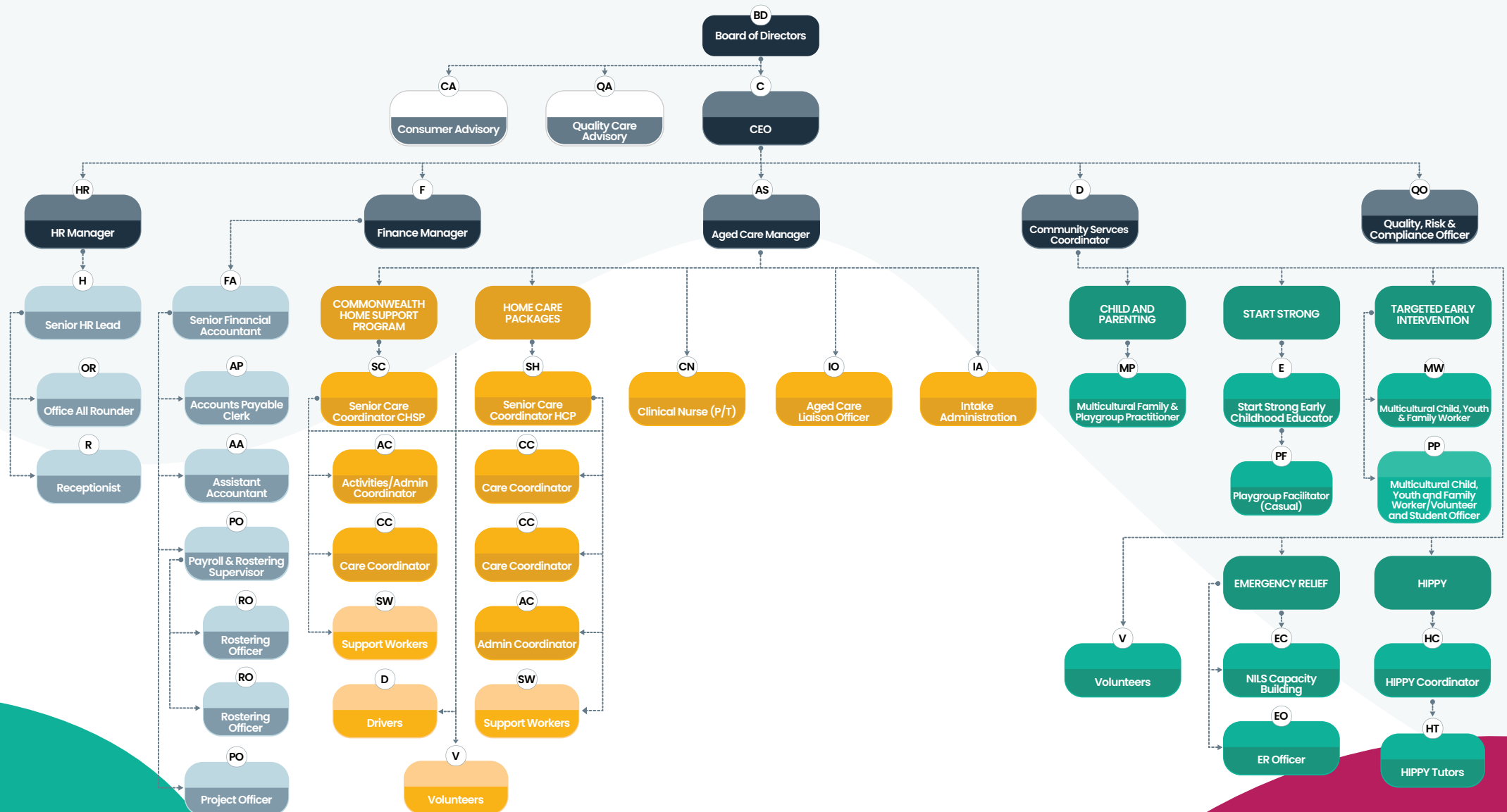
Our approach is centred on fostering a dynamic, empowered workforce. With the addition of experienced HR professionals, we are now better positioned to support the strategic changes ahead. Moving forward, we will continue prioritising the well-being of our employees, promoting a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

FOCUS Connect remains committed to investing in talent acquisition, development, and retention, ensuring that our principles of excellence and equal opportunity guide our efforts.

Ashish Dahiwalkar

HR Manager

Organisational Chart



FOCUS Connect 2024 Events



Support Worker Appreciation Day

In August we honoured our incredible support staff, celebrating their hard work and dedication.

NAIDOC Week Celebration 2024

The event featured a flag-raising ceremony, a street march, and a Community Connections Day. FOCUS Connect hosted a popular reptile show, drawing 500 attendees from the community.



Harmony Week Celebrations

In March, we celebrated Harmony Week by recognising and honouring our diverse community, bringing together Australians from all backgrounds in a shared celebration of inclusivity.

National Pyjama Day

FOCUS Connect participated in National Pyjama Day, an annual event in July that raises awareness and funds for children in foster care across Australia.



Tanya Fung
Finance Manager



FOCUS Connect is proud to report stable financial performance for the 2024 financial year, driven by disciplined management and strategic decision making.



Financial Summary

FOCUS Connect is proud to report stable financial performance for the 2024 financial year, driven by disciplined management and strategic decision making. Despite challenges in specific service areas, we maintained a strong financial position, enabling us to navigate the changing landscape with confidence. Looking ahead to 2025, our solid cash reserves and proactive risk management put us in a strong position to seize new opportunities.

For the 2023–24 financial year, FOCUS Connect recorded a surplus of \$589,882, a slight 5% decrease from the previous year's \$618,363. Key factors that contributed to this result include:

- **New Grant Secured:** We successfully obtained a 12-month grant for Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Multicultural Services, providing vital additional funding.
- **Fleet Expansion:** To meet the growing demand for transportation services, two new motor vehicles were added to our fleet.
- **Asset Utilisation:** Our full use of the Dumaresq Street properties facilitated the effective operation of Aged Care groups, Disability groups, and Community Playgroups.
- **Exit from Disability Support Coordination:** A strategic decision was made to exit Disability Support Coordination due to underperformance.
- **Optimisation of Cash Reserves:** Higher interest rates enabled us to maximise the returns on our cash reserves, strengthening our financial position.
- **Increased Marketing Investment:** We significantly increased our marketing and promotional expenditure to boost brand awareness and engagement.

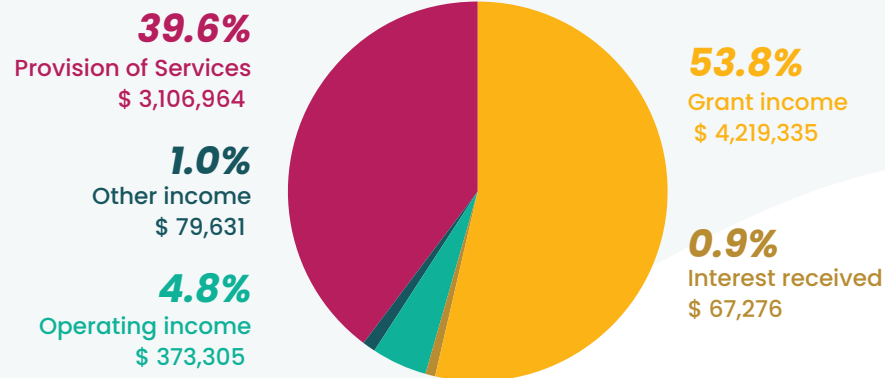
Tanya Fung
Finance Manager

Financial Review

Income

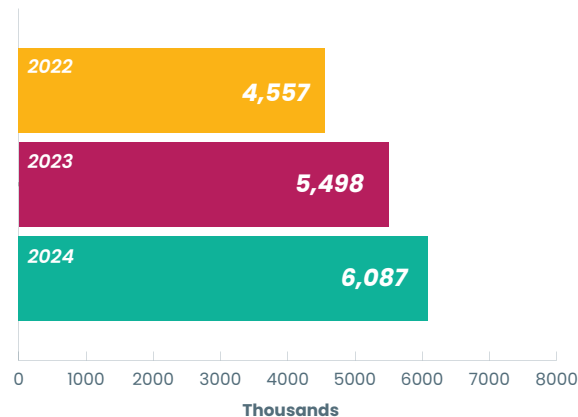
Despite the discontinuation of Support Coordination, revenue remained consistent with the prior year. Notable contributions to revenue included:

- **Home Care Packages:** A 10% revenue increase from rising demand for aged care services.
- **Multicultural Services Grant:** A temporary income boost from the grant for Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence services.



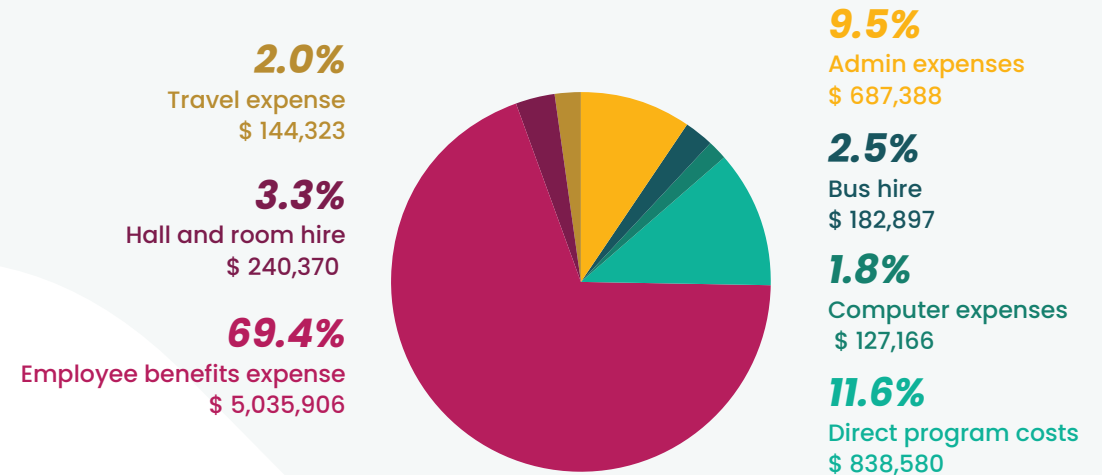
Net Assets

Net assets increased by 11%, reinforcing our financial strength. In addition, 99% of outstanding loans have been repaid, significantly reducing liabilities.



Expenditure

The workforce remains our largest area of expenditure, accounting for 69% of total costs. However, workforce shortages and effective cost management limited the total expenditure increase to just 1%, despite inflationary pressures.



In Summary

The 2023–24 financial year reflects FOCUS Connect's commitment to financial stability and responsible management. By exiting underperforming services and optimising cash reserves, we maintained steady revenue while investing in key areas like marketing. Our strong financial health positions us for continued growth and strategic reform to meet the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

Aged Care Services 2024

FOCUS Connect remains dedicated to promoting senior independence through the Commonwealth Home Support Program and Home Care Packages Program. In 2024, we prioritised the well-being of seniors across Campbelltown, Macarthur, South West Sydney, and the Northern suburbs of Sydney. Our services fostered community connections through transport, offered social support through multicultural groups and educational sessions, plus provided personalised one-on-one assistance.





Antonietta Bugge
Aged Care Manager



Our Aged Care team has seen significant growth and implemented key operational changes, resulting in exceptional care for our consumers.



Supporting Our Older Australians

As an approved My Aged Care Provider, FOCUS Connect is committed to helping individuals in the Commonwealth Home Support Program and Home Care Packages live independently at home while staying connected and safe within their communities. In 2024, we provided Aged Care services to 217 clients in the Macarthur area, 54 clients in the Liverpool/Fairfield area, and 24 clients in the Northern Suburbs of Sydney. Looking ahead, we plan to expand our Aged Care services further, increasing our support to older Australians.

Focus on Quality Care

The team passed the Aged Care Quality Audit with no nonconformities—an outstanding achievement. We also launched two new advisory bodies: the Consumer Advisory Body and the Quality Care Advisory Body, ensuring compliance and delivering consumer-directed care in line with the Aged Care Quality Standards. Continued collaboration with external stakeholders, including our Clinical Care Partner, Better Care Delivered, remains a priority. As a longstanding member of the Aged and Community Care Providers Association (ACCPA), FOCUS Connect continues to lead home care services in the Macarthur region, actively engaging the community through expos and networking events.

Focus on the Consumer

This year, we hosted a series of special events for our seniors, including a live bird show during Seniors Week, a Mother's Day High Tea, and several Consumer Forums. We also celebrated our consumers at the Aged Care Christmas Party and made service improvements based on feedback from our Consumer Advisory Body.



Seniors Week with Feathered Friends

Feathered Friends hosted a special free-flight bird show for Seniors Week, immersing guests in a memorable and unique experience.



Aged Care Consumer Christmas Party

Our seniors enjoyed a festive day filled with Christmas spirit.



Community Outreach Aged Care Consumer Forum

The forum provided FOCUS Connect with the opportunity to engage with seniors, discuss upcoming changes in aged care, and listen to their valuable experiences and insights.

Focus on Staff

We have continued to recruit bilingual Aged Care Support Workers, providing them with essential training. Our workers consistently embody FOCUS Connect's values, building strong relationships with consumers and delivering high-quality care.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the entire Aged Care team for their dedication and positive attitude. Each member plays a vital role in our operations and has a meaningful impact on the lives of those we support.

Antoniella Bugge
Aged Care Manager



Staff Spotlight

We proudly celebrated Nanhwa Chong's 10-year work anniversary. An integral member of the Aged Care Team, Nanhwa has vast expertise in the CHSP program and continues to grow in leadership, Home Care Packages, and industry reforms.

Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP)

The Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) offers Government-subsidised basic home support for Australians over 65 (or 50 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) who wish to remain at home with additional help. This includes household tasks, personal care, respite, transport, and social connections.



Transport

Provides older individuals with access to transport services, ensuring they remain connected to their community.



Personal Care

Offers support with daily activities to help older people maintain proper hygiene and grooming.



Flexible Respite

Supports carers by offering high-quality respite for seniors, allowing carers to take breaks and maintain healthy care relationships.



Social Support Individual

Assists seniors in staying socially connected by providing one-on-one companionship and opportunities for social engagement.



Social Support Group

Helps older individuals participate in community life and feel socially included through structured, group-based activities that promote independent living and social interaction.



Domestic Assistance

Provides help with household chores, enabling elderly individuals to manage daily tasks in a safe, secure, and healthy home environment.



A Lifetime of Service and Connection with Focus Connect

Harold Leslie Burton, known as Sonny, has been a valued member of our community for decades. His journey with Focus Connect began as a volunteer in the early 1990s and continued until 2015. During those years, Sonny's contributions were immeasurable, earning him a nomination for the prestigious 'Order of Macarthur' and the honour of meeting two prime ministers, including John Howard. His passion for service was evident not only in his involvement but also in his carefully curated collection of memorabilia—photos, certificates of appreciation, badges, ID tags, and volunteer t-shirts—that stand as reminders of his enduring commitment to the Social Support Group, particularly the Multicultural Group.

Even after stepping down as a volunteer due to health issues, Sonny's determination and love for the community never waned. He became a client of Focus Connect's Aged Care services, where he continues to participate in the Social Support Group that once benefited from his service. Recently, during a review visit to Sonny's home, his care coordinator was moved by the pride he takes in his collection of Focus Connect newsletters, brochures, certificates, and his cherished volunteer shirts, all prominently displayed as a testament to his years of dedication.

Now facing health challenges, Sonny's attendance at the Social Support Group has become less frequent due to medical appointments. However, the group remains an essential part of his life. For nearly 40 years, the Multicultural Social Support Group has been his anchor, providing him with a sense of purpose and connection. Despite the physical limitations imposed by his illness, Sonny continues to travel from Bargo to Campbelltown, whenever possible, to attend the sessions that mean so much to him.

The Focus Connect Social Support Group has had a profound impact on Sonny's life, offering him both emotional and physical benefits. The structured group sessions are designed to promote socialisation and connection among the elderly, which is vital for those like Sonny who face the challenges of ageing and are in vulnerable situations. For him, these attending social support group sessions are more than just an opportunity to socialise, they are a lifeline. The group provides a space where Sonny feels supported, appreciated, and connected to a community that understands his journey.



Reflecting on his past volunteer work, Sonny acknowledges how deeply it shaped his current outlook on life. The sense of purpose and camaraderie he felt as a volunteer has carried over into his role as a client, where the same values of service and connection continue to uplift him. The friendships he built, the diversity he embraced, and the support he both gave and received through Focus Connect have helped him navigate the difficulties of his health journey with grace and resilience.

Sonny's story is a powerful reminder of the transformative impact that Focus Connect's Aged Care services and Social Support Groups can have. For Sonny, the group is not just a social outlet t's a crucial part of his well-being, helping him stay mentally sharp and emotionally strong. His commitment to attending, despite the challenges he faces, speaks to the vital role the Social Support Group plays in his life.

Through Focus Connect, Sonny has found a community that continues to support him, just as he once supported it. His journey from volunteer to client is a testament to the enduring value of connection, service, and the power of community care.



Multicultural Social Support Groups

Our Social Support Groups are designed to offer culturally rich and appropriate support for our CALD community. Meeting weekly for social interaction and organising monthly outings, each Multicultural Social Support Group also celebrates its own cultural events. At FOCUS Connect, we value the diversity of these cultures, embracing them with respect, open-mindedness, and a shared commitment to fostering unity and education. We take pride in celebrating the unique cultural traditions of each group, recognising and honouring these differences.



Sonny (right) during the Multicultural Group's soap-making session

Home Care Package Program (HCP)

The Australian Government's Home Care Package (HCP) Program supports senior Australians aged 65 and above (or 50 and above for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals) with complex care needs to maintain their independence at home. The program uses a consumer-directed care approach, ensuring support is tailored to each person's unique needs and goals. Coordinated care packages are provided based on assessed care needs within the individual's budget and the program's scope.

The HCP program offers four levels of care for those requiring more complex support. Each client receives an annual budget, managed by a Home Care Package Provider, who organises, administers, and coordinates all necessary services.



Wellbeing and Independence

Including personal care, nursing services, allied health.



Safety at Home

Covers cleaning, home maintenance and modifications, assistive technology.



Community connections

Includes transport and social support services

As a not-for-profit organisation, FOCUS Connect prioritises people over profit with a person-centred approach, managing and coordinating services on seniors behalf to ensure they receive the best possible care.



Community Services and Programs 2024

For over 40 years, FOCUS Connect has been dedicated to enhancing the well-being of vulnerable children, youth, and families through prevention, early intervention, casework, and parenting programs. Our efforts focus on supporting multicultural (CALD) communities across Macarthur and South West Sydney, driving positive outcomes and fostering resilience. In 2024, 2,181 participants engaged in various community support programs and services through FOCUS Connect.





Kristin Russell
Care Services Manager



"2024 has been an exceptional year, our unwavering commitment to exceptional care and support has led to significant achievements, empowering individuals and enriching our community."



Empowering Lives Through Community Support

For over 40 years, FOCUS Connect has been dedicated to uplifting and empowering the disadvantaged in our community. We focus on creating meaningful connections, fostering engagement, and supporting individuals to live fulfilling lives while contributing to the broader community.

Expanding Support Services

This year, we introduced new programs to address mental health, social inclusion, independent living, domestic violence, holiday activities, school readiness, and parenting skills. These initiatives were warmly received, delivering positive results and reaffirming our commitment to meeting community needs.

Community Engagement & Success

Through partnerships and local events, we strengthened ties and provided valuable resources to the community. Numerous clients achieved personal milestones, from gaining independence to securing employment. These successes highlight the resilience of our clients and the dedication of our team.

A heartfelt thank you to our staff, volunteers, donors, and partners for your support in helping us expand our services and create a more inclusive society.

Kristin Russell
Care Services Manager

Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI)

The TEI has proven to be an essential service for families in the community, providing both children and parents with the tools they need for positive development. The collaboration with partners further enhances the breadth of resources and activities offered, ensuring the program's continued success and impact.

Case Management and Support Services

Our case management program provides comprehensive, trauma-informed support to families, free of charge and accessible to all. With a focus on personal goal setting and long-term improvements, cases are typically managed for 3-6 months. Core services include personalised case plans, assistance in achieving goals, referrals to local services, parenting education, advocacy, and information on topics like child development, healthy relationships, and child safety. We also offer home visits as part of our holistic support.

Multicultural Supported Playgroup

Our free, community-based supported playgroups provide a nurturing space for parents, carers, and children, focusing on early childhood development. Held weekly at various community venues for two hours, these playgroups support children aged 0-5 through structured playgroups designed to meet their social, emotional, and developmental needs. Activities such as arts and crafts, sensory play, gross motor skills, music, and storytelling foster learning, build confidence, and promote positive social interactions.



Children are learning to identify colours with a colour sorting activity.



Children participating in gross motor activities.

Throughout the program, children have shown significant developmental progress. They have begun identifying colours, counting, and exploring early literacy. Separation anxiety has decreased, as children grow more comfortable engaging with their peers. Improvements in physical skills like jumping and throwing further highlight the effectiveness of the program. This success is a testament to both the thoughtfully planned activities and the active participation of parents.

These playgroups provide parents with educational sessions on child health and feature guest speakers who cover essential topics such as oral health, nutrition, and mental well-being. They foster social interaction and offer valuable resources on parenting, childhood milestones, and local services, helping families improve their overall health and social outcomes.

Transformation

One of our clients, a mother from Ghana, faced significant challenges as a new parent in Australia. Without local family support, she struggled with financial hardship and social isolation, lacking essential items for her baby such as a cot, pram, and car seat. Through our program, she was referred to the Focus Connect Emergency Relief program, which provided the necessary financial assistance to secure these items.

This support transformed her daily life. The new pram and car seat allowed her to take her baby for walks, improving their physical well-being and enabling social interaction. Attending our supported playgroups introduced her to the community, helping her make new friends and easing feelings of isolation. Daily activities, such as shopping and attending doctor's appointments, became more manageable. As a result, the mother has successfully integrated into her community, building a network of support and improving her quality of life.

Parenting Program: The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)

The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) is a free resource for families with children aged 0-11 in the Macarthur region. Offering practical strategies to address everyday challenges, this evidence-based program helps parents build strong, loving relationships with their children. We offer the program in group settings at local schools and through one-on-one sessions. In addition, we provide Tune Into Kids, Tune Into Teens, and Tune Into Dads programs at no cost, enhancing support for families at every stage.

The success of our services is bolstered by partnerships with various organisations, including LAH Claymore, Campbelltown City Council, Camden Council, Western Sydney University, St Vincent de Paul, and Uniting. These collaborations enhance the resources and activities we offer, ensuring that families receive the best possible support.

Through the Targeted Earlier Intervention program, we have provided essential resources, education, and support to families, empowering them to build stronger, healthier communities. The success of our programs is reflected in the positive outcomes achieved, and we remain committed to expanding our services and fostering connections within the community.



Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY) is a free, home-based early learning initiative designed to support early childhood education. By empowering parents to actively engage in their children's development, HIPPY benefits families and the community. Targeting preschool-aged children, the program aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum.

Aleef's HIPPY Experience

Aleef found that HIPPY helped her establish a daily routine filled with reading, crafts, and activities that built her daughter's confidence. After participating in group sessions, her daughter began singing in front of peers, showcasing her newfound self-assurance. HIPPY also improved her daughter's literacy and numeracy skills through engaging activities. Aleef noted, "HIPPY not only helped my daughter but transformed my understanding of child development. I've gained confidence in teaching her, improved my social skills, and even enrolled in an online early childhood education course."

Families participate in daily play-based educational activities lasting 10 to 15 minutes, allowing parents to become their child's first teacher and ensuring a smooth transition to school. HIPPY also fosters community connections by helping parents expand their networks and access local resources. As a HIPPY parent, you connect with other families in group settings to share experiences and celebrate achievements, supported by a Coordinator and a team of Tutors.



HIPPY Program

Children develop a lifelong love of learning through their early experiences. As they participate in the HIPPY Curriculum, they acquire new knowledge and skills while families are engaged and empowered in their children's educational journey.

Nimat's Journey of Learning

Nimat attended her first HIPPY gathering and observed her child actively engaging in activities like fruit cutting. This experience sparked a conversation between them about how to make lemonade using child-safe tools, which reinforced skills learned during the gathering. She appreciated that HIPPY provided quality time with her child and inspired her to reduce screen time, making learning enjoyable and accessible.

Parent Testimonial

"We have learned so much from our HIPPY tutor over the past seven months. As a parent of four, I've discovered new ways to support my preschooler's development. HIPPY covers all the areas a child should grow in, filling gaps that many parents face. It has built my confidence in parenting, benefiting both my younger and older children. Emma, my daughter, is now more engaged and has developed skills I hadn't noticed before. Thanks to HIPPY, I feel empowered and supported."

The HIPPY program is making a significant impact on families in the Campbelltown LGA. FOCUS Connect sincerely thanks our partner organisation, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), for their support. By empowering parents to actively engage in their children's education, fostering community involvement, and providing pathways to employment through the Tutor program, HIPPY enhances early childhood development and strengthens the social fabric of our community.



Start Strong Pathways Program

The Start Strong Pathways program is an innovative initiative designed to support children aged 0–3 years in the Macarthur area. Focused on fostering early educational engagement, the program utilises a variety of play-based activities to create a nurturing environment. Each child's unique goals, strengths, and developmental progress are prioritised, ensuring that they receive the necessary support to thrive during these formative years.

Funded by the NSW Department of Education, Start Strong Pathways aims to:

Building Connections and Confidence

Playgroup has been incredibly beneficial for both Lily and me. It provides a wonderful opportunity for her to socialise, and interact with other children, helping her develop vital social skills like sharing, cooperation, and empathy. I love watching her explore new activities and gain confidence in her abilities. For me, playgroups are a great way to connect with other parents, share experiences, and build a supportive community. It gives us both a chance to learn from each other, engage in fun activities, and create lasting memories together. **–Sally**

- Advance early childhood development.
- Educate families on the importance of early education.
- Prepare children for preschool by developing essential learning skills.

In addition to child development, Start Strong Pathways fosters positive parent-child relationships through engaging activities that encourage meaningful interactions. The program also provides a platform for parents to connect, share experiences, and discuss common challenges, helping to diminish social isolation and build a sense of community.

Overall, Start Strong Pathways enhances family engagement in their children's development while equipping them with effective strategies for active participation in their learning journey.



Start Strong

By integrating educational activities with community support, the program plays a crucial role in promoting both individual and collective early childhood development.

Success Story

One of the program's significant achievements in 2024 was the Families Week Event held on May 14, which welcomed over 60 playgroup families and featured participation from more than 10 local services, including Centrelink, Campbelltown Council, and Uniting. This event provided families with a unique opportunity to engage with local services, helping them navigate support systems and access important resources.

Children participated in enjoyable and educational activities that promote healthy eating and physical activity, allowing families to connect, build relationships, and enjoy enriching experiences. This event reflected the program's commitment to supporting children's development and family engagement.

Throughout the year, Start Strong Pathways strengthened its partnership with Campbelltown Council Libraries, providing families with access to a wide range of community services. Families actively participated in several events at both Campbelltown and Ingleburn Libraries, fostering a love for learning and encouraging family involvement in community activities, furthering the program's mission to integrate education and community support.

The Start Strong Pathways program has made a positive and lasting impact on the children and families of Campbelltown and Minto. By offering personalised, play-based learning experiences, the program equips children with the tools they need for a successful transition to preschool while providing parents with the resources and support to actively engage in their children's educational journeys.



Child and Parenting

Funded by the Department of Social Services, the Child & Parenting Program is dedicated to assisting CALD families in the Macarthur area with children aged 0-17 who are seeking support or have been identified as at-risk. Funded by the Department of Social Services, the program is delivered through two key components: supported playgroups and case management.

Through these activities, parents can strengthen their relationships with their children while gaining valuable insights into childhood health, safety, development, parenting education, and access to additional family support services. The playgroups facilitate both informal and formal social networking opportunities, helping to reduce social isolation among parents.

Parents can also attend informative sessions presented by local organisations such as Smith Family, Uniting, and Macarthur OT. These sessions serve as gateways to local support services, providing essential health and support information. Our Yasmin Playgroup is located in Campbelltown, while the Koala Playgroup is based in Minto. Last financial year, the program served over 30 families and conducted 38 supported playgroup sessions across four school terms.

Testimonial

"My experience with Focus Connect has always been great. I'm currently receiving guidance and support in my job search with Nafiza. My son attended playgroups until the end of last year, and he started kindergarten early this year. He gradually came out of his shell, thanks to the educational games, kid interactions, outdoor activities, and the lovely environment created by Reem and Kasak. Overall, Focus Connect has been a significant part of our lives, helping me meet wonderful new friends and become more involved in the beautiful Campbelltown community."



Healthy Lunches

A significant accomplishment of the program was the successful launch of the Healthy Lunch Boxes project during Family Week. Families from diverse cultural backgrounds came together to prepare nutritious lunch boxes for their children, helping them get ready for school.

We gratefully acknowledge the Department of Social Services for their funding and express our heartfelt appreciation to our valued partner organisations for their additional support in delivering the program this year.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| • Human Services | • Macarthur OT |
| • Services NSW | • Legal Aid |
| • MRC | • Kids College |
| • EACH | • Uniting |
| • Smith Family | • B4 Big School |
| • GrowFit | • TAFE |
| • Campbelltown Council | • PHN |
| • Camden Council | • Fire & Rescue NSW |
| • Campbelltown Library | • Macarthur Women's Domestic Violence Service |

The Child & Parenting Program continues to make a significant impact on families in Macarthur, especially those from CALD backgrounds. By offering playgroups and case management, the program empowers parents to actively participate in their children's development while reducing social isolation and connecting families to essential services.

Emergency Relief (ER)

FOCUS Connect's Emergency Relief (ER) programs provide immediate support to individuals and families facing financial crises in Macarthur, Liverpool and the Illawarra.

Programs and Services Overview

Financial or Material Aid

- Monetary Assistance: Direct financial help for urgent expenses.
- Utility Bills: Support for electricity, water, or gas bills.
- Medications: Financial assistance for necessary medications.
- Vouchers: Vouchers for travel, petrol, food, clothing, or household goods.

Information and Referrals

- Financial Counselling: Referrals to financial counsellors to help clients manage their finances and plan for the future.
- Other Services: Information and referrals to additional support services addressing underlying issues contributing to financial crises.

Ongoing Case Management

- Continued Support: Ongoing assistance and referrals to resolve financial difficulties completely.
- Holistic Approach: Comprehensive case management to address immediate crises and the root causes of financial disadvantage.

Goals of ER Programs

- Maintain Dignity: Providing assistance in a manner that respects client dignity.
- Encourage Self-Reliance: Empowering clients to become self-reliant and less dependent on emergency aid in the future.

A Story of Resilience

One client exemplified resilience by taking proactive steps to manage her utility bills through Centrepay, illustrating her commitment to improving her financial situation. Despite her limited income, she prioritised purchasing a new television to address an urgent household need.



Outcomes

- Improved Financial Stability: By utilising Centrepay, the client anticipates better management of her bills, reducing the stress of multiple payments and ensuring timely utility payments.
- Continued Access to Essential Services: Assistance with her electricity bill through programs like EAPA will help her maintain access to essential services such as heating, cooking, and hot water, crucial for her well-being.
- Enhanced Quality of Life: The new television provides the client with valuable information and entertainment, enhancing her quality of life despite financial constraints.

The client's resourcefulness highlights the significance of support programs in helping individuals maintain their quality of life.

We sincerely thank our valued partner organisations—Thriving Communities, the EAPA Government Energy Assistance Scheme, and Woolworths Pty Ltd—for their support in delivering the program this year.

By combining direct financial support, case management, and referrals to essential services, our ER programs not only address urgent needs but also support clients on their journey toward long-term financial stability.

No Interest Loans (NILs)

The NILS program offers No Interest Loans to low-income clients who typically may not qualify for traditional loans. These loans provide fair, safe, and affordable credit of up to \$3,000, allowing clients to purchase essential goods and services. They can be used to cover vital expenses, including household items, vehicle costs, rent assistance, and bond rentals.

The funds are community-based and recycled back into the program as loans are repaid, ensuring ongoing support for other clients.

Recent Feedback

I wanted to let you know that I received a call today from Focus Connect confirming the approval of the NILS loan you submitted for me.

Thank you so much for your time and assistance; I truly appreciate it. Your efforts in gathering all the necessary documents for the loan and helping me access my email from your laptop were invaluable. I hope you have a great week!

You are doing an outstanding job in your role, and I can confidently say that because you genuinely care about customer service and the needs of your clients. You made sure all the necessary information and paperwork were in order and explained the entire process clearly, including payment options for the upcoming financial year. Your organisation, courteous demeanour, and excellent customer service skills made this experience seamless.

The NILS program continues to be an essential resource for individuals and families experiencing financial hardship. By offering interest-free loans for critical needs, it provides immediate relief and fosters long-term financial stability. With strong partnerships and a commitment to empowering individuals, NILS is building financial resilience within the Macarthur community. The program will evolve further, expanding its reach to ensure that everyone has access to the financial support they need.

We gratefully acknowledge the Department of Fair Trading and extend our sincere appreciation to our valued partner organisations for their additional support in helping deliver the NILS program this year.

- Thriving Communities – One Stop One Story Hub (Referrals for Sydney Water, Telstra, Energy Australia, LINKT, Commonwealth Bank, Centre for Women's Economic Security, AGL-DV)
- Southern NILS – Illawarra (Loan Provider)
- Gosford City NILS (Loan Provider)
- Toukley Neighbourhood Centre (Loan Provider)
- Baptist Care (Loan Provider)
- Mary McKillop (Loan Provider)
- NSW/ACT NILS Network
- Good Shepherd

We have received numerous positive comments from grateful clients.





Rangī Gurney
Community Support Employee



Providing support services to CALD clients who have experienced or continue to experience Domestic Violence, whether from Intimate Partner Violence or a significant other.



Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence (DHSV)

Funded by Multicultural NSW, FOCUS Connect's Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence (DHSV) services offer essential support to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence, including intimate partner violence and other significant relationships.

Achievements and Outcomes

As the Multicultural Domestic Family Sexual Violence (MDHSV) caseworker in 2023–2024, it has been an honor to contribute to the life-changing work at FOCUS Connect. Supported by a dedicated team of staff, volunteers, and students, we have delivered 100% commitment to our clients, offering direct, practical support to individuals and families impacted by domestic violence.

Our key achievements include:

- **One-on-One Support:** Assisting clients in navigating the complex dynamics of coercive control and the devastating effects it has on relationships and families.
- **Social Education and Group Programs:** Facilitating healing pathways through group sessions tailored to both men and women affected by violence.

Artwork created by school aged children

FOCUS Connect's vision is far-reaching, exceeding expectations in providing individualised support and conducting specialised programs for both men and women. We were honoured to be guest speakers at a forum hosted by the Department of Communities and Justice and invited to submit a paper for the 2024 Domestic Violence National Conference in Adelaide.

Artwork created by school aged children

Many survivors face obstacles such as:

- Fear of increased violence if they attempt to leave.
- A lack of financial security, housing, or other resources.
- Emotional ties to the abuser or the hope that the abuse will end without having to leave.

At FOCUS Connect, we recognise that not everyone is ready or able to leave, but everyone deserves safety and support. We provide the necessary tools, resources, and emotional support to empower clients on their journey toward freedom from abuse.

Accessing Support

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, support is available. Call 1800RESPECT at 1800 737 732 for advice, assistance, and resources to safely escape an abusive relationship.

Through our MDFSV casework and community outreach, FOCUS Connect remains committed to fostering safer, healthier futures for all individuals impacted by domestic violence.



Outreach and Awareness Initiative

Engaging the community with resources, guidance, and support to those in need of assistance.



DV Support Group

A DV client created this artwork during the support group, where she shared her story.

Rangi Gurne
Community Support Employee

Disability Services 2024

At FOCUS Connect, our services are dedicated to empowering individuals of all ages by providing tailored support that enhances their independence, community engagement, and overall well-being. Our programs cater to adults, youth, and those requiring personalised assistance, with a strong emphasis on fostering skills, building relationships, and promoting inclusion within the community.





Nikki Ali

Disability Services Coordinator



"Our programs catered to adults, youth, and individuals requiring personalised support, with a strong emphasis on fostering skills, building relationships, and promoting inclusion within the community."



Disability Support

In 2024, FOCUS Connect offered a range of NDIS support services, including personalised support, adult day programs, and youth activities like school holiday and after-school care.

Disability Support

Our Individual Support Program provided comprehensive, one-on-one care, both at home and in the community, fostering independence while meeting each person's unique needs.

Primrose Cottage

Primrose Cottage, our central hub on Dumaresq Street in Campbelltown, was newly renovated in 2024 to create a warm, inviting space. It features a sensory room for relaxation and a sensory garden for outdoor enjoyment. The well-equipped kitchen also allowed participants to explore cooking.

Community Access

Our program extended beyond Primrose Cottage with outings to parks, gardens, and recreational sites, offering diverse, engaging experiences.

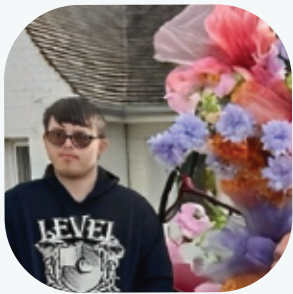
By combining structured sessions with community interactions, we created a holistic environment that meets the needs and aspirations of all participants.

Nikki Ali

Disability Services Coordinator

Adult Activity Program

Our Adult Day Program offered a wide range of activities thoughtfully designed to meet the diverse interests and abilities of our participants. This personalised approach enriched daily experiences and supported the journey toward greater independence and fulfilment. By focusing on practical life skills and social engagement, the program helped participants build a strong sense of community and belonging.



Attending the Wizard of Oz



Fishing



Cooking



Painting session

The dedication of our staff in creating a supportive and inclusive environment ensures that each participant can explore new passions, develop skills, and enhance their quality of life.

Individual Support Program

FOCUS Connect's Individual Support Program offered comprehensive assistance both at home and in the community. By providing personalised care tailored to each person's unique needs, the program fostered independence while ensuring a high standard of compassionate support.

Progress

A notable success story involves Mr. W, a client who initially faced significant challenges and preferred working with only one support worker. Through persistent efforts, our team identified a support worker who was an excellent fit, leading to remarkable progress in Mr. W's social and culinary experiences. He has become more open to new experiences, enjoying a variety of foods and social outings, marking a significant improvement in his quality of life.

Empowerment

Miss Z, a participant in our program, experienced a decline in vision, which initially required constant one-on-one support from staff to ensure her safety and comfort during daily activities and while navigating the community and public transportation. This level of physical assistance, while necessary, began to affect her sense of independence and caused discomfort, particularly back pain, as she relied on staff for stability.

Recognising these challenges, our support team explored alternatives to improve Miss Z's mobility and comfort. They suggested she try using a crutch instead of a walker, which she had previously been hesitant to adopt. After careful consideration of her needs and preferences, Miss Z agreed, and with staff assistance, she was fitted for a crutch.

This change marked a significant improvement. The crutch provided her with the necessary support while reducing her reliance on staff, alleviating her back pain, and allowing her to walk with more confidence and ease. As a result, Miss Z regained a sense of independence, navigating her surroundings with greater autonomy. This change has been instrumental in enhancing her quality of life, demonstrating our commitment to empowering individuals.



Youth Group Holiday Program

Launched in December 2023, our Youth Group Holiday Program quickly grew from serving just two participants to a thriving community of eleven by April 2024. This program offers a mix of centre-based activities and community outings, designed to be both fun and developmental. Activities are tailored to meet the individual needs of each participant, supported by our trained staff, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment that mirrors a home-like setting.

Outcomes

A heartwarming success story from the April 2024 school holidays involves Ms. X, whose experience was significantly enhanced by the program. Unlike previous holidays, she was able to fully enjoy her time without any adjustments to her medication, a testament to the program's effectiveness in catering to her needs. The positive changes in her demeanour and overall well-being were profoundly felt by her family, who were overjoyed by the stability and happiness she experienced throughout the holidays.



Acknowledging Support and Services

Our achievements this year would not have been possible without the steadfast support of our partners, staff, and volunteers. Your dedication has enabled us to provide essential services that empower individuals and families to thrive within our community. We extend our deepest gratitude to the organisations, local councils, funding bodies, and community groups whose contributions have played a crucial role in our success.

To our staff and volunteers, thank you for your passion, hard work, and tireless commitment to delivering compassionate, high-quality care. Your efforts have made a lasting impact on the lives of those we serve, and we are immensely proud of what we have accomplished together.

As we reflect on the successes of this year, we also look forward to the future with optimism. The challenges ahead inspire us to continue evolving and expanding our programs to meet the growing needs of the community. With the ongoing support of our partners, staff, and volunteers, we are confident that we will continue to make a meaningful difference, empowering even more individuals and families in the years to come.

Together, we will build on this year's accomplishments, shaping a brighter and more resilient future for all.





Annual Report

2024

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We acknowledge that we work on Indigenous lands and that sovereignty was never ceded. We pay respect to elders, past and present, and acknowledge the pivotal role that First Nations people continue to play within our communities.



We embrace diversity and are committed to creating a safe environment for all people, irrespective of their age, gender, cultural identity, sexuality, abilities, language, economic status, profession or location.

