



**CELEBRATING**

**40** YEARS

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OF SERVICE

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**1983 - 2023**

**ANNIVERSARY**

**Annual Report**



## Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation Pathfinders acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and also extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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## Directors Report

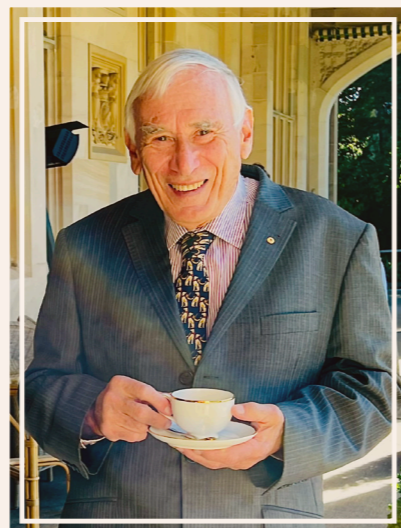
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## Message from our Patron

We are honoured to have The Honourable Justice James Wood AO, KC serve as the esteemed Patron of Pathfinders. Justice Wood brings with him a distinguished career marked by profound contributions to law and justice in Australia.

His leadership has been instrumental as Chairman of the Law Reform Commission of New South Wales, Chairman of the New South Wales Sentencing Council, Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission, and as a respected former judge. Currently, he continues to serve the community through his role as a Judicial Officer with the NSW State Parole Authority.



As Patron of Pathfinders for the past decade, I've had the honour of witnessing this extraordinary organisation evolve and expand its reach, touching countless lives in profound ways. When I first became involved, I could never have fully envisioned the transformative impact Pathfinders would have on individuals, families, communities, and society at large.

Over these ten years, the organisation has grown fivefold in staff, reflecting its steady commitment to serving more people and meeting the ever-increasing needs of our communities.

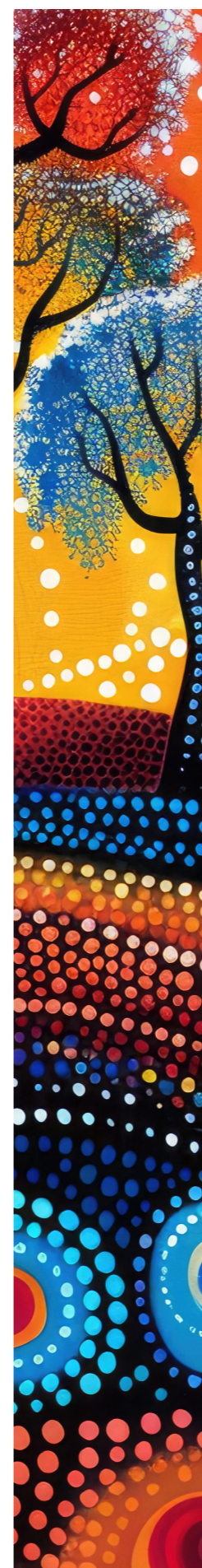
Earlier this year, I joined the Pathfinders team in celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Pumpkin Run, a milestone event that concluded with a memorable gathering at Government House in Sydney. Having attended several Pumpkin Runs over the years, I've seen firsthand the joy and inspiration this event brings to young participants. The excitement in their faces and the energy in the air only seem to grow stronger with each passing year.

Recently, I had the privilege of meeting with Alan and the executive team in Darwin, where we discussed the promising prospect of expanding Pathfinders' reach into the Northern Territory. If the achievements and community impact we've seen in New South Wales can be mirrored in the Territory, I am certain that Pathfinders will continue to bring hope and positive change to even more lives.

Being part of Pathfinders' journey over the past ten years has been a pleasure and a profound source of pride for me. It has been incredibly rewarding to watch this organisation grow and thrive, always guided by its mission to uplift and empower those who need it most.

*James Wood*

**The Honourable James Wood AO, KC**



## Reconciliation

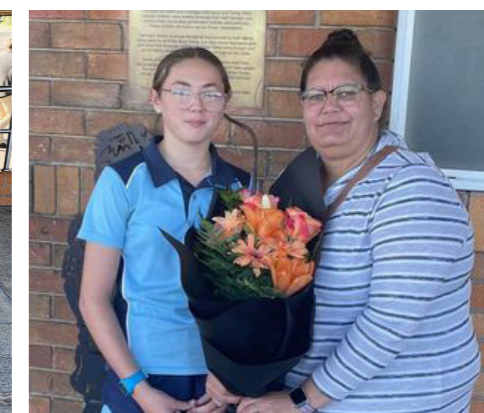
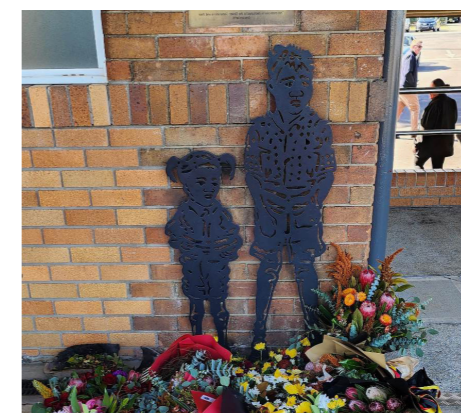
Pathfinders continues to prioritise the implementation, recognition, and promotion of reconciliation, making it central to our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.

The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) framework is built on relationships, respect, and opportunities and it emphasises the importance of consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also empowers our staff to actively contribute, strengthening their role in advancing reconciliation.

Our ongoing RAP journey focuses on deep-

ening partnerships, joint decision making, and service delivery within these communities, ensuring that our approach remains inclusive, culturally sensitive, and responsive to their needs.

As we update and progress our RAP, we draw on the valuable insights and knowledge gained from years of service provision. These insights are critical to shaping the next phase of our RAP. Ongoing communication and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been and will continue to be key in ensuring our RAP remains meaningful, effective, and aligned with the community's needs.



### Reconciliation Week and Sorry Day 2024

Staff along the Mid North Coast and in New England attended community breakfasts and walks during Reconciliation Week and Sorry Day 2024. Staff from our Kempsey office joined the community at Kempsey Railway Station to commemorate Sorry Day. This important gathering honoured the resilience and strength of Stolen Generations and survivors, offering a moment for reflection on the past and a commitment to a brighter future.



## Message from our CEO

### 20 YEARS OF HEART, HOPE, AND HARD WORK

This year marks an extraordinary milestone for Pathfinders and our CEO, who celebrates 20 years of dedicated service.

From a small, community-focused organisation with a handful of committed individuals, Pathfinders has grown into a leading force for change, supporting thousands of young people, families, and communities.



Looking back on my past 20 years with Pathfinders, I am filled with pride, gratitude, and awe. What began as a small community service organisation with a team of five and a shared vision has now grown into one of the most impactful forces for good in our region.

Our purpose has always been crystal clear: to build pathways to a brighter future for young people, families, and communities, and to stand with the vulnerable through every hardship and challenge. This journey has been a labour of love, marked by our commitment to child protection, our innovative programs, and our unwavering drive to make a difference.

From the beginning, Pathfinders has felt like family. Today, we're a family of over 400 compassionate, dedicated professionals, each of whom brings passion, skill, and heart to their work. The fact that so many of our team members have stayed with us for years is a testament to the supportive, rewarding environment we've built together.

I'm endlessly proud to lead a team that mirrors the diversity of the communities we serve, and whose members embrace the Circle of Courage philosophy of fostering resilience, belonging, generosity, and purpose. Through our use of the Sanctuary Model, we will deepen these values, learning and growing in our understanding of trauma and our ability to provide healing.

Our journey has been filled with challenges—from fires and droughts to economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, with each adversity, our resilience has only grown stronger. We have always taken risks to help those at risk, and every time we've stretched our limits, we've done it with one goal in mind: to create pathways of hope, healing, and opportunity.

I'm more committed than ever to our mission. There is so much more we can do, so many more lives to touch, and Pathfinders is ready to face whatever challenges the

future holds. We will continue to pioneer, to build, and to stand by our communities, creating a brighter, more hopeful future for all who need us.

This report is not just a reflection on our past; it's a celebration of every person who has brought us to where we are today. To our incredible staff, visionary leaders, community partners, and supporters—thank you. Each of you has been part of this journey, and together we've built something truly extraordinary.

To the Board, who has stood by me over the years, I am deeply grateful for your wisdom, guidance, and encouragement. I think back to 20 years ago when Pat Schultz, our former Chair, interviewed me for the role of manager. Her belief in me and in Pathfinders has left a lasting mark. Today, her daughter, Korrina Schultz, is our current Chair, and her dedication echoes her mother's unwavering commitment. The Schultz family's belief in Pathfinders has been a beacon, guiding us through challenges and milestones alike.

Each of you has been a vital part of this journey, and together, we've built something truly extraordinary. Together, we have not only served, but we've uplifted, empowered, and inspired.

As we turn toward the future, I feel the same passion and hope that I did when I first joined Pathfinders. We will keep fighting for a world where every young person and family can look forward to a life filled with possibility. Thank you for standing with us every step of the way. Here's to the next chapter of heart, hope, and hard work.

*Alan Brennan*

**CEO, Pathfinders**

## Message from our Chair

This year's Annual Report speaks to Pathfinders' extraordinary journey—a journey that began as a small, regional youth support service and has grown into a multifaceted organisation, dedicated to uplifting vulnerable communities across New South Wales and beyond.

From the outset, Pathfinders has remained committed to empowering children, young people, and families, weaving compassion and resilience into every program, expansion, and initiative.

My connection to Pathfinders goes back to my childhood. I remember vividly how my mother, Pat Schultz, who served as a Board member, opened our home as a haven for those in need. It was not unusual to find young people sleeping on our veranda when the house was full, and it was through this nurturing environment that I learned the power of community support. This early experience, guided by my parents' compassion and empathy, ignited my own passion for community service and led me to a career supporting individuals and families in need.

I would like to welcome new staff members to Pathfinders – we are now 400 plus strong. And a fond farewell to those who have left the organisation to pursue new opportunities.

There have been some significant achievements during the past 12 months. In May 2024, Pathfinders was awarded a contract to deliver Intensive Therapeutic Care for the Mid North Coast. Our proposal was so strong that the Department of Communities and Justice granted us the New England contract without the need to tender.

Pathfinders has been working towards the delivery of ITC for three years, recruiting and upskilling staff, sourcing properties and creating partnerships to help us deliver wraparound services for young people in need of the program. Pathfinders will now deliver the Intensive Therapeutic Care program across 12 homes in Armidale, Tamworth, Inverell, Port Macquarie, Taree and Forster.

We are making the most of opportunities to expand our services into the Northern Territory and the work we are doing there will have a significant impact on the lives of children, young people and families. The Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate has formed strong relationships with the Northern Territory Births, Deaths and Marriages, and UNICEF continues to champion the program.

The Board has decided to renew our commitment to the Sanctuary Model, which had been interrupted by CO-

VID-19. All staff will undergo comprehensive training in this model, ensuring we fully integrate its principles across our organisation.

This year, the Pumpkin Run was once again a tremendous success. Since its beginning in 2014, the run has provided food to thousands, collaborated with like-minded organisations, and been welcomed with open arms wherever it stops.

We were deeply honoured to have the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency, The Honourable Margaret Beasley, AC, KC, once again open Government House to the Pumpkin Run team.

We take immense pride in working alongside and employing many Aboriginal people, whose contributions enrich our work and our communities. Pathfinders plays a vital role in the social fabric of these communities. For much of our history, our work has been done quietly, humbly, often without recognition. But that doesn't lessen its impact. Pathfinders continues to transform lives, one person at a time. It's essential to pause and recognise the reach and depth of this work, a glimpse of which is highlighted in this Annual Report.

To the Pathfinders team, it is an immense honour to serve as your Chair on the Board. You should feel tremendous pride in the work you accomplish every day, making a genuine difference in so many lives. To the Senior Executive team—your dedication, tireless hours, and unwavering commitment have not gone unnoticed. Thank you for your exemplary leadership and for inspiring all of us through your passion and vision.

I want to extend my heartfelt tribute to my fellow Board members, whose steadfast dedication has been truly inspiring. Your collective wisdom, knowledge, and lived experiences have profoundly impacted our work and strengthened our shared mission.

Our journey ahead will continue to be challenging and the strain on our resources will only intensify. Yet, our vision is more critical than ever: that every child, young person, and family has a home where they belong—a place free from abuse, neglect, discrimination, and inequality—where they can achieve their full potential and contribute meaningfully to Australian society.

*Korrina Schultz*

**Chairperson, Pathfinders**



# Pathfinders Overview

At Pathfinders, we are proud to be leaders in advocating for and uplifting disadvantaged communities. For more than 40 years, our commitment has been unwavering in providing essential support to young people and families throughout the New England and North West Tablelands, the Mid North Coast of NSW, and, more recently, in Darwin, Northern Territory. Our work addresses some of the most complex social challenges faced by individuals, families, and young people, driving positive change where it's needed most.

We are constantly evolving and expanding to meet the changing needs of our communities. From foster care, out-of-home care, and homelessness support to family referral services, supported independent living, and disability support services, our aim is to provide meaningful, practical solutions that make a difference.

We are committed to ensuring everyone has access to the support they need to feel connected and thrive within their communities. We are especially proud of our partnerships and ability to grow and deliver tailored programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as early education and youth training initiatives.

We believe no one should be left behind. Through collaboration, program delivery, and face-to-face support, we are breaking down barriers to create equal opportunities for everyone by facilitating access to education, employment, and safe housing, thus removing obstacles to growth and independence.

Providing real solutions to today's challenges takes time and care. By offering holistic, thoughtful support, we are helping individuals and

families to build resilience, stability, and empowerment so they can reach their full potential and actively participate in their communities.

Our work would not be possible without the dedication of our incredible frontline staff, the guidance of our experienced board, and the strong leadership team that drives our mission.

We are deeply thankful for the continued support from our clients, partners, and community members. Your trust and belief in our work empowers us to keep making a meaningful difference.

Together, we are creating brighter futures for young people and their families.

## Coffs Coast Business Awards Recognition

**Pathfinders is proud to have been named a finalist in three categories at last year's Coffs Coast Business Awards, hosted by the Coffs Harbour Chamber of Commerce.**

Our Marketing team was recognised for their innovation and effectiveness in the Marketing and Advertising category, celebrating the impact of their creative campaigns.

Additionally, two of our staff members were nominated for individual awards. Ronald Naden, Cultural Support Manager and Coordinator of the Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate (PNABC) Program, was named as a finalist for Outstanding Employee. Ronald's leadership and commitment to securing birth certificates for more than 5,000 Aboriginal people has made a significant difference in communities across Australia. Garth Freudenstein, our Family Connect and Support Manager, was a finalist in the Outstanding Business Leader category, recognised for his remarkable leadership in driving the success and growth of the Family Connect and Support program.

Pathfinders is proud of our dedicated team and their ongoing contributions to the community, and we are grateful to see their hard work acknowledged.



### Special Mention

Pathfinders would like to express its gratitude to Tanya Cook for all her efforts in achieving the recognition Pathfinders deserves by participating in business awards events.

# Pat Schultz

When Pat Schultz joined the Board of the Armidale Youth Refuge in 1999, the organisation was facing significant challenges. The Allingham Street premises had fallen into disrepair, residents were avoiding the shelter, finances were in disarray, and frequent staff turnover created instability in the care provided.

"We had real difficulty in attracting young people, even though we knew demand was out there. Along with Marilyn Miller who also joined the board, and Allan Potter who was chair, and the recent appointment of Julia Hardaker as Manager, we were able to turn the whole business around," Pat said.

"Word of mouth spread pretty quickly and we went from having only a couple of residents to a full house, with some overflow of young people sleeping on couches or in the office.

"We convinced the Department of Community Services to open up the refuge for both younger and older people as we were finding there was a greater need for the service."

Through persistent advocacy the board and Julia convinced DOCS to expand the program to include three additional flats for independent living purposes and they were fortunate to secure funding for several extra services. Heather Maciver, a part-time bookkeeper, was also invaluable in maintaining the finances for the organisation.

"Julia saw that the only way that the refuge could survive was to look at ways that we could expand the services. This necessitated a name change to Armidale and District Youth Support Services."



When Julia left to pursue volunteer work overseas, Pat resigned to become the Manager before the ADYSS appointed Alan Brennan as Manager.

"Both Alan and Julia shared a deep commitment to serving the community and improving the lives of young people. Julia laid the foundation, and Alan built on it," Pat noted.

"Throughout my years of involvement with Pathfinders—on the Board, as President, and once in an emergency role as Manager—the values have remained constant. There's a positive energy, fully engaged staff, and strong community support for Pathfinders' work.

"The finances are now in excellent shape, there are more young people off the streets, going to school, getting jobs and becoming productive members of society.

"It's a joy to have been involved with Pathfinders."

As part of the Schultz family's continued belief in Pathfinders, Pat was instrumental in encouraging her daughter, Korrina Schultz, to take on the role of Chair of the Board.

A perfect bookend to this story.



## Youth Work Awards 2023 Finalist

**At the 2023 Youth Action Awards, Pathfinders was a finalist for Youth Worker of the Year (Toni Simmons) and Outstanding Work with Regional Young People (Tilbuster Station).**

As Resource Coordinator and Farm Manager, Toni engages with more than 200 young people each year, using his patient manner and compassion to positively impact those facing challenges at home, school, or with the legal system. Tilbuster Station serves as a peaceful haven in a chaotic world for teenagers and young adults.



PICTURED: Celebrating our recognition as a finalist at the Port Macquarie Business Awards for Excellence in Large Business and Employer of Choice over 20 Employees.





## Expansion into the Northern Territory

Pathfinders is committed to providing holistic, culturally responsive social services that meet the needs of communities across Australia.

This year, we have expanded our operations from New South Wales into the Northern Territory, where we see an opportunity to extend our service delivery and bring essential support services to some of the most remote and underserved populations in the country.

The decision to expand into the Northern Territory is driven by our desire to address critical gaps in

service delivery, particularly in areas such as child protection, disability, housing, and Aboriginal community services. The region faces unique social challenges, including high rates of homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and significant barriers to accessing health and social care.

By establishing a presence in the Northern Territory, Pathfinders aims to collaborate with local organisations and government agencies to deliver targeted programs that address these issues.



### Meeting with Hon. Steven Edgington

During their recent trip to Darwin for the National Homelessness and Housing Forum, our Pathfinders team had a productive meeting with Hon. Steven Edgington. It was a great opportunity to share insights about our work and discuss how we can collaborate to support vulnerable communities in the Northern Territory.

**The National Homelessness and Housing Forum**, held in May 2024, focused on four key themes: planning, challenges faced by Indigenous communities concerning housing and homelessness, service delivery and collaboration.

### Conference Sponsorship

In July 2023, Pathfinders proudly sponsored the Developing Northern Australia Conference held in Darwin, NT. Attendees engaged in meaningful discussions on strategic economic planning, sustainable development, and social inclusion, uncovering keys to unlock the region's true potential.



### Indigenous Wellbeing Conference

In October 2023 Pathfinders also sponsored the Indigenous Wellbeing Conference, which celebrated Indigenous community, culture, and identity. The conference highlighted the vital roles of connection to country, culture, spirituality, and ancestry in enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations Australians, Māori, and Pasifika peoples. By bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, the conference aimed to develop strategies and solutions to the key wellbeing needs of the community.



## Sanctuary Model Implementation

Implementation of the Sanctuary model into the organisation's culture has commenced, with the goal of creating a trauma-informed community for everyone engaged with and connected to Pathfinders. Sanctuary acknowledges that adversity is a universal experience and focuses on building a safe environment that promotes healing, learning, and growth.

The rollout of the Sanctuary model started this year, beginning with Climate and Cultural Surveys that were completed in April. In November, our Core team members, who have been selected from across the organisation, will gather in Coffs

Harbour for a five day professional training session. During this training, staff will learn about the model from the Steering Committee and consultants while actively contributing to the implementation process as Sanctuary is woven into our organisational culture.

#### What is Sanctuary?

The Sanctuary model encourages us to rethink how we work by supporting our team in building healthy communities by creating and supporting a culture that prioritises safety and wellbeing at every level of the organisation. Sanctuary recognises that adversity affects not only those who have experienced

trauma but also the staff who support them within the organisation itself.

Many of the families, children, and young people we support have been impacted by trauma. By implementing Sanctuary, we are committed to delivering services that create safety in various ways, enabling healing, recovery, and growth.

Sanctuary applies to everyone at Pathfinders, from our support workers, corporate teams and Executives right through to our Board and onto our clients we serve.

## Meeting the Young Ambassadors

At the start of last year, a select group of young people from across our services had the privilege of meeting the newly recruited Young Ambassadors at UNICEF Australia in Sydney.

The UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Program aims to empower young people aged 16 -24 to become advocates for children's rights and amplify the voices of Australia's youth.

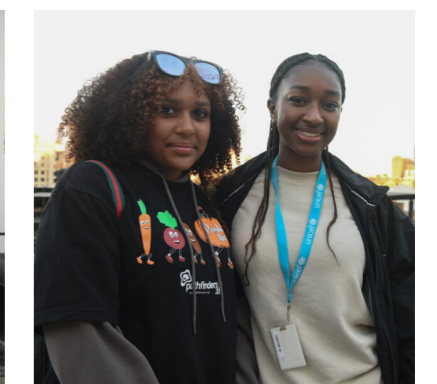
These Young Ambassadors are selected from various regions across the country and receive comprehensive training in leadership, advocacy, media and

communications, and meaningful engagement with other young individuals. The program emphasises key areas such as Climate Change and Disasters, First Nations Social Justice, and Digital Safety and Wellbeing, allowing participants to leverage their lived experiences to support major campaigns.

The meeting with Pathfinders young people took place at the UNICEF Australia head office in Pyrmont. Led by the Child and Youth Engagement Manager at UNICEF Australia Freya Conomos, it was a well-designed session that encouraged all of the young people to participate, allowing everyone to share their own stories,

experiences, and aspirations. During the meeting, our young people and the Ambassadors discussed their shared interests, discovering common ground and mutual passions. Through these engaging conversations, they exchanged ideas and perspectives on critical issues affecting young people today.

The opportunity to meet with these inspiring Ambassadors was a positive experience for our young people, showing them that their voices and collective ideas have the power to drive positive change in areas that impact the lives of children and young people.





## Finance and Resources

The strength of our balance sheet remains essential to our ability to meet the needs of our clients and to deliver sustainable and strong outcomes. The Board's focus on operational excellence and careful financial management has ensured that we have been able to continue to grow our core business and reinvest in our services and people.

Total revenue increased by \$5,564,066 (11.2%) from \$49,708,320 to \$54,272,386. Contracted revenue comprising Government funding and fee-for-service income increased by \$5,809,450. This reflects the growth in the Permanency Support, Short-Term Emergency Placement Programs, along with Individual Placement Agreements.

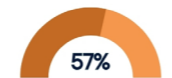
Other revenue increased by \$165,003 from \$5,469,439 to \$5,634,442. The main reason for this was sundry income with a decrease in donations (mostly made up of Crowd funding).

Expenses for the year increased by \$7,241,386 (15.6%) from \$46,433,160 to \$53,674,546. The primary reasons for this are from increases in wage and wage related expenses and increases in client and program costs as a result of a growth in Permanency Support, Short-Term Emergency Placement Programs, along with Individual Placement Agreements.

In 2024, we've seen substantial growth across resources: Rentals increased by 15%, owned properties by 57%, leased vehicles by 15%, and owned vehicles by 12%.



**Properties: Rental**  
2024: 60 | 2023: 52  
Increase: 8 (15%)



**Properties: Owned**  
2024: 11 | 2023: 7  
Increase: 4 (57%)



**Vehicles: Leased**  
2024: 62 | 2023: 54  
Increase: 8 (15%)



**Vehicles: Owned**  
2024: 47 | 2023: 42  
Increase: 5 (12%)

## Human Resources

During the past financial year, we at Pathfinders welcomed 124 new staff members including our first new staff member in the Northern Territory. Our employee is based in Darwin, bringing our total workforce to 421. Again, growth in Out-of-Home Care is the driving force behind the increase in numbers, along with the continuing growth of our Support your Path program.

At the time of going to print we have 23.75 % of staff who identify as

Aborigina or Torres Strait Islander. Our goal is to significantly continue to increase this figure and a number of strategies are being implemented to attract and retain Aboriginal staff to the company, including offering traineeships and tertiary education.

It has been rewarding for the organisation to see the growth in staffing across the New England, North West, and Mid North Coast regions, as well as in the Northern Territory, alongside the

expansion of various programs and the commencement of new business ventures across the entire organisation.

2024-2025 will continue to see the development of new systems and increased technology to assist in the process of recruitment, interviews and onboarding of new staff to Pathfinders.

### The Summit

Five members of the Corporate Services Team (Trish Parker, Melissa Colman, Christina Clark, Tanya Cook and Gayle Keene) were excited to attend the inspiring Women in Leadership Summit 2024 in Darling Harbour on 29 February 2024.

The Summit connected aspiring and current women in leadership with insights from featured international speaker, Hillary Clinton, Australian journalist Leigh Sales and numerous other Guest Speakers sharing discussions on powerful lived experiences, leadership and career insights, celebrating empowerment as well as their diverse personal journeys.



## Royal Hotel

Renovations at the Royal Hotel in Glen Innes are moving forward smoothly. The rear exterior has been thoroughly upgraded, with all four walls replaced by concrete HardiPlank that closely replicates the original weatherboard design.

The roof and guttering have also been fully renewed and barge boards, used to help protect the roof from weather, have been attached.

The roof now displays a heritage red colour, and the walls have been painted to match the hotel's signature cream shade. All existing windows have been replaced, ensuring consistency throughout the property. Upon completion of the renovations, Pathfinders will focus on transforming the property to serve the needs of vulnerable youth and those at risk of homelessness in the New England region.

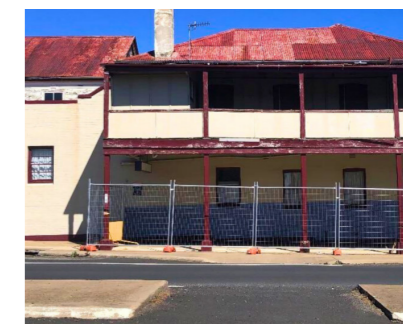
Plans include creating a central community hub to provide shared space for broader community activities. The redevelopment and staffing at the Royal will also contribute significantly to the local economy.

Our goal is to repurpose the building as a centre for support and education services, where vulnerable young people can engage in meaningful, hands-on activities, including education and training, employment, volunteering, mentoring, and recreation.

The Royal Hotel will continue to serve as our main headquarters in Glen Innes, housing our local teams for Specialist Homelessness Support Services and out-of-home care programs.

As the office rebuild and awning construction progress, our builder will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the property to identify any remaining renovation needs.

With the Development Application already approved by Glen Innes Council, we anticipate receiving the Construction Certificate by the end of December 2024. Subject to final insurance approval, construction is expected to begin in February 2025. The builders are finalising cost estimates in November 2024, and upon approval, work will commence as scheduled.



## Community Housing Provider

The NSW Government has recognised the not-for-profit community housing sector as a key partner in delivering affordable housing solutions.

Since July 2021, Pathfinders has been a registered Tier 3 community housing provider under the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH). The NRSCH is a national framework for the registration, monitoring, and regulation of community housing providers, designed to promote the development, viability, and quality of community housing and ensure strong governance within the sector.

Community housing supports individuals and families on very low,

low, or moderate incomes, as well as people with additional needs, and is delivered by non-government organisations.

While Pathfinders currently does not own or manage community housing properties, we have expressed interest in securing support for housing projects through the Department of Communities and Justice's Tranche 3 Core and Cluster Program and Intensive Therapeutic Care program. Core and Cluster is an innovative model that allows for independent living and privacy while also providing access to supports.

Our goal is to own 40 long-term community housing properties by June 30, 2026, including seven

designated as National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Specialist Disability Accommodation. Over this financial year, we have enhanced our tenancy policies and procedures and developed new housing strategies.

Pathfinders has proactively engaged with housing organisations and funding agencies to strengthen our profile as we prepare to operate in the community housing sector.



## Community Benefits Program

Late last year, Pathfinders proudly partnered with GambleAware NSW to launch the Community Benefits Program.

This initiative is dedicated to raising awareness about the risks associated with gambling, particularly focusing on the impacts of online gaming and exposure to gambling through social media.

During GambleAware Week in October, Pathfinders hosted a collaborative community engagement event that took place in Inverell. This event provided an opportunity for support service providers, community members, and school groups to come together, learn about gambling risks, and access information on available support services.

In addition, Pathfinders worked with GambleAware to deliver an education program in schools, focusing on early intervention and addressing issues related to online gambling, its connection with online gaming, and associated mental health and social media concerns.

Single Early Intervention workshops were successfully rolled out in 10 primary schools across the New England area, specifically Year 6 students.



### GambleAware Week 2023

As part of GambleAware Week 2023, Pathfinders hosted a Community Awareness Event in Campbell Park, Inverell, bringing together local residents, service providers, and community groups to highlight the importance of responsible gambling. The event aimed to raise awareness about the risks associated with gambling, empowering individuals to recognise the signs of harm, and providing practical strategies to encourage safer gambling practices.

Local residents gathered to enjoy live music by Terra Firma, an Armidale based band, and explore information stalls from local service providers, who shared valuable insights about the support available in the Inverell community.



## Work Health and Safety

The Pathfinders Work Health and Safety (WHS) team has made significant progress over the past 12 months, with a strong focus on the safety and wellbeing of both staff and clients and participants. The WHS team has visited all areas within Pathfinders' operational sites to deliver internal training, assess sites and address potential risks, ensuring that comprehensive safety strategies are in place in all locations.

Throughout the year, the WHS team participated in seminars, webinars, and external training sessions to stay informed about best practices and to refine the delivery of safety programs.

The team's primary responsibility has been to eliminate workplace risks wherever possible and, where complete elimination is not feasible, to minimise potential hazards. This is achieved through the implementation

and continual review of safe systems of work, employee training, supervision, health monitoring, and ongoing consultation.

The key objectives of the WHS program during this period included designing relevant training courses to educate staff across all WHS areas, ensuring compliance in all workplaces, re-establishing the WHS committee, and supporting collaborative working relationships between Pathfinders' internal services.

The WHS program has also worked in alignment with other initiatives, such as the motor vehicle monitoring and training program, the Health Body and Mind Hub, and the Sanctuary program, which has further contributed to a holistic approach to staff wellbeing.

### Building a Safer Future Together

Craig Hunt and Tanya Cook from our WHS team attended the Australian Institute of Health & Safety National Conference at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre this year.

The conference theme, 'Stronger Together,' emphasised the power of collaboration among industry bodies, regulators, workplaces, and academia. It recognised the collective strength that comes from partnership, enabling greater achievements and informed practices in workplace health and safety.





# Aboriginal Early Years Program

The Aboriginal Early Years Program (AEYP) is a regional support service dedicated to assisting Aboriginal families and their young children, aged two to six years. AEYP focuses on preparing children for a successful start in their educational journey and ensuring they are ready to thrive in school.

AEYP supports Aboriginal children in attending preschool and smoothly transitioning to school, while enhancing their emotional, social, and academic readiness. Over the past year, AEYP has been instrumental in engaging with families and early childhood providers across Tingha, Inverell, Ashford, Armidale, Walcha, Uralla, Gunnedah, Quirindi, Narrabri, Wee Waa and Moree.

The program has made significant strides in encouraging greater participation in preschool and transition activities. This year, AEYP provided support to more than 77 children and families, securing new and additional preschool and childcare placements, and facilitating a smooth transition to school through various forms of assistance.

Building and strengthening partnerships with more than 30 local early childhood and care providers has been crucial to identifying children in need of additional support and tailoring programs to their specific needs.



**NEW TEAM:** The Aboriginal Early Years Program (AEYP) has welcomed three new dedicated support workers this year, who are providing invaluable assistance across the New England and North West regions.

AEYP addresses individual needs through comprehensive support, including conducting interviews and assessments, linking children with school transition programs, and providing referrals to specialist services. Additionally, the program offers support for the whole family including parenting programs, healthy eating tips for preparing nutritious lunchboxes, and connecting families with community activities that support their cultural identity.

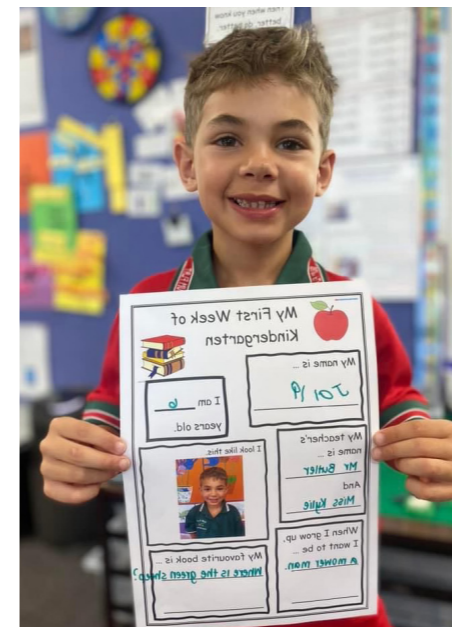
AEYP plays a crucial role in addressing early childhood disparities, supporting educational outcomes, and improving long term life trajectories for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. By investing in these early years, we are supporting better educational, health, and social outcomes, ultimately reducing future challenges in child protection, youth justice, and other areas.

## CLOSING THE GAP

Evidence shows that Aboriginal children achieve stronger educational outcomes when their learning is connected to their cultural identity. AEYP remains committed to enhancing Aboriginal children's education from an early stage, ensuring every Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service is a safe, supportive, and culturally welcoming space.

Despite some progress, challenges persist. In 2021, only 34.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children starting school were developmentally on track, compared to 56.2% of non-Indigenous children. By 2024, this figure rose to 46.5%, showing steady improvement towards closing the gap, aligned with the National Closing the Gap Agreement, aiming for parity by 2031.

## Celebrating Jarli's Journey with AEYP



Over the past four years, AEYP has supported Jarli and his family through key milestones, from childcare and preschool to his transition into primary school. Our Inverell AEYP Coordinator recently had the opportunity to visit Jarli at school, where they spoke with his teachers and principal about his progress.

The feedback from his teachers was overwhelmingly positive. Jarli is described as a delightful child who shows great enthusiasm for learning and actively engages in his education. He has made new friends and has settled into school life wonderfully.

AEYP will continue to provide support to Jarli and his family, ensuring that he has all the resources and encouragement needed to build on this promising beginning and thrive in his educational journey.

## Stanley's First Day at Preschool

Earlier this year, young Stanley began his preschool journey at Kindamindi in Inverell, with support from AEYP. The program played a crucial role in guiding Stanley's family through the enrolment process, ensuring a smooth transition into preschool.

In addition to helping with enrolment, AEYP has assisted the family in obtaining birth certificates for both Stanley and his sister through the Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program, addressing an important need for their future. AEYP Support Workers have also been able to connect Stanley's family with other local parents, helping both children engage with their peers and participate in various community activities.



**8.5%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children starting school had a medically diagnosed special need.

**46.5%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed for school readiness met the developmental benchmarks.

**15%** increase in preschool enrolment for Aboriginal children this year.





# Momentum Program

The Momentum Program continues to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Northern NSW, providing a comprehensive three-phase approach to overcoming key barriers in birth registration, driver licenses, and employment. This year, roadshow events were held across the Northern Rivers, New England, and Hunter regions, helping many Aboriginal people obtain birth certificates, gain their learner or provisional driver licences, and secure employment.

Pathfinders plays a crucial role in the program, leading intake and engagement processes and facilitating access to birth registration services. Additionally, Pathfinders leads the program's community engagement, working with local community groups and services to assist with the coordination of the program's roadshow and later licencing activities.

ACE Community Colleges delivers driver education services, including learner driver classes and practical driving support, helping participants achieve their driver licences. They also provide alternative pathways for those ineligible, ensuring everyone has access to the support they need.

Real Futures leads the program's employment phase, offering holistic job readiness training, placement services, and post-placement support. They ensure participants are prepared to enter the workforce and continue to oversee Momentum's delivery across all regions.

The Momentum Program is led by Real Futures and funded by the NSW Government's Office of Social Impact Investment.



## Momentum

Earlier this year, Michael signed up for the Momentum program at the Coffs Harbour Roadshow event. With the assistance of the Momentum Team, he was able to obtain his birth certificate and his Learner's Licence. Michael is now undertaking driving instructor lessons to achieve his Provisional Licence. Michael's dedication and perseverance led to his recent appointment as a Traffic Controller with Lack Group. Despite facing initial job market challenges, Michael is now contributing to road safety in his new role.

Just a few months into his role, his dedication and hard work were acknowledged when he was Awarded Employee of the Month.

The Momentum Team has been actively working with Lack Group to build a strong partnership and secure additional employment opportunities for additional Momentum participants.



## Building Confidence and Achieving Goals

Tom was introduced to the Momentum Program by his uncle. He signed up for the program and took the chance to boost his confidence. Initially apprehensive, he has since embraced the opportunity to try something new and it is paying off.

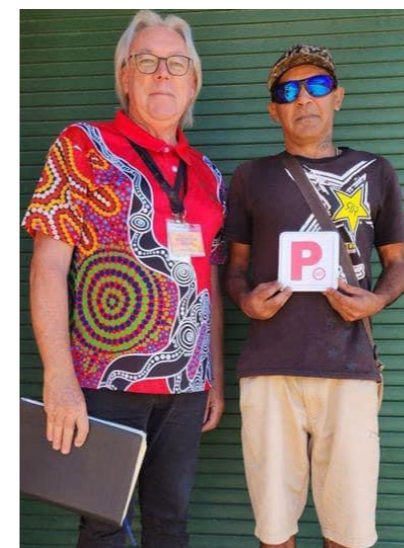
Having enrolled in the Momentum Program in Coffs Harbour last year, Tom has now received his birth certificate with the support of Pathfinders and has completed the M-Week course. M-Week is a comprehensive week long course requiring both practical and theoretical work to be completed. Participants engage in learner driver classes and driving lessons led by expert instructors from ACE

Community College. Tom found that the course instructors were able to provide him with the support and encouragement he needed during M-Week to successfully complete the course.

Sharing his experience with our program coordinator, Tom said that the Momentum Program has helped to build his confidence, especially in the classroom where he was given the support he needed to get through the course. He said that he would happily recommend the program to others and thanked the Momentum team for helping him achieve his goals.

### SIGN UP EVENTS WERE HELD AT:

- Singleton
- Cessnock
- Maitland
- Windale
- Tweed Heads
- Murwillumbah
- Kempsey
- Casino
- Muli Muli
- Lismore
- Ballina
- Armidale
- Guyra
- Tingha





# Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program

**The Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate (PNABC) Program continues to have a profound impact on vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

By hosting sign-up events and providing free birth certificates, PNABC has helped more than 20,900 individuals secure their birth certificates, unlocking access to essential services such as driver's licenses, tax file numbers, education, and housing.

PNABC held 13 new sign-up events across New South Wales and Queensland, assisting with the application of an additional 1,956 birth certificates this year alone. The program's reach has expanded, building and strengthening relationships with local Aboriginal land councils, medical centres, community groups, and organisations. These partnerships have ensured access to communities, helping even the most vulnerable individuals receive support.



## 51st NSW Koori Knockout

Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program (PNABC) attended the 51st NSW Koori Knockout in Tuggerah, where between 20,000 to 25,000 people gathered.

PNABC helped more than 60 individuals with birth certificate applications, ensuring they could access essential services. We appreciated the support we received from Hon. David Harris MP and Hon. Linda Burney MP, who acknowledged our vital work in the community on the day.

## Overcoming ID Barriers with PNABC

Luke from Marsden Park in Sydney struggled with obtaining birth certificates for his children and himself due to ID and paperwork issues, which impacted applications for schools and Medicare cards. When he learned about the PNABC event, he attended without hesitation. "I was so relieved to finally get it done," Luke said. He believes that more frequent events like the PNABC sign up events would significantly help families facing similar challenges.



## Navigating Birth Certificate Challenges

Monique attended a PNABC sign up event after struggling for years to obtain birth certificates. She faced significant barriers, saying, "The whole ID thing was my biggest issue because I don't have my own birth certificate. To be able to get a birth certificate you need a birth certificate, which is a bit complicated." Monique added, "Now that I've got it, it is a massive relief - a weight lifted off my shoulders." She hopes future processes will be simplified to help others facing similar challenges.



## UNICEF Australia's Partnership with PNABC

UNICEF Australia has continued its partnership with PNABC. Over the past two years, UNICEF has helped amplify PNABC's achievements through national media, raising awareness of the critical issues Aboriginal communities face.

A key focus for UNICEF has been highlighting the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal children who do not have their births registered or lack access to a birth certificate. The impact of unregistered births is devastating, it denies children access to early childhood education, and sporting and recreational activities that are critical foundations for their future development.

One of UNICEF's significant contributions this year has been the work they have achieved in creating the report "Certify Hope: Rights from the Start" and developing a national media campaign aimed at raising

awareness of the issue of late birth registrations.

The report indicates that 17% of Indigenous births are registered after the age of one, compared to just 3% of non-Indigenous births. This equates to around 12,600 unregistered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies each year. These delayed registrations can severely hinder a child's ability to access crucial services and opportunities.

UNICEF is calling on the Federal Government to commit to universal birth registration by embedding it in the Early Years Strategy and working with states and territories to make birth certificates more affordable and accessible.

State and Territory Governments are being urged to reform Registries of Births, Deaths, and Marriages

to provide better support to communities, strengthen community-based services, and resource early childhood development systems with wraparound support programs for those facing barriers to birth registration.

Pathfinders will continue to work with our partners and communities to provide this vital program, which has become a lifeline for many individuals. As PNABC grows, its goal is to further expand its reach, ensuring that no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is denied the opportunity a birth certificate provides, whether for education, healthcare, employment, or community participation.

PNABC is funded by Pathfinders and supported by public donations through the Chuffed.org fundraising platform.



UNICEF Australia staff conducted community consultations at three PNABC sign-up events this year held in Sydney, Kyogle, and Brisbane. Engaging with families to discuss the significance of birth registration, understand the barriers they face, and assess the support available to communities.





# Supporting sign-up Events in Remote Northern Territory Communities

In June, Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program Coordinator Ronald Naden travelled to the Northern Territory, where he collaborated with Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) to facilitate sign-up events in two remote communities, Ngukurr and Numbulwar.

## Ngukurr Community

Ngukurr, part of the Roper Gulf Regional Council, is home to approximately 250 residents. Due to its isolation, the community has limited access to essential services, making the BDM visit particularly vital.

The sign-up event in Ngukurr took place over two days, and the team was overwhelmed with applications, receiving a total of 106 by the end of the second day. It had been two years since BDM last visited this community, and the need for such services was evident. The event was enthusiastically received, with a noticeable increase in community members coming forward on the second day. Ron noted an interesting trend, with many families requesting name changes and asking to include fathers on birth certificates. This issue arises because, in many cases, mothers need to travel to major

centres to give birth alone, resulting in fathers being absent during the registration process and left off the paperwork.

## Numbulwar Community

After the successful event in Ngukurr, the team travelled an hour to Numbulwar, which has a population of approximately 600 people. Although the sign-up event in Numbulwar started slowly, word quickly spread, and soon there was a steady line of community members eager to apply for their birth certificates, resulting in a total of 94 applications.

The sign-up events in these communities differs significantly from those in other states. In contrast to other regions where individuals often wait weeks for their birth certificates, participants in Ngukurr and Numbulwar completed their applications on-site, receiving their certificates immediately.

The positive response towards BDM and their sign-up events from both Ngukurr and Numbulwar reflects the ongoing need for accessible services in remote areas and the importance of community engagement in this process.



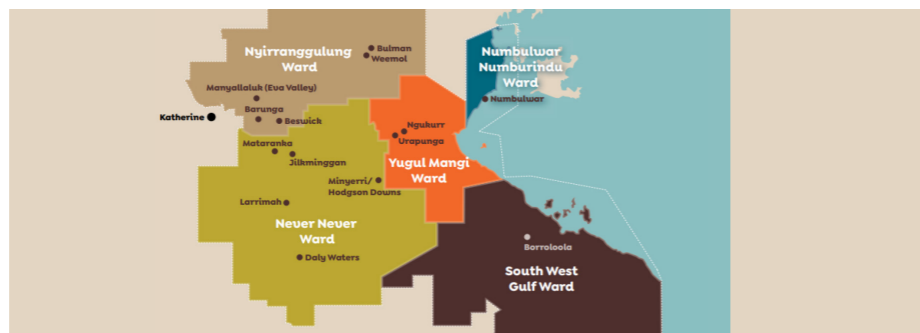
## Meeting with Local Councillors

During his time in Numbulwar, Ronald had the opportunity to meet with local Councillors Kathy-Ann Numamurdirdi and Edwin Nungumajbarr.

Their conversation revealed a shared familial connection. Both councillors are dedicated leaders committed to the development and advancement of their community and church, as well as the progression of Aboriginal issues.



PICTURED: A very happy mother with her son receiving his birth certificate at Numbulwar sign-up event.



## Roper Gulf Regional Council

The Ngukurr and Numbulwar communities are part of the Roper Gulf Regional Council, which comprises five wards: Nyirranggulung, Never Never, Yugul Mangi, Numburindi, and South West Gulf. The council spans from the Kakadu escarpment in the north to the Barkly Tablelands in the south, and from the Gulf of Carpentaria and QLD border in the east to the Stuart Highway in the west.



# Ashford Supported Playgroup - Bunbun

Bunbun Aboriginal Supported Playgroup is facilitated by Pathfinders' Inverell Family Youth Support Service. It provides a welcoming and safe environment for children and their parents or carers to connect with others in Ashford, NSW. This weekly program brings families and support services together to play, learn, and socialise, offering a range of engaging activities designed to support the health and wellbeing of both parents and children.

Each session features a variety of activities, including music, singing, arts and crafts, imaginative play, and outdoor experiences, creating a balanced and stimulating learning environment. The playgroup regularly hosts special guests who provide valuable educational insights on topics such as transitioning to school, parenting strategies, early intervention, child safety, and healthy living.

## Farm Safety Fun at Bunbun Playgroup

In November, Bunbun Playgroup hosted a special farm safety session featuring two adorable baby lambs, kindly brought in by a local family.

The children were thrilled to feed the lambs from bottles, showering them with affection and pats, and even giving them a playful tour of the playground. The lambs were a delightful addition to the playgroup, and by the end of the session, they were well fed and ready for a well deserved nap.



PICTURED: Bunbun wrapped up the year with a festive Christmas and pool party, gifting each child and family with a present while wishing everyone a happy and safe holiday break!





# Inverell Family Youth Support Services

The Inverell Family Youth Support Service (IFYSS) continued to provide essential support to families and young people living in Inverell, Tingha, and Ashford in NSW. IFYSS employs a diverse team to address specific community needs.

The Family Worker offers guidance to parents and carers of children aged 0 to 12 years, focusing on parenting strategies, life skills, and improving family relationships.

The Adolescent Support Worker assists individuals aged 13 to 25 with a wide range of issues, including education, bullying, Centrelink support, family matters, sexual health, drug and alcohol use, vocational training, and life skills development. Additionally, the Aboriginal Family Worker aims to enhance educational, social, and health outcomes for Aboriginal families and carers of children aged 0 to 12 years.

Throughout the year, IFYSS supported 500 clients by providing a comprehensive range of services focused on the main identified areas of need, including parenting, life skills, relationships, self-esteem, and coping strategies. This targeted support ensured that families and young people received the guidance needed to navigate various challenges effectively.

In 2023-2024, IFYSS introduced three new programs to better meet community needs:

The **Shark Cage Program** has been designed to foster personal growth, build confidence, raise awareness about domestic violence, and understand personal rights. Participants reported increased confidence and improved boundary-setting skills.

The **MoneyMinded Program**, launched in April and funded by ANZ,

trained staff as accredited coaches to deliver financial education, significantly benefiting clients' financial wellbeing.

The **Circle of Security Parenting Program** was also introduced to support parents in creating nurturing and secure family environments.

IFYSS maintained strong partnerships with local schools, delivering practical workshops such as a basic car skills session on vehicle maintenance and road safety, and a hygiene workshop in collaboration with Inverell High School's Clontarf Program. These initiatives were well-received by students and are set to be expanded to additional schools within Inverell.

The service actively engaged with the community throughout the year, participating in events with the Inverell Family Violence Team, local organisations, and support service providers. IFYSS also contributed to community Christmas celebrations and NAIDOC Week activities.

Collaboration with the Inverell Shire Council during Youth Week further connected young people with local services, enhancing community ties and awareness of available support.

## IFYSS Support Enhances Client's Access to Services

One of the year's standout successes was the support provided to a grandmother caring for her three grandchildren. When she first came to IFYSS, she was overwhelmed by the complex system of available services and struggled to access the help she needed.

Thanks to the dedication of one of our support workers, the client was able to navigate services like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), secure appropriate housing and obtain much needed identification documents. Her grandchildren are now receiving the early childhood education they need, and the family is thriving, thanks to the wraparound support provided by IFYSS. Local service providers have praised IFYSS for its proactive approach and the tangible outcomes achieved for this family.

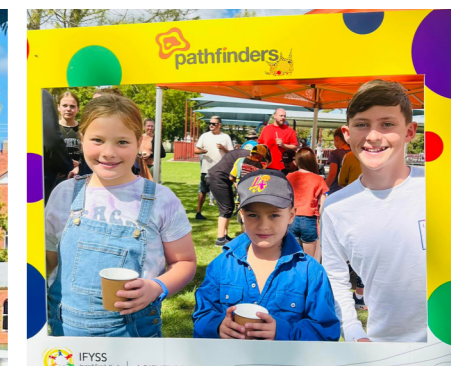
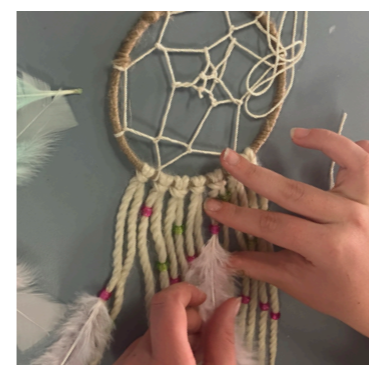


### Ashford Community Christmas Party

IFYSS supported the Ashford community Christmas party, hosted by the Ashford Local Aboriginal Land Council. The team coordinated a Colour Run, with the Ashford Fire Brigade helping to keep everyone cool. Armajun Aboriginal Health Services also contributed by providing free ice cream.



PICTURED: Inverell Family and Youth Support Service (IFYSS) proudly supported Youth Week events in Inverell, offering a hands-on Aboriginal clap stick making activity as part of the festivities. The event brought the community together, featuring a variety of activities, entertainment, and opportunities for young people to connect, learn, and celebrate.



## Empowering Young Minds Through Creativity

The Girls Empowerment Program, launched by Inverell Family Youth Support Services, was created to address the growing needs identified by a local high school and its students.

This program offers young girls a safe, supportive space to explore important topics such as friendships, healthy relationships, personal hygiene, healthy eating, body image, and self-care.

Through a range of activities, the girls are encouraged to express themselves, build confidence, develop life skills, and strengthen their sense of community and support.



# Family Connect and Support

**The Family Connect and Support (FCS) program, delivered in collaboration with Social Futures, offers vital assistance to families across the Mid North Coast. Through a network of support services, FCS helps individuals navigate challenges, access resources, and build connections within their communities.**

This year, FCS assisted 1,372 individuals facing a variety of challenges, including mental health issues, financial hardship, domestic violence, housing instability, and substance abuse. As homelessness surged this year, with a concerning increase in rough sleepers in Coffs Harbour and along the coast the demand for services intensified, placing additional pressure on already strained resources.

Despite these growing challenges, the team has shown remarkable resilience and commitment. The team's work goes beyond immediate assistance, with staff persistently following up with clients, attending community events, and advocating for families to access the services they need. Even when access to housing, mental health care, or other vital services has been delayed, the team has worked tirelessly to ensure that no family falls through the cracks. Their proactive approach has helped bridge gaps in service delivery, reinforcing Pathfinders' commitment to a holistic model of care.

FCS not only met but exceeded its program targets again this year, surpassing its key performance indicators (KPIs) by 51%. More than 718 outbound referrals were made ensuring families were connected to the right support services. Even during waiting periods, FCS staff maintained continuous engagement with families and young people, helping them to prevent further escalation of their concerns before receiving support.



## Promoting Healthy Relationships and Supporting Schools

FCS extended its reach into schools this year, delivering the LoveBites program at St Paul's College in Kempsey, which promotes healthy relationships among young people.

The program, which focuses on educating young people about respectful relationships, was facilitated by Michelle Mayhew, Tegan Degioia, and Ashley Howe (Social Futures in Schools FCS Worker), in collaboration with NSW Health. The artworks created by participants were so impressive that staff had them printed on the facilitator t-shirts for the program.

Mental health emerged again this year as a significant issue, with 88.6% of families supported by FCS having at least one child under 18 affected by mental illness. Additionally, 37.5% of clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. With 347 individuals self-referring to the program, it's clear that FCS has become a trusted support service and safe space for families and young people seeking support.

This year we saw an increase in the use of Pathfinders programs and services by FCS clients. Multiple clients participated in the Momentum Program and others were provided with assistance through Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program. There was also an increase in the number of clients who connected to support through our Support Your Path Disability Support Services.

## Launch of a New Mums and Bubs Yarning Group

The Mums and Bubs parenting group was launched by FCS this year with Many River Family Violence Prevention Services. The Group is held in the Bellbrook community and has been highly successful. With a large number of Aboriginal families attending, the program offers culturally respectful parenting guidance. FCS has facilitated group discussions aimed at addressing community needs while helping parents develop various parenting skills.



## Rollands Plains Upper Public School

FCS staff made regular visits to Rollands Plains Upper Public School, dedicating a full day each month to building connections and providing ongoing support to students, families, and staff. These visits have created strong relationships, ensuring young people and their families have the guidance and resources needed to navigate complex challenges and thrive within their community.

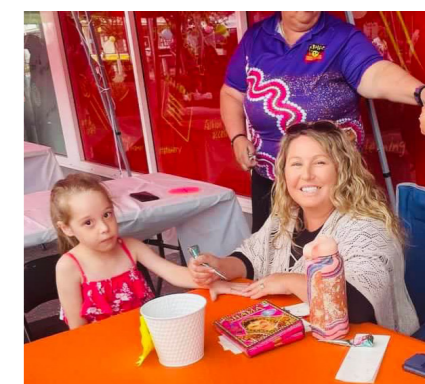
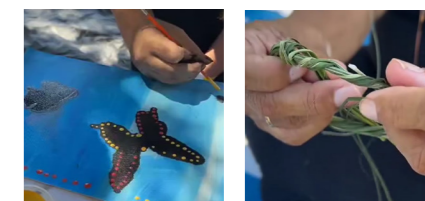


## 'A Day at Cresso'

During Youth Week this year, FCS attended 'A Day at Cresso' featuring a range of free activities, including surfing lessons and various beach sports. The event was proudly hosted by Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation in partnership with Pathfinders FCS, Durri AMS, Ready Mob, and the Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre.

## Culture in the Park

FCS proudly supported the Culture in the Park event on Dunghutti Country in January as part of the Indigenous Youth Connecting to Culture project. Community youth participated in traditional art, weaving, language, and clapstick making, and practiced throwing skills in a traditional Indigenous game. The event was facilitated by Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, with support from Pathfinders and the Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre.



## Laneway Festival

During Youth Week this year, FCS participated in the Kempsey Shire Council's Youth Laneway Festival, celebrating youth contributions to the community. The event included food trucks, live mural painting and street performances. FCS offered free henna tattooing. Young people created their own henna tattoos for Elders adding a special touch to the day.



# Out-of-Home Care

During the past financial year Pathfinders has continued its commitment to providing exceptional out-of-home care (OoHC) services. Our focus has remained on creating safe, nurturing environments for children and young people who require care away from their families. This report highlights our achievements, challenges, and future directions, underscoring our dedication to fostering resilience and well-being in the children we serve.

The 2023 – 2024 year has been significant for Pathfinders OoHC program, being awarded the Intensive Therapeutic Care (ITC) contract. After only being able to tender for the Mid North Coast, Pathfinders was successful in being granted contracts in both Mid North Coast and New England areas. This opened up a suite of additional placement options and services that Pathfinders can now offer which include:

**Intensive Therapeutic Care Homes** provide children and young people with a safe and home-like environment guided by an overarching philosophy of Therapeutic Care. They will holistically address the needs of children and young people through an intensive, time limited program of integrated individual and group therapeutic interventions, consistent and planned daily routines.

**Therapeutic Sibling Option Placement** is a care option for siblings or related groups of children

and young people who are cared for by permanent authorised live-in carers who provide 24 hour care, seven days a week, in a home provided and maintained by Pathfinders. The carers' primary role is to provide a safe, structured, nurturing and supportive environment to meet the emotional and physical needs of the children and young people. This placement option is designed to support sibling groups to live together as a family unit and nurture the attachment bond between family and kin.

**Therapeutic Supported Independent Living** is an integrated accommodation and support program that aims to prepare and support young people to make a smooth transition from OoHC to independent living, self-reliance and adulthood.

**Therapeutic Home Based Care** is a professional type of foster care as the children and young people receive the therapeutic services offered within ITC including Therapeutic Specialists and multidisciplinary specialist services. It must be provided in a home based, safe, structured and nurturing environment with Authorised Carers. Pathfinders has received positive feedback from external stakeholders and our funding body since transitioning to the ITC.

**Highlights for the Year:**

We currently have 98 Authorised Carers in total broken down into 60

general carers, 26 kinship carers and 12 Aboriginal carers. Over the last year we have supported 120 people in Foster Care. ITC – 21, SIL – 30, and ICM – 13. Over the past 12 months our Short Term Emergency Program (STEP) supported 39 young people. Seven children were restored back to their parents and guardianship of two young people was granted to their carers.

A new Interim Care House was opened in Inverell, bringing the total of Interim Care Houses to four. ITC Contract for Mid North Coast was awarded in March and in April for the New England region.

In June, Pathfinders presented at the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies on building strong partnerships with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), receiving positive feedback from the Office of Children's Guardian who were in attendance at our presentation.

Current locations where we are supporting carers and young people has extended further out to Western NSW, including Walgett and Boggabilla, as well as continuing to support carers of young people in Gympie, Queensland.

Pathfinders continued to support Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care while ensuring active efforts were made to transition these young people to Aboriginal Controlled-Community Organisations where there is capacity.

## Natalie Fitzgerald Celebrating 10 Years with Pathfinders

Natalie Fitzgerald joined Pathfinders 10 years ago and has held a number of roles working with young people.

Here she explains why she loves her job and the impact it has had on her family and life.

I was working at a school with high needs behaviours when I was encouraged to apply for a role with Pathways – I got the job and started working not long after. I had always had an interest in helping children and young people and my and husband and I were already foster carers to a teenage Aboriginal boy as well as respite carer for other families. So it was a natural extension to begin work with Pathfinders where I could make a difference to other young people.

Working with young people who are experiencing trauma based

behaviours is not for everyone. You must do it for the reasons because it is really hard work and tiring, as well as mentally challenging. But most children just want to feel loved and supported and by doing this we can make a difference.

This year I am celebrating 10 years with Pathfinders and I have worked as a direct carer, team leader and house leader. It is the young people who I find so inspiring – watching them grow into self-sufficient, independent adults with children of their own, creating their own families and new lives. I'm "Nanny Nat" to the children of eight young people I cared for.

My own three children have all worked for Pathfinders out-of-home care and have now all gone onto complete Advanced Diplomas in the community sector. They are working in the community services

sector with different agencies from Inverell, Armidale and Newcastle. My foster son has also just started a new career working with Vulnerable Aboriginal Youth in Cairns.

I am so proud of what we are achieving at Pathfinders. The staff I work with are incredible, dedicated and caring. No child deserves to experience trauma, but if they do then there is no better place to care for them than Pathfinders.



Dear Pathfinders Team, (a letter from a young person)

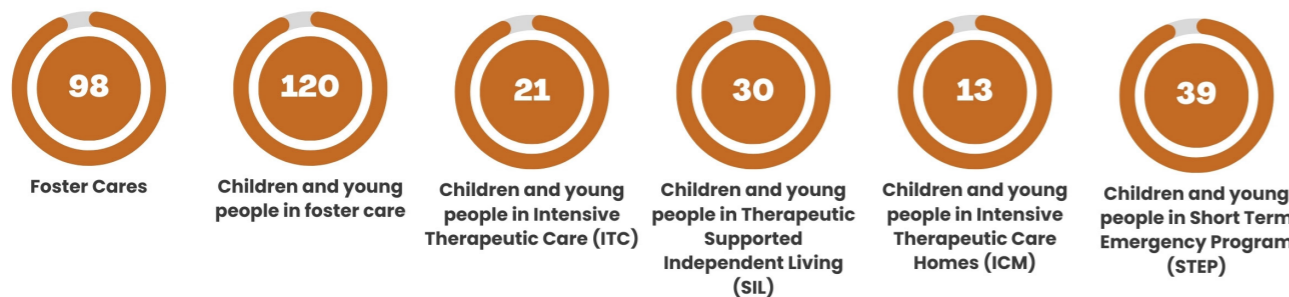
As I take a moment to reflect on my journey through Year 10 and the experience of earning my learner's licence, I am filled with immense gratitude for the impact you have all had on my life. If it weren't for your unwavering support, I can truly say that I might not have made it through this challenging year. You have been more than just mentors; you've been my guiding stars, lighting the way during some of the toughest moments. Throughout this past year, I encountered my fair share of ups and downs, but your encouragement and resources helped me find my way.

There were instances where I struggled with subjects and felt overwhelmed, yet your belief in my potential motivated me to push through. One of my most cherished memories was the day I finally grasped the concepts that had eluded me for so long, and that triumph was, in many ways, due to your patient guidance and tailored support.

Moreover, obtaining my learner's licence was a pivotal moment for me, and I could not have accomplished it without the skills and confidence I built through my time with Pathfinders. The hands-on support and practical workshops you provided were invaluable. I remember those driving practice sessions where we laughed and learned at the same time; those moments strengthen my belief in what I can achieve.

As we celebrated my graduation together, I felt a profound sense of joy and fulfilment. This celebration was not just about me; it represented the culmination of teamwork, perseverance, and the bonds we've formed. I am deeply thankful for every opportunity you've offered, allowing me to shine and share my accomplishments with a community that felt like family.

Looking ahead, the aspirations I hold in my heart have been ignited by the encouragement I received from each of you. With your support, I've learned that I can achieve anything I set my mind to, and for that, I am eternally grateful. Thank you, Pathfinders, for believing in me, for celebrating my successes, and for being an integral part of my journey.





## Non-Placement Support Services

A range of services are required to contribute to positive outcomes for children and young people in OOHC. These include services that provide opportunities for ongoing, meaningful connections to family and kin, support dynamic and transformative mentoring relationships, provide respite assistance, and support safe and supervised transportation services.

The team provides services for Pathfinders children and young people and supports requests from the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), other non-government organisations as well as private family court matters. These services include supervised birth family contact and transport, mentoring, respite and staffing for Alternative Care Arrangements. NPSS also provides support for carers through

transport to appointments, school, respite placements and changes of placement.

Throughout the year, Pathfinders' Non-Placement Support Services (NPSS) continued to play an important role in supporting a child's right to have contact with their family and community. NPSS provides a safe, environment for children and young people to maintain connections with their birth families. NPSS provides essential support to families in facilitating quality family time that can strengthen child/parent relationships, support children's cultural identities and connections and help develop and maintain parenting skills that support restoration.

The program's goal is to enhance the wellbeing of families and to

encourage a child or young persons' sense of belonging and hope.

Pathfinders is an approved provider of these services through the Department of Communities and Justice Casework Support Scheme (CSS). Each service is designed for children and young people in out-of-home care (OoHC) and their families through individual client agreements.

During the financial year, the NPSS team of 36 staff worked with 84 families including 23 Aboriginal families, to support 939 family visits, 583 transports, 214 mentoring sessions, 49 in-home supervision supports and travelled over 350 000 kilometres. NPSS provided services to seven other NGOs and 12 DCJ locations, ranging from Sydney to Moree.

### What do you think young people get out of mentoring?

Max, one of our dedicated youth mentors, shared his thoughts on what he thinks young people get out of mentoring: "When a young person chooses to engage with a mentor, they get someone who isn't their usual guy. This means they have someone to open up to with no strings attached! They also get a solid support foundation from their mentor which leads them to feeling better and more assured of themselves. Ultimately, young people who engage often with a mentor receive an increased self-esteem, a furthered appreciation of life and an easier path through their issues."



### New Specialised Youth Mentoring Program Launched by NPSS

This year, NPSS proudly launched a new Specialised Youth Mentoring program across the New England and Mid North Coast regions, significantly expanding the range of mentors available to support our young people.

This program provides structured and trusting relationships that bring children and young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement, whilst engaging in a specific area of interest that has been identified by the young person such as cooking. NPSS Specialised Youth Mentors use their acquired expertise to help build those skills of children and young people in a safe environment and with a trauma informed approach. Mentors are not only great listeners but also provide a positive, non-judgemental relationship, offering guidance and encouragement to help young people navigate their daily lives.



## Equine Psychotherapy for Young People in Foster Care and Out-of-Home Care

This year, Pathfinders, in partnership with Pink Olive Farm near Inverell, expanded its therapeutic programs to include Equine Psychotherapy, offering unique healing experiences for young people in foster care and out-of-home care. Delivered in one hour sessions by a qualified counsellor, the program harnesses the calming presence and authenticity of horses to help participants develop essential social and emotional skills. These skills are crucial for overcoming trauma and fostering emotional resilience, enabling young people to gain a deeper understanding of themselves

and the world around them.

Horses offer genuine connection and provide a non-judgemental environment where participants can safely explore their emotions and build self-awareness. Through this interaction, the sessions promote confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve social skills, equipping young people with tools for healthier relationships and personal growth. Pathfinders introduced this program as part of its commitment to offering holistic, innovative care that complements traditional counselling approaches while addressing the

unique needs of children and young people in care.

In collaboration with Pink Olive Farm, Pathfinders also launched the Empowered Girls Program, a series of transformative Equine Psychotherapy workshops tailored specifically for girls aged 12 to 15.

These workshops helped participants enhance communication, strengthen relationships, and tap into their inner wisdom. By exploring the principles of trust, respect, and connection, the workshops provided valuable skills for personal growth and empowerment.

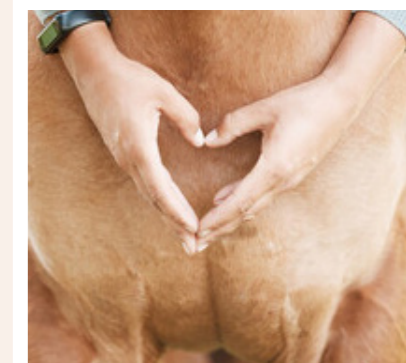
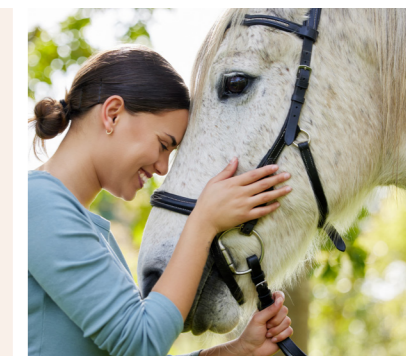
### Empowered Girls Program

During the school holidays, Pathfinders partnered with Pink Olive Farm to launch the Empowered Girls Program, a unique Equine Psychotherapy workshop designed specifically for girls aged 12 to 15. This free program offered participants the chance to connect with horses in a safe and supportive environment, where they learned about trust, respect, and communication.

Through hands on activities, the girls discovered how to build strong, healthy relationships, both with the horses and each other. The workshops provided a space

for them to tap into their inner strengths, boosting self-esteem and self-awareness. By working alongside these gentle animals, the girls learned to overcome challenges, regulate their emotions, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves.

Participants left with a renewed sense of confidence and valuable life skills, helping them navigate their everyday lives with greater resilience and self-assurance. Pathfinders is proud to offer initiatives like these, empowering young people to grow, heal, and thrive.





# Specialist Homelessness Support Services

This year, our Specialist Homelessness Support services (SHS) team proudly achieved Australian Services Excellence Standards (ASES) accreditation, ensuring the continued delivery of our services through to 2026.

As part of a service restructure, we appointed new coordinators for the Inverell Women's and Children's Refuge, the Armidale Youth Refuge, and SHS outreach services. Our outreach teams in Armidale, Glen Innes, and Inverell also expanded to better meet the growing needs of our clients.

The ongoing housing crisis and rising cost of living have significantly impacted individuals and families, leading to an increase in clients seeking support. Many referrals this year came through Homes North Community Housing via Temporary Accommodation placements. Many clients not in temporary housing were living in overcrowded conditions with family or friends, often with multiple family members sharing beds or resorting to makeshift tents in backyards.

Over the past financial year, we have been able to support 455 clients in Armidale, Inverell, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. Despite the increasing demand, our dedicated staff have worked tirelessly to avoid placing clients on waitlists, going above and

beyond to meet the needs of the community.

Limited housing availability and financial strain have stretched our resources this past financial year. Of the clients we assisted, 27.6% identified with domestic violence and family breakdown continuing to be major drivers of homelessness in the New England region. Additionally, 48.35% of our clients identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. To better serve these clients, 20% of our SHS staff also identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, ensuring culturally responsive and appropriate care.

Our community partnerships played a vital role in providing additional support, resources, and training for clients. SHS hosted multiple courses and workshops such as Rent It, Keep It, facilitated by Flourish (New England Regional Sustainable Housing and Homelessness Program) and New England Western Tenancy Advice Advocacy Service (NEWTAAS), which empowered women to understand their tenancy rights and responsibilities. Additionally, our SHS teams conducted workshops focused on budgeting, life skills, and mental health, equipping clients with essential tools for daily living and emotional well-being.

Staff development remained a priority for us this year, with our team

becoming MoneyMinded Coaches through training funded by ANZ and delivered by The Smith Family. This training equipped staff with valuable tools to help clients manage budgeting, debt, and financial planning, allowing us to offer tailored workshops that empower clients to regain financial control.

SHS staff also completed nine days of the Horse Wisdom Program as part of Equine Therapy with Pink Olive Farm Equine Connections.

Our SHS teams also attended key conferences this year, including Platform 1225 in Brisbane in May, which focused on youth homelessness, and the Understanding Young People Doing it Tough conference in Armidale which saw an impressive line-up of guest speakers involved in youth homelessness.

Once again, we received generous support from the community, with donations of meals, gifts, and food hampers providing essential assistance to clients. In addition, we were able to provide tenancy boxes this year filled with household essentials to clients transitioning from our refuges into new homes, helping them settle in and start the next chapter of their lives with dignity and support.



## Pathfinders at UNE Lifesaver Day

Each year, the University of New England (UNE) welcomes new students to Armidale with Lifesaver Day, a key event during orientation that helps students settle into the community. The Pathfinders Armidale Youth Refuge, Support Your Path, Out of Home Care, and Non-Placement Support Services teams engaged with students, providing information on the essential services we offer to support those in need. Additionally, our teams highlighted a variety of job opportunities for those eager to make a positive impact in the community. The event was a valuable opportunity to connect with new students and showcase Pathfinders' role in supporting individuals and families across the region.

## 16 Days Of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, our SHS services actively hosted and participated in several events across the region to honour the women who have tragically lost their lives to domestic violence and to promote advocacy and support within our communities to end violence against women.

Pathfinders hosted the Clothesline Project in Armidale and Inverell, a powerful visual display where survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault shared their stories by decorating t-shirts. These shirts were hung on a public clothesline for the community to view, honouring victims and raising awareness about

gender-based violence. In Inverell, Pathfinders also held the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event, where men wore high heels and marched through the streets to raise awareness of domestic violence and gender-based violence. This event encouraged community members, especially men, to stand in solidarity with women, promoting understanding and advocacy for the prevention of violence against women.

Pathfinders staff attended candlelight vigils held across the region on Domestic Violence Remembrance Day, paying tribute to victims and standing against domestic violence in our communities.



## Community Support

We are extremely thankful for the generous support we received from the community and local businesses during the Christmas season. The donations of gifts and food hampers, helped make the holidays a little brighter for families in our refuges, providing essential support and joy during a difficult time.



## Violence Prevention Month 2024

In May, Inverell Specialist Homelessness Support (SHS) staff stood in solidarity with the community to take a stand against domestic and family violence (DV). They joined the Inverell Community Violence Prevention Team to honour and remember those who have lost their lives to DV and to support those who continue to endure its effects.



## National Children and Youth Homelessness Conference

In July last year, staff from Pathfinders' Specialist Homelessness Support Services attended the National Children and Youth Homelessness Conference in Melbourne, engaging in critical discussions aimed at shaping the future for children and young people experiencing homelessness in Australia.





## The Clothesline Project

### Supporting Survivors and Raising Awareness

This year, Pathfinders hosted Clothesline Project events in Armidale and Inverell, joining a global movement dedicated to supporting survivors of violence and raising community awareness. Originating in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, the project provides a platform for those affected by violence to express their emotions, share their stories, and begin the healing process through creativity.

At the heart of the Clothesline Project is the act of decorating t-shirts. For survivors, this process can be a therapeutic way to share their experiences, whether by expressing

their pain, resilience, or hope. Each shirt tells a personal story, with a colour coded system representing different forms of abuse, highlighting the broad spectrum of violence that affects our communities. Participants not directly affected are encouraged to create messages of support and solidarity, showing that survivors are not alone.

During the events, the decorated shirts are displayed on a clothesline, creating a powerful visual representation of the voices and stories of survivors. The public display serves not only to raise awareness

but also to raise community support and understanding.

Pathfinders' Clothesline Project events also provides essential resources, including information on recognising and preventing violence, advice on how to support someone experiencing abuse, and details on local services for survivors. By bringing the community together in this way, the events aim to break the silence around violence and offer a safe space for healing, connection, and empowerment.

#### Armidale

Pathfinders, Armidale event was well supported by the community, with multiple local services coming together to take part and show their support. The event provided a safe and welcoming space for participants to share their stories and experiences. Supporters on the day included headspace, Armidale police and the University of New England.



#### Inverell

Our Inverell event took place at the Inverell Club, providing a welcoming and supportive space for participants to share their stories.



## The Reality of Violence in Australia

The Clothesline Project provides a powerful platform for raising awareness about the ongoing issue of violence in our communities. In 2023-2024, more than 100,000 women sought assistance from homelessness services due to domestic and family violence, and tragically, more than 50 women lost their lives to violence at the hands of a current or former partner.

According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), one in six

women has experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or previous partner since the age of 15. Disturbingly, Indigenous women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-Indigenous women, highlighting a significant disparity that requires urgent attention and support.

By facilitating the Clothesline Project in multiple communities, Pathfinders is taking an active stance against this reality. Each shirt displayed

represents a survivor's voice, telling a story that might otherwise go unheard. It is a call to action for greater support, awareness, and resources to combat violence at all levels. Events like these not only empower survivors to share their experiences but also provide a sense of solidarity, showing those affected that they are not alone, and that their community stands with them in their journey towards healing.



# Support Your Path

The Support Your Path (SYP) program offers innovative, personalised care services to individuals with disabilities. Our primary aim is to empower participants to embrace life fully and achieve their personal goals, promoting greater independence while encouraging active participation and continuous learning.

This year, SYP has focused on expanding services across the New England and Mid North Coast regions, making significant strides in participant growth, policy development, and community engagement. The program has achieved notable milestones this year, including an increase in participant numbers since January 2024, with 12 new participants in the Mid North Coast and 10 in the New England North West. Additionally, policies and procedures were

successfully reviewed, approved, and published.

Flowlogic was introduced and implemented as a comprehensive customer relationship management system that enhances the program's capabilities in rostering, reporting, and invoicing. To support ongoing training for our support workers, Pathfinders has purchased and customised a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Disability Specific Training Platform designed to equip support workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high quality assistance, aligning with NDIS practice standards and Pathfinders' policies.

A major highlight this year was the successful completion of the NDIS Registration Audit, which demonstrated compliance with NDIS practice standards. Pathfinders

received commendations for the efforts made by both the program and the organisation. The success of the audit was met with positive feedback from both participants and staff.

Throughout the year, our staff have actively engaged with the community by participating in various events, including the Living Well Expo in Tamworth, Lifesaver Day Expo at the University of New England, Pride in the Park in Armidale, and community consultation sessions in Tamworth, as well as several events on the Mid North Coast.

Looking ahead to the coming year, the team is focused on program growth, while ensuring quality service provision to our NDIS participants. To do so, SYP is collaborating with TAFE NSW to develop a customised training program to upskill SYP staff.



## 2024 Living Well Expo

In March this year, our team made a vibrant appearance at the Living Well Expo held at the Coffs Harbour Exhibition Pavilion. This annual event attracts around 2,000 attendees from various regions, creating a valuable platform for connecting with individuals, families, and carers seeking information and support.

Sami Hemmings our Senior Disabilities Coordinator, reflected on the experience, saying: "Being part of this expo was incredibly rewarding. It allowed us to engage with new participants and explore the wide range of supports available in the Coffs Harbour area. Whether it's for community engagement or life skills development, it's clear there are fantastic supports and products now accessible. It was a great day for us as service providers to discover what else is out there to help our clients live their best lives."

## Links For Life Disability Expo

Our Support Your Path team participated in the Links for Life Disability Expo in Tamworth. This vibrant event brought together individuals, families, and service providers to explore the latest in disability support and services. The expo featured a wide range of exhibitors, informative workshops, and engaging discussions, creating a welcoming atmosphere for all attendees.

Our team was on hand to connect with the community, providing insights into NDIS support options and showcasing the diverse services available through Pathfinders. The expo was a valuable opportunity for attendees to learn about resources, meet support workers, and gain a better understanding of how to navigate the NDIS system.



## Pride In The Park

In February, Armidale came alive with its very first Pride in the Park celebration, thanks to the incredible support of local community groups, organisations, and the Armidale Regional Council. Curtis Park was buzzing with energy as our Support Your Path team joined the festivities, enjoying an afternoon of live entertainment, community service stalls, children's activities, and vibrant food and drink stands. It was a day filled with love, diversity, and a strong sense of togetherness.

Our team was pleasantly surprised to meet the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, who was visiting Armidale and joined in the celebration.



Pathfinders Ltd  
Annual Report 2024

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# Tilbuster Station

**This year has seen a period of growth for our Tilbuster team, with new staff and young people joining us, allowing for a wider range of agricultural, construction, and life skills activities. As a multifunctional youth and family centre, we have made substantial strides toward establishing this property as a regional hub for youth and family development.**

The addition of new staff members has enhanced our service delivery, providing our young people with additional mentors who are supporting them in gaining a wide range of skills. As we continue to expand our services, we can offer more opportunities for young people to develop and complete exciting new projects, further improving their experiences and life skills.

Throughout the year, Tilbuster again welcomed a variety of visitors, including the Shadow Minister for Youth Justice, Hon. Aileen Macdonald OAM MLC. During her visit, she observed the impactful work done by our young people and mentors. She took the time to connect with our youth, listening to their stories and sharing their experiences. She toured our other services in Armidale, including the Armidale Youth Refuge and the Supported Independent Living Facility at Rose Villa.

Tilbuster has always been a place for engaging busy young people in meaningful, hands on projects that benefit both themselves and the broader community. This year, our young people participated in a range of activities, helping to develop strong work ethics and essential life skills. They planted pumpkins and helped to organise and attend the Pumpkin Run, learned various construction and agricultural skills, and attended internal training sessions focused on work, health and safety practices.



PICTURED: Shadow Minister for Youth Justice, Hon. Aileen Macdonald OAM MLC, visiting Tilbuster Station, with CEO Alan Brennan, Station Manager Anthony Simmons, and Board Member Rosemary Curtis OAM.



This year's standout achievement has been our new partnership with Kindly Animal Sanctuary in Armidale, which is dedicated to rescuing injured and abandoned animals.

All the young people at Tilbuster actively volunteered at the sanctuary, gaining first-hand experience in animal care while contributing to farm maintenance. They shared their knowledge and skills to build shelters, erect new fences, clear trees, and help keep the property clean and fire safe. Our collaboration with Coles' SecondBite program not only

supported our homelessness services but has also provided us with surplus food scraps to feed the animals, making visits to the sanctuary a highlight for many of our young people each week.

Construction has become popular among our young people this year, and we are following their lead by introducing more construction projects next year, with young people wanting to build custom made dog kennels, bird aviaries, and garden beds that can be sold to the public to help fund additional initiatives.

## Fijian Visitors

Over the Christmas holidays, Tilbuster Station welcomed a group of Fijian volunteers from the remote island of Kadavu who are now working and living in Grafton in NSW.

The visit was organised after the group expressed interest in Pathfinders' work. The local Armidale Fijian Men's group supported during their visit with daily meals, and a special Christmas dinner that brought everyone together.

The Fijian volunteers helped out around the farm during their stay and have already expressed an interest in making this an annual tradition to come and visit Tilbuster Station during the holidays.



## Working With The Kindly Animal Sanctuary

This year, a new partnership was formed between the Tilbuster Station team and Kindly Animal Sanctuary in Armidale. Led by Kindly Manager, Naomi Hooper, the partnership has allowed young people from Tilbuster to visit the sanctuary every Tuesday.

With support from the Coles SecondBite program, which provides surplus vegetables and bread, the young people engage in feeding, caring for, and learning about the sanctuary's rescued animals. These hands-on experiences offer them the opportunity to develop new skills and build confidence and empathy through meaningful interactions.

The collaboration's success has inspired plans for future projects, including rebuilding fences and a range of small construction projects. With the support of local land care groups, we also aim to help plant 7,500 eucalyptus trees to create a koala sanctuary.



10 Years of Generosity

# 10 Years of The Pumpkin Run



When we started the Pumpkin Run 10 years ago we could never have envisaged the impact that the Run would have. From what emerged from a seed of an idea from our young people a decade ago when they looked at the pumpkins they had grown on Tilbuster Station to what it has become today is nothing short of remarkable.

As the rising cost of living increased the demand for food relief this year, forcing more people to turn to charities and soup kitchens for support, the generosity shared by the Pumpkin Run team in bringing fresh, healthy pumpkins to those in need was hugely appreciated. With these growing demands, our team was able to provide some relief for services, delivering hundreds of pumpkins to soup kitchens, charities, and community services in Armidale, Inverell, Uralla, Coffs Harbour, Taree, Kempsey, Newcastle, and Sydney.

Throughout the Pumpkin Run this year, our young people prepared and served more than 500 meals. Support services were incredibly grateful for the donations and for the young people's involvement in the kitchens and their engagement with clients, chatting to everyone and making meaningful connections.

Meg Norling from the Community Kitchen in Taree said: "Our diners are thrilled to see and have young people

serving them lunch. It's the fresh faces and the fact that the young people want to be here and give back to the community. Having them here really promotes a sense of community, which is so important. Pathfinders is providing a fantastic opportunity for young people to experience the joy of giving back, and that is really valuable."

The Pumpkin Run concluded with a celebratory morning tea this year at Government House, where Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC warmly welcomed our pumpkin runners. She praised Pathfinders for creating incredible opportunities for young people and applauded the Pumpkin Run's journey over the last decade - from planting seeds to delivering much needed meals.

CEO of Pathfinders, Alan Brennan, spoke at Government House, reflecting on the extraordinary growth of the Pumpkin Run, which began as a small idea and has become one of Pathfinders' flagship programs.

He thanked the many organisations and partners who have supported Pathfinders over the years, acknowledged the hard work of the young people involved, and commended the dedicated staff at Tilbuster Station for their leadership and dedication to the project.



## 500 Meals Provided

This year, the Pumpkin Run team prepared and served over 500 meals, supporting soup kitchens, charities and community services across Armidale, Inverell, Uralla, Coffs Harbour, Taree, Newcastle, and Sydney.



## From Planting to Harvest - A Team Effort

This year, young people and staff rolled up their sleeves to plant over 8,000 pumpkin seeds for the Pumpkin Run.

The seeds included two varieties: Queensland Blue and Butternut pumpkins. These were carefully chosen for their resilience and ability to thrive in the region, ensuring a harvest of larger, more robust pumpkins.

Once the pumpkins were ready to harvest, young people from across Pathfinders' services came together at Tilbuster to harvest and sort them. The pumpkins were carefully stored and packed, ready for delivery.



# The Impact of The Pumpkin Run

**Over the past decade, the Pumpkin Run has become a key community project for Pathfinders, offering children and young people the chance to develop a wide range of skills while building resilience and independence.**

Based on the Circle of Courage framework which emphasises Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity, the Pumpkin Run provides young people with valuable experiences. By participating in the project, young people engage in meaningful activities that promote personal growth, skill development, and a strong sense of community.

The Pumpkin Run encourages acts of generosity while teaching valuable life skills and building connections within the community. The Pumpkin Run brings together young people from across our services, showing them how to work as a team, build relationships, and support one another, which strengthens their sense of belonging and connection.

Each year, a new group of young people takes part in the Pumpkin Run, but it's always rewarding to see those who've participated the year before return. Our returning young people bring with them the skills and knowledge from the previous year that they happily share with others becoming valuable young mentors. Participating in the Pumpkin Run helps our young people reach personal milestones, giving them a sense of accomplishment and mastery.

The project also offers valuable opportunities for leadership and independence. From planning to organising logistics and managing the Pumpkin Run itself, young people take on key roles that influence the project's success. This responsibility promotes self reliance and allows our young people to make decisions and lead different aspects of the project.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the Pumpkin Run is its emphasis on generosity. Throughout the project,

our young people experience the joy of giving, starting from growing pumpkins from seeds, to harvesting them, and finally delivering them to a charity or individual in need. Witnessing the genuine gratitude of those they help reinforces the importance of giving back and demonstrates how their efforts can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.



## The Pumpkin Run Song

Pathfinders have pumpkins they have a run each year  
It all began ten years ago so let's all give a cheer  
Our youth are out there helping their generosity shines  
New South Wales needs you the pumpkin tastes divine

These kids help grow the pumpkins and also cook great meals  
They feed some hungry people and happiness they feel  
Many tonnes of pumpkin are grown then harvested too  
These kids are very clever and know just what to do

They drive the great big pumpkins in trucks to Sydney town  
They drop in for a cuppa at Government House they're found  
They're busy helping others who sometimes need support  
The people on the Pumpkin Run much joy to others have brought  
We thank you for your caring you're helping others out  
The kids who do the pumpkin run we love that you're about





## DIRECTORS REPORT 2024

Your directors present their report on the company for the financial year ended 30 June 2024.

### Principal Activities

The Company (called Pathfinders Ltd) is a public company limited by guarantee.

The Company is a charitable institution dedicated to:

- Providing housing and supported accommodation for the homeless, including operating refuges for youth, women, and children.
- Supporting disadvantaged families, individuals, children, and young people.
- Offering 24/7 Out of Home Residential and Foster Care for children and young people under the guardianship of the NSW Minister for Communities and Justice.
- Assisting people with disabilities to engage more effectively in their communities.
- Delivering rural skills, child protection, family support, youth services, youth homelessness, and vocational training programs for disadvantaged young people.
- Alleviating poverty.
- Providing training, work readiness and educational programs.

Pathfinders (ABN 64 146 004 524) operates as a nonprofit organisation registered under the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission Act 2012, functioning as a company limited by guarantee without a share capital. All our Directors serve voluntarily and do not receive any compensation for their roles. The Board of Directors is responsible for formulating both short-term and long-term strategies for Pathfinders, guided by the organisation's Constitution and legal obligations.

The execution of these strategies and the day-to-day management of the organisation are officially entrusted to the Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Team by the Board. To address complex matters, the Board has established committees that delve into specific issues, with the outcomes of these committee meetings reported at subsequent Board meetings.

### Pathfinders Key achievements:

1. Successful ITC Tender submission won and implemented across Mid North Coast and New England.
2. Successful audit and/or re-accreditation of NDIS, CHP and ASES.

3. Develop and host Pathfinders Cultural Camps at Pathfinders Tilbuster Station farm.
4. Development of Pathfinders Education and Learning Strategy including commencing the process to become a Registered Training Organisation in partnership with Procure Spot.
5. Implementation and development of activities for Equine Assisted Learning programs.
6. Celebration of the Pathfinders 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Pumpkin Run.
7. Expansion of Pathfinders geographical footprint to the Northern Territory and Office setup.
8. Pathfinders attendance and Key Speaker Presentation at ACWA's annual conference 2024.
9. Successful Organisation registration with the REDRESS Scheme.
10. Development and implementation of a range of offerings for Pathfinders Staff Wellbeing programs.
11. Expanding and developing the Pathfinders OOHC Program, including foster care, ITC, STEP, IPA and ICM's aligning with DCJ OOHC Reforms and Permanency Support Program.
12. Development and execution of MOU with Armajun Aboriginal Medical Service.
13. Continuation of growth of Pathfinders assets including purchase of additional 7 properties. One property includes 2 houses, another property includes 1 house and 3 SDA approved units.
14. Continuation of partnership with UNICEF Australia.
15. Expanding on existing Education and Training services already offered including Aboriginal Early Years programs, Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Playgroups, School Programs, Education Support and Breakfast clubs, developing Marie Delaney Training centre and commercial kitchen and training centre at the Royal in Glen Innes.
16. Commencement of building works and improvements including cladding at the Royal in Glen Innes and new shed at Tilbuster in Armidale.
17. Growing and Expanding Specialist Disability Accommodation and Support Your Path (NDIS) to support individuals to thrive in their community, support their independence, and live their life freely with hope and equal opportunity.

18. Delivering a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Birth Certificate Program, ensuring access to a birth certificate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and continuing to crowd fund.
19. Contributing to State-wide policy development through participation on peak bodies and committees such as ACWA, Yfoundations, Foyer Australia and NCOSS.
20. Implementing frameworks for Pathfinders Strategic Plan (2020-2025) with defined organisational KPIs for progress tracking, fully supported by Scaling Up methodology.
21. Facilitating collaboration between DCJ, Health, and FCS providers to integrate FCSS with NSW Child Protection Programs, in line with recommendations from Pathfinders Patron, The Hon. James Wood.
22. Implementation of HSRs across Pathfinders geography and establishment and implementation of WHS working groups.
23. Finalist in multiple Business Awards across our geography:

2024 Quality Business Awards (Tamworth Business Chamber)

- Finalist – Excellence in Large Business
- Finalist – Employer of Choice

2024 Mid-Coast Business Awards (Taree)

- Finalist – Outstanding Community Organisation
- Finalist – Excellence in Large Business
- Finalist – Employer of Choice

2024 NSW Youth Work Awards (State Award)

- Finalist – Outstanding Work with Young People
- Finalist – Outstanding Therapeutic Residential Care Team
- Finalist – Outstanding Youth Participation (Tilbuster Station)

**Directors**

The names of the directors in office at any time during, or since the end of the financial year are:

**Directors Name**

- Korrina Schultz
- Rosemary Curtis
- Mark Keogh
- Alex Shaw
- Damian Hall
- Leeah Daley
- Kevin Emanuel

**Meetings of Directors**

During the financial year, 7 meetings of the Board of Directors were held and the attendances by each Director during the year were as follows:

**Director's Meetings**

	Eligible to attend	Number attended
Rose Curtis	7	7
Alex Shaw	7	7
Korrina Schultz	7	7
Mark Keogh	7	2
Damian Hall	7	4
Kevin Emanuel	4	3
Leeah Daley	2	2

## Membership Details

Pathfinders Ltd is a public company limited by guarantee and no shares or options are issued. If the company is wound up, the constitution states that each member is required to contribute a maximum of \$10.00 each towards meeting any outstanding obligations of the company.

Membership Class	Number of Members	Individual Members Contribution on winding up of Company	Total Members contribution on winding up of Company
Ordinary Members	25	\$10	\$250
Associate Members	5	\$10	\$50
Total	30	\$10	\$300

## Auditors' Independence Declaration

A copy of the auditor's independence declaration as required under section 60-40 of the ACNC Act 2012 is attached to these financial statements.

Signed in accordance with a resolution of the Board of Directors.

Director

Dated: 13 November 2024

Director



**Crowe Central North**  
 ABN 91 680 058 554  
 134 Taylor Street  
 Armidale NSW 2350 Australia  
 PO Box 660  
 Armidale NSW 2350 Australia  
 Tel 02 6776 5100  
 Fax 02 6772 9492  
 www.crowe.com.au

## AUDITORS' INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION UNDER SECTION 60-40 OF THE AUSTRALIAN CHARITIES AND NOT-FOR-PROFITS COMMISSION ACT 2012 TO THE BOARD MEMBERS OF PATHFINDERS LTD

ABN 64 146 004 524

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, during the financial year to 30 June 2024 there have been:

- (i) no contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* in relation to the audit; and
- (ii) no contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.

## CROWE CENTRAL NORTH

**Kylie Ellis**  
**Partner**  
 Registered Company Auditor  
 134 Taylor Street  
 ARMIDALE NSW 2350

Dated: 13 November 2024

The title 'Partner' conveys that the person is a senior member within their respective division, and is among the group of persons who hold an equity interest (shareholder) in its parent entity, Findex Group Limited. The only professional service offering which is conducted by a partnership is external audit, conducted via the Crowe Australasia external audit division and Unison SMSF Audit. All other professional services offered by Findex Group Limited are conducted by a privately owned organisation and/or its subsidiaries.

Findex (Aust) Pty Ltd, trading as Crowe Australasia is a member of Crowe Global, a Swiss Verein. Each member firm of Crowe Global is a separate and independent legal entity. Findex (Aust) Pty Ltd and its affiliates are not responsible or liable for any acts or omissions of Crowe Global or any other member of Crowe Global. Crowe Global does not render any professional services and does not have an ownership or partnership interest in Findex (Aust) Pty Ltd. Services are provided by Crowe Central North, an affiliate of Findex (Aust) Pty Ltd. Liability limited by a scheme approved under Professional Standards Legislation. Liability limited other than for acts or omissions of financial services licensees.  
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STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
Revenue	2	54,452,704	48,478,251
Other Income	3	529,385	1,140,420
Interest revenue calculated using the effective interest method		290,297	89,649
Administration expenses		(2,884,448)	(2,569,274)
Borrowing costs		(361,648)	(264,622)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	4	(2,072,747)	(1,597,837)
Employee benefits expense		(33,392,420)	(29,302,552)
Occupancy costs		(14,963,283)	(12,698,875)
<b>Surplus before income tax expense</b>		<b>1,597,840</b>	<b>3,275,160</b>
Income tax expense	1	-	-
<b>Surplus after income tax expense</b>		<b>1,597,840</b>	<b>3,275,160</b>
Other comprehensive income		-	-
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>		<b>1,597,840</b>	<b>3,275,160</b>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	8,807,335	5,945,977
Trade and other receivables	6	1,298,841	1,999,291
Financial assets	8	2,789,980	4,329,655
Contract assets	7	1,558,125	347,478
Other assets	9	373,342	226,181
<b>TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>14,827,623</b>	<b>12,848,582</b>
<b>NON CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Property, plant and equipment	10	14,945,227	7,130,957
Intangible assets	11	2,799	33,397
Right-of-use assets	12	3,295,775	3,221,069
<b>TOTAL NON CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>18,243,801</b>	<b>10,385,423</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>33,071,424</b>	<b>23,234,005</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>			
<b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Trade and other payables	13	3,074,661	2,476,493
Contract liabilities	14	1,872,412	1,171,143
Financial liabilities	15	716,330	82,251
Provisions	16	1,495,004	1,468,739
Lease liabilities	17	1,180,237	922,438
<b>TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>8,338,644</b>	<b>6,121,064</b>
<b>NON CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>			
Financial liabilities	15	7,844,322	1,895,000
Provisions	16	632,930	383,181
Lease liabilities	17	2,254,961	2,432,033
<b>TOTAL NON CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>10,732,213</b>	<b>4,710,214</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>		<b>19,070,857</b>	<b>10,831,278</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<b>14,000,567</b>	<b>12,402,727</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Asset maintenance and refurbishment reserve	18	100,000	100,000
Planned maintenance reserve	18	394,483	352,217
Accumulated funds		13,506,084	11,950,510
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>		<b>14,000,567</b>	<b>12,402,727</b>



PATHFINDERS LTD  
ABN 64 146 004 524  
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION  
AS AT 30 JUNE 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	8,807,335	5,945,977
Trade and other receivables	6	1,298,841	1,999,291
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<b>NET ASSETS</b>		<b>14,000,567</b>	<b>12,402,727</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>			
Asset maintenance and refurbishment reserve	18	100,000	100,000
Planned maintenance reserve	18	394,483	352,217
Accumulated funds		13,506,084	11,950,510
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>		<b>14,000,567</b>	<b>12,402,727</b>

PATHFINDERS LTD  
ABN 64 146 004 524  
STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	Asset Maintenance & Refurbishment Reserves \$	Planned Maintenance Reserve \$
<b>Balance at 1 July 2022</b>	100,000	311,182
Surplus after income tax expense	-	-
Total comprehensive surplus for the year	-	-
Transfer to/(from) reserve	-	41,035
<b>Balance at 30 June 2023</b>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>352,217</b>
Surplus after income tax expense	-	-
Total comprehensive surplus for the year	-	-
Transfer to/(from) reserve	-	42,266
<b>Balance at 30 June 2024</b>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>394,483</b>
	Accumulated Funds \$	Total \$
<b>Balance at 1 July 2022</b>	8,716,385	9,127,567
Surplus after income tax expense	3,275,160	3,275,160
Total comprehensive surplus for the year	-	-
Realisation of reserves	-	41,035
Transfer to/(from) reserve	(41,035)	(41,035)
<b>Balance at 30 June 2023</b>	<b>11,950,510</b>	<b>12,402,727</b>
Surplus after income tax expense	1,597,840	1,597,840
Total comprehensive surplus for the year	-	-
Realisation of reserves	-	42,266
Transfer to/(from) reserve	(42,266)	(42,266)
<b>Balance at 30 June 2024</b>	<b>13,506,084</b>	<b>14,000,567</b>

PATHFINDERS LTD  
ABN 64 146 004 524

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	Note	2024 \$	2023 \$
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Receipts from customers		61,048,389	53,234,296
Interest received		579,267	179,298
Payments to suppliers and employees		(56,680,499)	(47,870,421)
Interest paid		(361,648)	(264,622)
Net cash provided by operating activities		<u>4,585,509</u>	<u>5,278,551</u>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Payments for plant and equipment		(8,712,718)	(2,583,871)
Receipt from investments		1,539,675	-
Payments for investments		-	(4,329,655)
Net cash used in investing activities		<u>(7,173,043)</u>	<u>(6,913,526)</u>
<b>CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES</b>			
Proceeds from borrowings		7,400,000	1,955,000
Repayment of borrowings		(817,004)	(1,007,462)
Repayment of lease liabilities		(1,134,104)	(865,047)
Net cash provided by investing activities		<u>5,448,892</u>	<u>82,491</u>
Net increase/(decrease) in cash held		2,861,358	(1,552,484)
Cash at the beginning of the financial year		<u>5,945,977</u>	<u>7,498,461</u>
Cash at the end of the financial year	5	<u>8,807,335</u>	<u>5,945,977</u>



Annual Report  
2023 -2024

[www.pathfinders.ngo](http://www.pathfinders.ngo)