



# BELONG

## BLUE MOUNTAINS

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

# ANNUAL REPORT

2022 - 2023



BE HEARD • BE CONNECTED • BE SUPPORTED • BELONG





*Aunty Carol Cooper and Belong BM Chair Ruth Bennett at Belong Blue Mountains 2022 AGM*

## How you can contact us

### Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre

(Head Office)  
Town Centre Arcade  
81-83 Katoomba Street  
Katoomba NSW 2780  
Tel: 02 4782 1117  
[Email: kncadmin@belongbm.org.au](mailto:kncadmin@belongbm.org.au)

### Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre

Mid Mountains Community Centre  
9 New Street  
Lawson NSW 2783  
Tel: 02 4759 2592  
[Email: mmncadmin@belongbm.org.au](mailto:mmncadmin@belongbm.org.au)

### Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre

Blaxland Community Centre  
33 Hope Street, Blaxland NSW 2774  
Tel: 02 4739 1164  
[Email: lmncadmin@belongbm.org.au](mailto:lmncadmin@belongbm.org.au)



*Belong Blue Mountains acknowledges and respects the Darug and Gundungurra Peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land in which we work and live. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.*

*We recognise the impacts of past and present injustice and the role we can all play in working together towards a better future.*

*Belong Blue Mountains supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We will promote mutual respect and understanding, paying respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their cultures and their heritage.*

*We acknowledge that this land is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.*



# CONTENTS

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Chair's Report..... | 2-3 |
| CEO Report .....    | 4-5 |

## OUR SERVICES HIGHLIGHTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Introduction .....  | 6     |
| Governance.....   | 7     |
| Families, Children, Youth & Communities Report, including KOOSH ..... | 8-11  |
| Aged, Chronic Care & Allied Health Stream Report .....                | 12-13 |
| ASSIST Building & Maintenance Report .....                            | 14-15 |
| NDIS & Disability Services Report.....                                | 16    |
| People & Culture Report.....  | 17    |

|                  |       |
|------------------|-------|
| OUR IMPACT ..... | 18-20 |
|------------------|-------|

|                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| Information Technology Report ..... | 21    |
| Finance Team Report.....            | 22    |
| Treasurer's Report.....             | 23    |
| Finance Report .....                | 24-25 |

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| OUR VOLUNTEERS ..... | 26 |
|----------------------|----|

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| OUR SUPPORTERS..... | 27-28 |
|---------------------|-------|

For more about our services go to:  
**[belongbm.org.au](http://belongbm.org.au)**

# CHAIR'S REPORT

## WARWICK FULLER CHAIRPERSON



Be Heard, Be Connected, Be Supported, Belong. It's a powerful call to our community, but I really appreciate just how hard it is to provide the environment for these words to flourish into actions. It's taken a vision, extensive planning, commitment, a wonderful, professional and rapidly growing team and five very challenging years. We have had to deal with the whole gamut; fire, flood and pestilence, all the while staying focused on our goal of being "a sustainable, vibrant and agile local organisation, where the community is at the heart of all that we do."

Today Belong BM is much more than the sum of our original three parts: Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre, Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre and Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre. We have capitalised on their more than 100 years of collective experience to create a strong, innovative and responsive organisation with an ever-growing range of programs, services and support options for our Blue Mountains community.

It hasn't been easy, at times even painful. Good people have stepped aside so that Belong BM could survive and grow. The Board led re-structuring of the organisation was difficult for those of us with long histories with our

respective neighbourhood centres and I acknowledge the leadership of our then Chair, Ruth Bennett, through this period. It was no less challenging for the leadership team that led the organisation through this period demonstrating enormous professionalism and compassion. Belong Blue Mountains is far stronger thanks to the leadership of our CEO, Kath Harrison, and her senior team of Len Kasper, Chris Baird, Steve Hart, Danielle Wilding-Forbes, Jo Ridley, Dale Reardon and Leigh Gordon. Supported so ably by both Shelley Oliver and Neil Smith. It has been particularly impressive to watch them grow and develop, individually and as a team, as they have met the significant challenges that came their way.

We have all had to learn as the idea of Belong Blue Mountains has developed. The Board recognised the need for change and actively went to the Blue Mountains community seeking to strengthen our skills in some key areas. We were rewarded with some outstanding applicants and our Employment Board Sub-Committee, of David Caton and Gay Thornton, were faced with the challenge of interviewing and making recommendations. Thanks to their excellent work, we welcomed to Belong Blue Mountains, Jean Baptiste Claray, Nigel Cunningham, Motofumi Kotsuka, Shannon Lane, and welcomed back Lynne Hudson. The skills and experience they bring to Belong Blue Mountains have already had significant impacts and their joining with our other existing members, Maria Katrivesis, Ruth Bennett, Mahalya Middlemist and Wendy Holland provides Belong BM with a very strong Board of Governance as we begin to again address significant challenges.

Key amongst these has been: What will Belong BM look like in five years' time? That is the question the Board, staff and volunteers of Belong BM have started to turn their minds to over the past 6 months. It's been an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, what we have done well, what not so well and whether the values we set for ourselves are still applicable. A positive consequence of this process has been the opportunity for not only Board members to meet with staff from each team to gain a better understanding of the breadth of the Organisation's activities, but for the teams themselves to get together for mutual understanding and the cross pollination of ideas. This is a valuable initiative that we look forward to continuing. The strategic plan review and reimagining is ongoing and we have greatly benefited

from the assistance of our external consultant, Deborah Sharpe, who is facilitating the review process.

No reflections on the past year would be complete without a thought on Belong BM's accepting the invitation from our First Nations peoples inherent in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and our subsequent strong support for Constitutional recognition and a Voice to parliament. The Board took a position to support the Yes campaign in the slated referendum, developing a clear position of support and showcasing our position through print media, key social networking sites and professional networking platforms. I'm proud of the stance we have taken as Belong Blue Mountains and the leadership shown by the Organisation on such an important social justice issue.

We recognise the support of our key funders, the NSW State government and the Federal government, and our organisation continues to exceed the operating standards they require. Their confidence in Belong Blue Mountains's ability to serve and support our Blue Mountains community has been a key contributor to our growth and the expansion of the range of programs we have been able to offer.

We thank the Blue Mountains City Council, for their support, particularly with the challenges around our Station Street premises and the plans to relocate to the Katoomba Town Centre. It is envisaged that our community will benefit from the upper mountains Belong Blue Mountains site being centrally located in Katoomba with increased accessibility and a much more visible presence as a result.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge David Caton, who stepped down from his role as Treasurer of the Organisation in May of this year and welcome Nigel Cunningham to the Treasurer role. David presided as Treasurer of the Organisation across a period of restructure, the effects of the

pandemic and again a period of Organisational growth. Thank you David.

Belong BM is recognised beyond the Blue Mountains as a positive model for community service organisations thanks to the efforts of my fellow Board members and Kath and her team. We are well placed to meet whatever challenges and opportunities present themselves in coming years. ■





# CEO REPORT

## KATH HARRISON CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



I wish to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which Belong Blue Mountains operates, the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. I would also like to pay my respect to their elders past and present and to the young people who are the elders of our future. I wish to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

I wish to also acknowledge the diverse and rich lived experiences of our community members and all they bring to and teach Belong Blue Mountains. 2022-2023 again brought opportunity and challenge within our communities and for Belong Blue Mountains. Our Organisation, our communities, our staff, volunteers and service partners again had to adapt to the ongoing impact of the pandemic with its peaks and troughs; the legacy of multiple natural disasters; the important human rights issues embodied in the Voice to Parliament debate and upcoming referendum; funding challenges and policy changes at State and Federal levels; the need to critically review the governance and strategic directions of the Organisation, ensuring currency; and, our ability to continue to meet community need.

Belong Blue Mountains services have continued to be impacted by the pandemic, most notably the significant reduction in volunteers directly attributable to Covid 19, continuing to affect our service delivery to

vulnerable and isolated older members of community and support of our neighbourhood centres. Our volunteer numbers are however slowly increasing and we are now better able to support our core functions and services. This remains a challenge going forward but one that we remain hopeful will resolve.

The direct impact of the second severe storm event in July 2022 further damaged our main Belong Blue Mountains offices at Katoomba. This compounded the damage caused to the building earlier in the year from the first storm event and resulted in the Katoomba Out of School Hours childcare service section of the building being completely closed. This subsequent damage led to the eventual decommissioning of the whole building at No 10 Station Street.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of the KOOSH staff and their management in facilitating that service moving on seven different occasions with minimal disruption to service provision for families. A more permanent two year solution has been found and the service has been relocated to Katoomba North Public School, with support from the Department of Education.

Blue Mountains City Council has continued to work proactively with Belong Blue Mountains Management to develop a remediation plan for this site and identify both long and short-term solutions for our services impacted by the damage to the No 8 and No 10 Station Street site. The partnership between Blue Mountains City Council and Belong Blue Mountains is considered one of the Organisations most important. I thank them for their continued support, it enables the work that we do in meeting the needs of the most marginalised within the Blue Mountains community. Particular thanks go to Kirrily Twomey, Director, Cultural and Community Services; Vicki Edmunds, Manager Community, Library and Customer Services and Tan Vo, Manager Property and Commercial Services.

Belong Blue Mountains embarked on a critical service partnership arrangement this year with Link Wentworth, the local social housing provider. Link Wentworth tenancy staff are now co-located with the upper mountains Belong Blue Mountains teams, operating from the Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre. This is a strategic partnership we hope to expand and enjoy for many years to come, delivering innovative and accessible services to and for our vulnerable community members.

This reporting period saw the advent of the call for referendum related to the Voice to Parliament enshrined

in the Constitution, recognising our First Nations Peoples and their invitation to the Nation contained within the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Belong Blue Mountains Board resolved to take a clear public position of support for the Voice to Parliament and a Yes vote in the referendum. I thank them for their ongoing leadership within community on our truly important social justice issues, and their commitment to walk together with our First Nations Peoples, no matter the outcome.

I acknowledge and thank the senior Management team responsible for providing adaptive and agile leadership and solid management throughout this period. To Len Kasper, Chris Baird, Danielle Wilding Forbes, Jo Ridley, Dale Reardon, Leigh Gordon and Steven Hart, your commitment and dedication to the work that we do, enables Belong Blue Mountains to continue to provide critical services across our communities and to our most vulnerable within them with clarity, integrity and focus. Your leadership, extraordinary skills and practice wisdom are reflected in the continued growth we experience in those service areas where you work with community to identify gaps and seek to redress them through successfully securing targeted funding and developing sector leading innovation.

The Management Team has championed critically important initiatives in this period and continues to work to strengthen our human resources, quality and safety platforms. I wish to acknowledge the work undertaken by the Management Team to achieve such a successful result in the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission mid-term audit for Belong Blue Mountains NDIS services. I would particularly like to draw attention to the difficult decision to discontinue our NDIS Support Coordination Services. Whilst a difficult service and business decision, this process resulted in our 56 Support Coordination participants being transferred seamlessly to local providers of their choice. I thank Jo Ridley for leading both the audit and service transfer process, on short

notice. I would also like to acknowledge Leigh Gordon for strong mentorship, leadership and management of the NDIS Plan Management staff throughout this period of change.

This year saw the retirement of Neil Smith. Neil has been a cornerstone in the operations of the Organisation in all its incarnations across almost two decades, and on a personal note a stalwart support for me as CEO of Belong Blue Mountains. In his role as Executive Support to the CEO, the Executive Management Team and the Board, he enabled us all to manage and prioritise at times, truly daunting workloads. It is a truth that I could not fulfil my role as CEO without the support provided by this position. I thank Neil for supporting me so ably for many years, both through the extraordinarily uplifting moments and the extraordinarily difficult periods. I also have the pleasure of welcoming Shelley Oliver to this key role and thank her for the seamless transition and her ongoing support of and commitment to this position.

The care, commitment and humanity shown by the staff and volunteers of Belong Blue Mountains in meeting the challenges of working with our diverse and unique communities is present every day. I acknowledge, thank and honour you all for your ongoing commitment to the work of Belong Blue Mountains through yet another year of significant challenge and change. Your capacity and your capabilities to continue to care and support the most vulnerable in our communities is humbling. The Organisation is strong and resilient as a direct result of your commitment, professionalism, integrity, expertise, innovation and agility.

The Belong Blue Mountains Board continues to exhibit great vision, strength, boldness and absolute commitment to the important work that we do. This year saw the focused decision to expand the Belong Blue Mountains Board numbers, recruiting very specific skills to the Board around human resources, governance, financial management, business experience, advocacy, and marketing. I wish to thank the Chairs, Ruth Bennett and Warwick Fuller, who took the Chair mid-term to facilitate a period of leave; the Board Executive David Caton, Warwick Fuller Mahalya Middlemist, and now Nigel Cunningham and Board members Gay Thornton, Wendy Holland, Maria Katrivesis, Motofumi Kotsuka, JB Claray, Shannon Lane and Lynne Hudson. The expanded Board has begun a critical review of our current Strategic Directions and Organisational Values, to ensure that they are current and fit for purpose as we go forward. Thank you to the Board for your wisdom, expertise, patience and clarity in bringing about positive change and governing through a values driven lens.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the people of our communities and our service partners who contribute to our work in some way, we are simply stronger together. ■



# INTRODUCTION

Belong Blue Mountains is a community and neighbourhood services organisation operating across the Mountains and providing services from Lower Mountains, Mid Mountains and Katoomba Neighbourhood Centres.

We provide a wide range of services and activities for people of all ages and circumstances to improve the wellbeing and capacity, social inclusion, resilience and quality of life for people in the Blue Mountains.

Our work is grounded in the principles of social justice: Connection, inclusion and access, safety and conditions for wellbeing. We focus our resources on the disadvantaged and least powerful in the community. We believe the development of networks, mutual support and collective action can improve the quality of life for our whole community.





# GOVERNANCE

## BOARD MEMBERS

Belong Blue Mountains is governed by a voluntary Board.

**Board members for 2022-2023 were:**

**Chair:** Ruth Bennett (July to November 2022)

Warwick Fuller (November 2022 to June 2023)

**Deputy Chair:** David Caton

**Secretary:** Mahalya Middlemist

**Treasurer:** David Caton (July 2022 to May 2023)

Nigel Cunningham (May to June 2023)

**Members:** Wendy Holland, Maria Katrivesis, Elizabeth (Gay) Thornton, Jean Baptiste Claray, Lynne Hudson, Shannon Lane, Motofumi Kotsuka

**Public Officer:** Len Kasper

## Chief Executive Officer

Kath Harrison

**Executive Support:** Neil Smith, Shelley Oliver

## Executive Manager Finance, Business Development & Service Support

Len Kasper

## Senior Management Team

**Aged, Chronic Care & Allied Health Stream:** Christine Baird

**ASSIST Building & Maintenance:** Steven Hart

**Families, Children, Youth & Communities:** Danielle Wilding-Forbes

**Finance:** Leigh Gordon

**Information & Communications Technology:** Dale Reardon

**NDIS & Disability Services:** Leigh Gordon

**People & Culture:** Margaret Price

**Locum Manager:** Jo Ridley



Kath Harrison



Len Kasper  
Shelley Oliver



Chris Baird, Danielle  
Wilding-Forbes



Steve Hart



Leigh Gordon



Dale Reardon



Jo Ridley

# FAMILIES, CHILDREN, YOUTH & COMMUNITIES

**Danielle Wilding-Forbes,**  
**FCYC Manager**

The Families Children Youth and Communities Team (FCYC Team) is delighted to present the highlights of our activities and services delivered this past year. Our dedicated team strive to strengthen community connection, wellbeing and belonging through the delivery of various programs and community activities.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

Our Neighbourhood Centres located in Blaxland, Lawson and Katoomba play a pivotal role in fostering community connections across the Blue Mountains. Belong BM Neighbourhood Centres provide a space for residents to come together, attend regular groups, access information, participate in community events and access important resources.

By providing a central space for community engagement, Neighbourhood Centres promote social cohesion, trust, and a sense of belonging among residents. They facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills, encouraging personal and professional development. Additionally, through partnerships with local organisations and government agencies, Neighbourhood Centres can address specific community needs such as childcare, health services, carers support, and assistance with housing or navigating service access.

Our Centres are community spaces and

are used to the full across all 3 locations throughout the year, engaging community across the age spectrum to meet their needs, connect with supports and drive change on their terms. Some of our groups include Community Book Club, Create for Wellbeing, Mid Mountains Walkers, Israeli Dancing, Walanmarra Women's Art Group and Chess Club, to name a few. These community support groups have been invaluable in fostering connections and encouraging personal growth. Some groups are run by our team, some by volunteers and some are community owned and run.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Our information and referral service is instrumental in connecting community members with the appropriate resources and services they require. This past year we have seen a considerable increase in the need for food relief and Belong BM provided emergency relief food hampers to individuals and families across the year and in 2022. These efforts culminated in our Christmas Hamper efforts at the end of the year, with Sharise and the team delivering 70 hampers that reached over 200 people. The packing of fresh food, pantry items and festive treats is always a mammoth effort that brings lots of smiles.

## FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Working with families and children is a focus of our FCYC team. This year our Transition to School support program has guided parents and children through the journey of starting school. We have organised school holiday activities, providing children with a safe and enjoyable environment. Furthermore, our







social support groups for families have contributed to building a strong and connected community. The Community Development team worked in partnership with Mountains Outreach Community Service and Mountains Youth Services to deliver family fun days in our neighbourhoods.

### SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

Our supported playgroups in Blaxland East, Lawson and Katoomba have been a valuable resource for parents and caregivers, offering a nurturing environment for children to learn and develop. These playgroups have provided a welcoming play space for families to connect with one another, fostering a sense of community among parents and children. Along with Cathryn and Emily, we had a new addition to the playgroup team this year. Billy Booksie joined the crew to assist us with promoting early literacy via the Paint The Blue Red Program. Together these 3 create fabulous fun.

### DISASTER RESILIENCE PREPAREDNESS SUPPORT

Belong Blue Mountains understands the importance of Emergency Preparedness in dealing with potential disasters, having worked in this space to identify service gaps for some time now. We

have actively supported the community through our annual Get Ready events to improve Disaster Resilience and Preparedness. These events have provided residents with essential knowledge, resources and skills to effectively prepare for and respond to emergencies. By supporting community members to be better prepared in the case of an emergency, we aim to build a strong and connected community and thus increase resilience.

### BE READY TEAM

Temporary funding opportunities gave Belong BM capacity to deliver increased individual emergency preparedness support. In September 2022 we welcomed our Be Ready Team: Bec Evers, Meredith Vasilescu and Megan Thomas. The team provides person-centred emergency planning (P-CEP) for people with disabilities, older people and those who are frail and isolated. At the end of the planning process participants have a plan that has been designed to meet their needs. They have thought through how they will act and have identified the actions they will take together with their support network, if or when an emergency occurs. The great strength of the P-CEP model is how it supports Be Ready staff to assist people with very complex needs. This unique process has been recognised with increasing referrals from local Rural Fire Service Brigades and the Blue Mountains City Council.

### BLUE FRINGE ART AND LITERATURE FESTIVAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

In October 2022 the Community Development team worked with the Springwood Neighbourhood Centre Cooperative and a team of dedicated and passionate volunteers on the Blue Fringe Art and Literature Festival. This annual festival, which showcases the art,





photography, poetry and short stories, celebrates the creativity of people with a lived experience of mental health and promotes the benefits of creativity for mental wellbeing and resilience. The exhibition and book showcased the work of more than 150 artists and writers.

2022 saw the addition of the first Blue Fringe Youth Short Film Festival increasing its engagement with young people. Blue Fringe is a safe space and community that starts conversations about mental health, creates networks and reduces stigma.

### PICK N MIX - YOUTH TEAM

2022 also saw the introduction of our Pick N Mix Youth Team: Rachael Ray, Sian Doko and Skye Flemming. This program was branded and named by young people for young people. Pick 'n' Mix is a partnership between Belong Blue Mountains and The Blue Mountains Women's Health & Resource Centre, and is facilitated by Sian and Rachael from Belong Blue Mountains.

Pick 'n' Mix is an inclusive safe space for young people (12-24) to connect,

create and access local resources and mental health support. The service is an outreach youth-focused model that takes a holistic approach to wellbeing. It integrates three domains: art, study and health, to holistically support young people to feel connected and be better supported. This temporarily funded project addresses some of the systemic challenges which continue to be a barrier for young people. As reported by young people in group sessions, these challenges include the stigmas attached to being young, or being young and neuro-diverse, gender diverse, coming from a low socioeconomic background or living with mental illness.

### KOOSH - BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CARE

In January 2023, Katoomba Out of School Hours permanently moved to on-site at Katoomba North Public School. This move has provided us with a storeroom for our equipment, a kitchen attached to the hall for serving breakfast and afternoon tea, a large hall and play space for our children to utilise.





We continue to transport children to and from the service with our 22-seat bus and 12-seat van which is a draw-card for many families who are confident with our service knowing their children are being met straight from school and safely brought to and from the service.

We have had a pre-approval and post-approval visit to our service this year from the Department of Education, passing with flying colours for both, and now are continuing to improve our service procedures for an assessment and rating audit to be done next year.

We would like to thank Jo Ridley who has gone above and beyond this past year assisting KOOSH and we now welcome Jenna Cosgrove to the position moving forward.

### WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Acting in community would not work half as well without partnerships with other services. The Blue Mountains Community services sector is a collaborative one and we are very grateful for these collaborations. I would like to extend a big thank you to our service partners.

As previously mentioned, some of our programs are supported by volunteers, as are our Neighbourhood Centre reception desks. May I extend a big thank you to each and every one of our volunteers, you bring such a diversity of

talents, wisdom and patience and we are all very grateful for your support.

The FCYC team work to support community and connect individuals with targeted support where appropriate. It has been wonderful being able to welcome new projects to the FCYC team this year and we look forward to continuing the learning together. FCYC is a team that is made up of skilled individuals who constantly go above and beyond in the work they do. Innovative, professional and caring are the attributes that come to mind. I would like to extend a big thank you to everyone on my team for their efforts this past year. ■





# AGED, CHRONIC CARE AND ALLIED HEALTH STREAM

**Christine Baird,**  
**ACA Manager**

Following the COVID-19 restrictions experienced in 2021-2022 the Aged, Chronic Care and Allied Health Stream has focused on consolidating its programs and services throughout this financial year. I am proud to share some of our work and achievements and would like to acknowledge the professionalism, caring and hard work that is demonstrated by the staff. I am proud and privileged to work with them.

Our administration team of Eddie, Jessica, Katie and Korey is responsible for supporting all staff and aspects of the Stream and has also taken on the primary responsibility for Access and Referral; our central point of contact for all new referrals, particularly for our Commonwealth Home Support Programs (CHSP). These programs include: Domestic Assistance, Allied Health, Social Support, Social Transport and more recently Gardening.

This is a demanding job, ensuring that all inquiries are responded to in a timely way and then processing referrals by contacting potential clients and listening to their needs and choices.

We have received lovely feedback about the team from clients who enquire.

Our Domestic assistance team, Jillian and Natasha, have taken on all our clients as we moved from subcontracting to an in-house service. This has been a mammoth effort from

Sonda, who has also instigated a casual cleaning client pool to ensure that when we have a cancellation, people waiting for a permanent cleaning spot can have some assistance. Great initiative!

Feedback from a client:

*"You have made growing older so much easier!  
I can't thank you enough"*

## PALLIATIVE SUPPORT SERVICE

Melissa Williams has provided extraordinary support to the Palliative Care volunteers and the clients of this service. Melissa and this dedicated group of volunteers have enriched the lives of many people with life-limiting illnesses.

Palliative Care awareness week saw the screening of a film called 'live the life you please' highlighting end of life issues and care.

Two of the volunteers (Andrew and Louise) were honoured for their outstanding and exceptional contribution to local residents at a Seniors week presentation.

Belong Blue Mountains staff pulled together when one of our palliative care clients needed some warm clothes and blankets to help get through the cold weather. Staff from across the three Neighbourhood Centres put together blankets, purchased some warm PJs, socks,







gloves and a beanie, together with some food items and toiletries. Simon Da Silva met with the volunteer who then delivered the items to the client. Feedback from the volunteer was that he was very appreciative. This is what Belong BM is all about.... helping the community!

The Caring Heart quilters are a fantastic group of women who dedicate their time to creating magnificent quilts for our palliative clients. Each year we receive bags of beautiful quilts and distribute them to clients at home and in hospital.

## ALLIED HEALTH

The Allied Health team of Gill, Vania, Emma, Adam and Simon was recently successful in receiving funding for 3 years to develop and implement a new program called DAWN. This program, adapted from the COPE program, supports carers of people with dementia to manage challenging behaviours and daily activities. Carer support is an essential element as the need within our community increases. Support and respite for carers will often result in people with dementia being able to remain living in their own homes in a supportive and familiar environment. Well done!

Our Standing Strong exercise classes with Adam and Simon continue to gain momentum with class numbers now reaching 180 registered participants per week across the Mountains. This program is complemented by walking groups both during the week and on some weekends, expanding our focus on movement and making social connections.



## SOCIAL SUPPORT

This service, led by led by Sonda with Bren, Jocelyn, Bethany and Jo, has struggled with recruiting volunteers post COVID-19. This is a global issue resulting in our need to advertise widely and creatively. An article in the Blue Mountains Gazette, featuring 2 of our volunteers, resulted in an increase of interest. Thanks to Doug and Jenny for featuring in the article (extract below).

Jenny volunteers as a Neighbourhood Centre receptionist for a few hours a week and helps with the community Christmas Hamper program, and Doug visits a gentleman in an aged care facility. "I really look forward to visiting my new friend on Thursday mornings. Each week I have seen him brighten up more and more when I visit, and I think it has helped him become more social with others and happier in himself" said Mr Fisk "All I do is bring him a coffee, have a chat and play some French Billiards, but it seems to make a real difference for him, and I get just as much out of it, listening and learning about his fascinating life." "It would be great to see more people volunteering. I don't think people realise what they can do, how much they can help and how much they'll get out of it too." said Mr Fisk. The couple are also planning to volunteer with social group outings where Jenny can host and Doug can drive the mini-bus.

Springwood locals Doug and Jenny Fisk, recent retirees and community volunteers at Belong Blue Mountains Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre in Blaxland

## GARDENING

Gardening is a recent addition to the Stream and completes the complement of CHSP services we provide. Expansion of the service will mean that new staff will be recruited in the next financial year.

Lea as the team leader has certainly stepped up to the challenge, and is ably supported by Amos. She has received really lovely feedback from a client, Jacqueline, who has had multiple services with us from gardening, standing strong, Occupational Therapy, Home Modifications to Eddie doing the intake process. She has expressed her gratitude and is very grateful for all the help and support she has received from our staff. ■

# ASSIST BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE

**Steve Hart,**  
**ASSIST Manager**

Assist Building & Home Maintenance is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health's Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP).

Belong Blue Mountains/ Assist is also a registered service provider with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to provide home modifications and maintenance for people with an NDIS plan.

Assist does private full-fee home modifications and maintenance work. Towards the end of 2022 Assist Building & Home Maintenance commenced facilities maintenance works on the six CONNECT Child & Family Services centres in the LGA of the Blue Mountains.

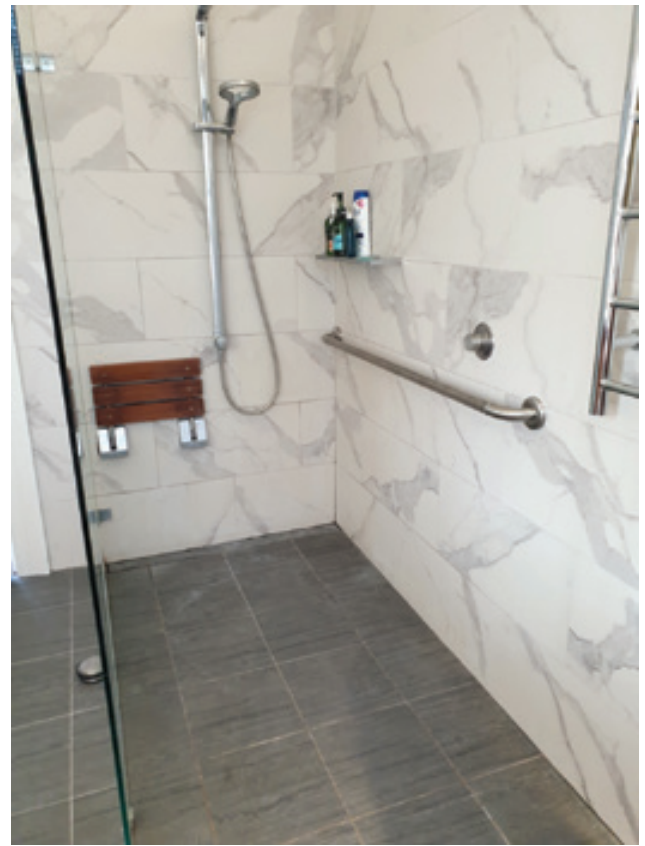
## SERVICE AIMS

Our service provides Home Modifications (Major & Minor) for eligible members of the Blue Mountains community, including the infirm, elderly and people with a disability, so they can remain safely in their own homes. This is made possible by installing ramps (large or small), grab rails and handrails and creating wheelchair accessible spaces internally and externally. We can also assist with minor maintenance works if it affects the safety and wellbeing of our clients.

Assist covers the whole of the Blue Mountains from Lapstone to Mt Victoria. ■









# NDIS & DISABILITY SERVICES REPORT

Leigh Gordon

Belong BM specialises in Plan Management services to participants of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) after having made the difficult decision to close the Support Coordination arm of its disability services during the year.

**Plan Managers** provide intermediary services and are responsible for organising the financial and administrative aspects of a Plan, such as:

- preparing and monitoring budgets for plan spending,
- paying invoices for the services participants receive,
- preparing reports to the participants about how their funds are being used, and
- helping participants connect with their choice of providers and organising service agreements.

At the end of this financial year our 2 part time Plan Managers were providing support to 217 participants. Numbers remain reasonably steady with an overall and continuing upward trend.

An exciting development during the year was the introduction of our new online platform, Planability. Planability is directly linked to our participants' NDIS budgets via the NDIS Myplace

Provider Portal, so allows us and our participants to see budget balances in real time. Participants are able to see details about payments we have made on their behalf and automatically receive a report each month. From our perspective, we have information about our participants and their plans at our fingertips. Planability has significantly cut down the time it takes to perform many of the administrative tasks associated with claiming funds and processing invoices for payment.

Belong BM has two Plan Managers, Simon Wheble and Emma Wheeler. Simon and Emma are a great team who have built really productive connections with our clients and assist them in making the most of their NDIS plan funding. Simon and Emma are supported by Jenni Howard and Caroline Peel, the invoice processing team, who this year have processed 39 750 individual transactions. ■



# PEOPLE & CULTURE REPORT

Margaret Price

The People and Culture portfolio oversees Human Resources, organisation wide Policy and Procedure documentation, Quality Assurance and Work Health & Safety. As such, we support the operational teams with the information and internal resources needed to be free to focus on providing quality services to their varied communities.

The Financial Year 2022/23 saw us refine and improve our human resources platform, Employment Hero. We produced a process mapping document, developed protocols and checklists for on-boarding, off-boarding and staff induction, and an initial "Welcome to Belong BM" online session for new staff. The management team collaborated to confirm the mandatory certifications and qualifications required by various staff teams and we conducted initial training sessions in these new processes for managers and team leaders.

There were two external quality audits conducted through the year.

Belong BM's before and after school care service, KOOSH, is overseen by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). We operate under the National Quality Framework and the NSW Child Safe Standards. In January 2023 we undertook an initial virtual quality audit of our new site at Katoomba North

Public School and a follow-up on-site audit. Results of both audits were very positive with high praise given regarding our safety systems and comprehensive operating policies. We congratulate Cate Harrison, KOOSH Coordinator, and her team for the seamless move of the service to this new site and the positive outcome of their quality audit.

In late 2022, we fully reviewed our NDIS services and, after much consideration, suspended the NDIS Support Coordination service to focus resources on NDIS Plan Management. Our team worked with all existing Support Coordination participants to successfully transition them to new service providers of their choice and to shepherd them through that process.

NDIS services are overseen by the NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission. Our NDIS services operate within the NDIS Practice Standards and National Quality Indicators. We undertook a mid-term audit of our NDIS Governance processes in early April 2023 and received a fully conforming report, with a Conformity with Best Practice result for our Emergency and Disaster Management processes. This was very pleasing given we operate with very vulnerable participants across a bushfire prone location. Many thanks to our small audit team including Shelley Oliver, Kath Harrison, Jo Ridley and myself. ■



# OUR IMPACT

**KOOSH**

Katoomba Out of School Hours

No. of children using service

184

149

No. of families

No. of days open before & after school care

199

244

Total no. days open

45

No. of days open vacation care & pupil free days

Bookings after school care

3826

Bookings before school care

2304

Bookings vacation care

1652

Total bookings

7782

**ASSIST**

ASSIST Building & Maintenance

Total clients

310

137 clients

Gardening

3639 hours

825 hours

Home Maintenance

46 clients

Home Care Package clients

35

Commonwealth Home Support Program clients

72

16

NDIS clients

Private clients

4

## Social media interactions

9959 unique visits to our website

3200 Facebook page visits

23,187 Facebook page reach

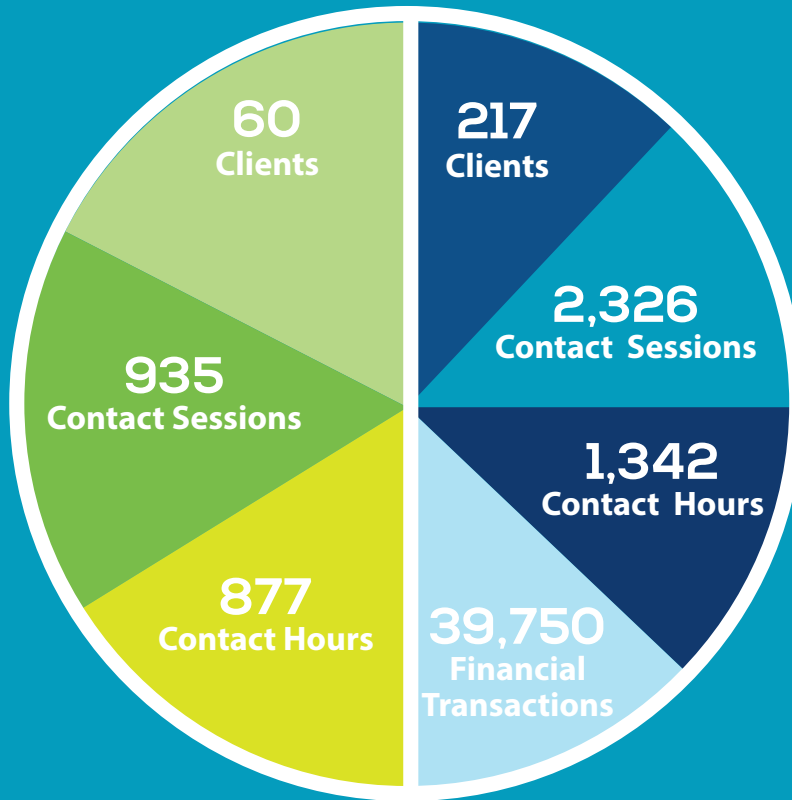
## Christmas 2022

70 Christmas Hampers distributed supporting 200 individuals



**NDIS**

**Coordination  
of Support**  
1.7.22 to  
24.1.23



**Plan  
Management**  
1.7.22 to  
30.6.23

**ACA**

Aged, Chronic Care and Allied Health Stream

**HOURS**

**2000**hrs

Palliative Care

**2859**hrs

Domestic Assistance

Community Visitors Scheme

**1600**hrs

**4765**hrs

Physio

**1237**hrs

Occupational Therapy

Social  
Support

Individual

Group

**4539**hrs

**5929**hrs

Allied  
Health

**CLIENTS**

**40**

Palliative Care

**64**

Domestic Assistance

Community Visitors Scheme

**35**

Physio

**207**

**117**

Occupational Therapy

Social  
Support

Individual

Group

**389**

**208**

Allied  
Health

# OUR IMPACT continued



Families ,Children, Youth & Communities

Total no. unique clients

33 1359

Community Event sessions

69.5 hours

Community Event hours

1133 attendees

Community Event attendees

5563

Information & Referral Requests in person

4200

Information & Referral Requests online

804

Total sessions

1556.5

Total hours

6437

Total attendees

Total number of occasions of engagement

32962

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

Playgroup sessions

120

Advocacy & Support sessions

124

Social Participation sessions

527

1021

Food Relief Hampers

## BELONG BM ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY

No. of individual clients = 3,543 No. of hours of community engagement = 32,658

No of occasions of service = 57,115

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF BELONG BM STAFF

Belong Blue Mountains could not achieve the high level of community engagement or provision of so many much-needed services without our amazing staff. They are our greatest asset and bring to their work joy, kindness, patience and professionalism on a daily basis.

We are constantly reminded of the number of vulnerable community members and the vast level of need within the Blue Mountains. We feel privileged to have the capacity and resources to serve our community and assist to make this place a more connected, inclusive and resilient society.



# INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) REPORT

Dale Reardon

Over the last financial year Belong Blue Mountains community and neighbourhood services has continued to progress and advance.

Our Information and Communications Technological infrastructure, strategies and initiatives have also required major advancement to support Belong Blue Mountains' growth and to help drive innovation and enhance efficiency.

Over the last twelve months the Belong Blue Mountains Information and Communications technology department has enhanced our cyber security and leveraged new technologies and digital solutions to protect our data and systems as well as to help streamline processes and improve both staff and client experiences.



Cyber-attacks and technologies for hackers to attack computers and computer networks have increased dramatically over recent years. To mitigate these cyber-attack advancements and also as part of our Belong Blue Mountains ICT continuous improvement strategy we have recently upgraded our cyber security infrastructure and threat management.

Below are just a few statistics from the Belong Blue Mountains Information and Communications Technology department collected over the last twelve months:

- There were 4023 cyber-attacks targeting Belong Blue Mountains ICT infrastructure from the previous twelve-month period, all 4023 cyber-attacks on our ICT infrastructure were successfully blocked by our cyber security systems and security gateways.
- Belong BM ICT helped staff and clients with 1642 help desk requests.

Over the last financial year Belong Blue Mountains ICT was also successful in addressing and passing the Australian "Essential Eight" Cyber Security Maturity Model.

Belong Blue Mountains Information and Communications Technology department continuously monitors the Belong Blue Mountains governance structure and governance processes as they improve and change to ensure ICT resources are well-managed and aligned with business objectives, ICT risk management, compliance with data privacy regulations, and ICT project management.

The Belong Blue Mountains Information and Communications Technology department looks forward to continuing our support for all our staff and community and we enjoy the interactions and challenges of finding solutions to our staff and community ICT needs. ■

# FINANCE TEAM REPORT

**Leigh Gordon**  
Manager, Finance

Belong Blue Mountains continues to grow and adapt to different business environments. The flow-on effect on the Finance team can be enormous, especially given our commitment to work closely with our stakeholders to provide them with the information and systems they need. For example, we have started to explore further options enabling on-the-spot mobile payments.

Statistically, the numbers continue to show the growth in our business and the corresponding workload for Finance, with transactions processed increasing to 60 600, up from 56 500 in the previous year.

The Finance team includes Justin Reardon, Jenni Howard and Caroline Peel, who have formed a formidable crew, always willing to go the extra mile to make sure the financial services of the organisation run smoothly. We have been fortunate with the implementation of our new Plan Management online platform, Planability, which has finally provided us with the capacity to pursue our plans to cross train all staff within the team. I thank the team for their professionalism, patience, support, flexibility and sense of humour. ■





# TREASURER'S REPORT

## David Caton

Treasurer (from July 2022 to May 2023) and Nigel Cunningham (from May 2023 to June 2023)

I am pleased to report that the financial performance of Belong Blue Mountains continues to be strong with increasing turnover and revenue in this period. In May 2023 I stood down as Treasurer of the Organisation, welcoming Nigel Cunningham to the role. Welcome Nigel.

**The financial performance of Belong Blue Mountains continues to be strong with revenues and turnover** increasing by \$2,335,012 to \$16,073,093 as a result of the following:

- NDIS Plan Management throughput increased by \$1,819,505 to \$10,738,504 increasing turnover
- New funding program: Carer and Dementia Support - Working together to improve wellbeing – a \$1,037,612 three-year program running from May 2023 to June 2026 funded by the Department of Health. Contributed \$10,446 to 2022/2023 growth in revenues.
- New funding program: Be Ready – Bushfire preparedness for people living with a disability – a \$805,700 three-year project running from June 2022 to March 2025 funded by the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources. Contributed \$337,497 to 2022/2023 growth in revenues.

- New funding program: Pick 'n Mix – supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people on pathways to self-reliance and empowerment through local community-driven solutions that support individuals to address barriers to participating in community activities, reduce social isolation, develop soft skills and support social and economic participation – a \$359,999 two-year project running from July 2022 to June 2024 funded by the Department of Social Services. Contributed \$208,578 to 2022/2023 growth in revenues.
- Other one-off programs (both last year and this year) and all other revenue streams reduced 2022/2023 revenues on a comparative basis by \$41,014.

**Expenses for 2022/2023 grew by \$2,060,933 to \$15,994,907 as follows:**

- NDIS Plan Management throughput increased by \$1,819,505 to \$10,738,504 increasing turnover
- Staff costs grew by \$206,681 in line with the new funding programs detailed above
- All other costs grew by \$34,747
- The 2022/2023 financial year resulted in an overall operating net income of \$78,187, a significant improvement on last year's operating loss of \$195,892.

Reserves increased to 8.3% of operating income (up from 7.5% last financial year).

I thank our CFO, Mr Len Kasper, and our finance team for their professionalism and excellent performance throughout the financial year.

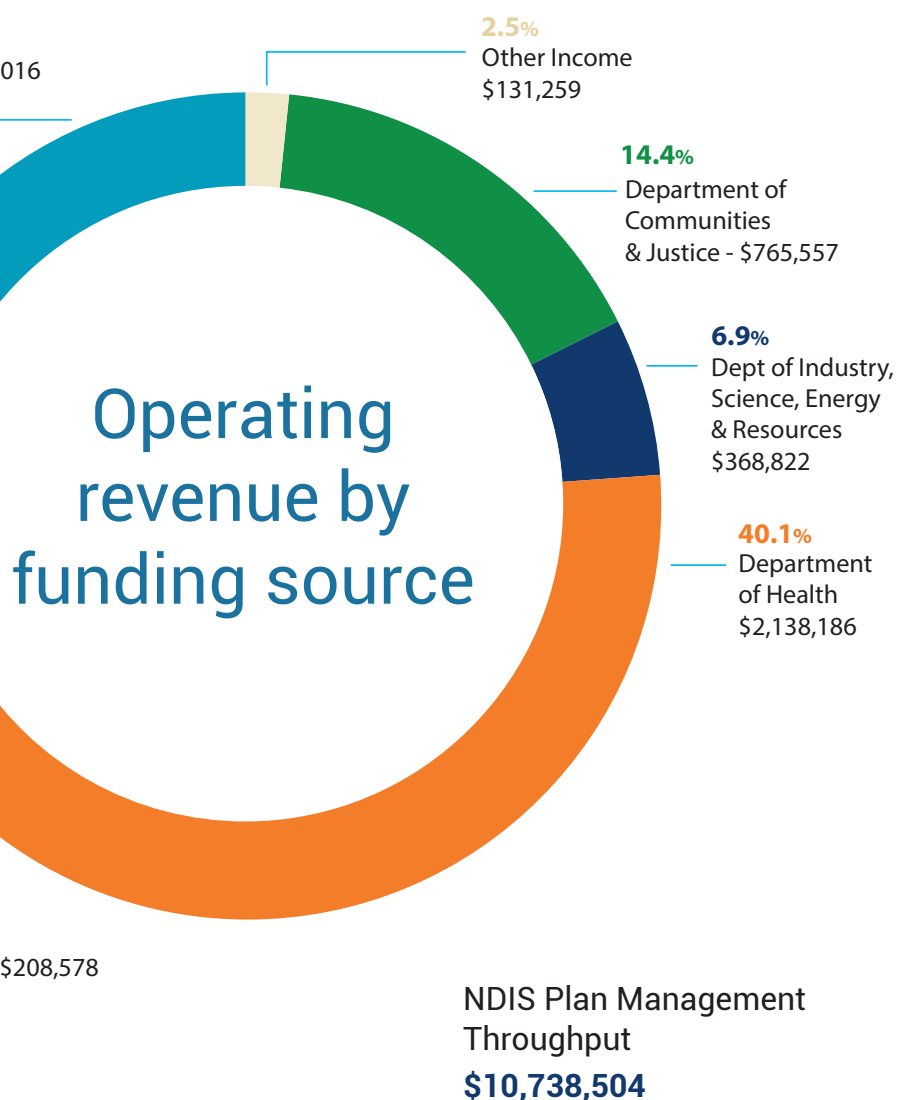
Mr John Thompson of Intentus was appointed as Belong Blue Mountain's auditor with effect from the 2022/2023 financial year. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the outgoing auditor, Bill Tomiczek from William Tomiczek & Associates, for their continued support of Belong Blue Mountains for more than 20 years and their support of the local community sector. ■



# FINANCIAL REPORT

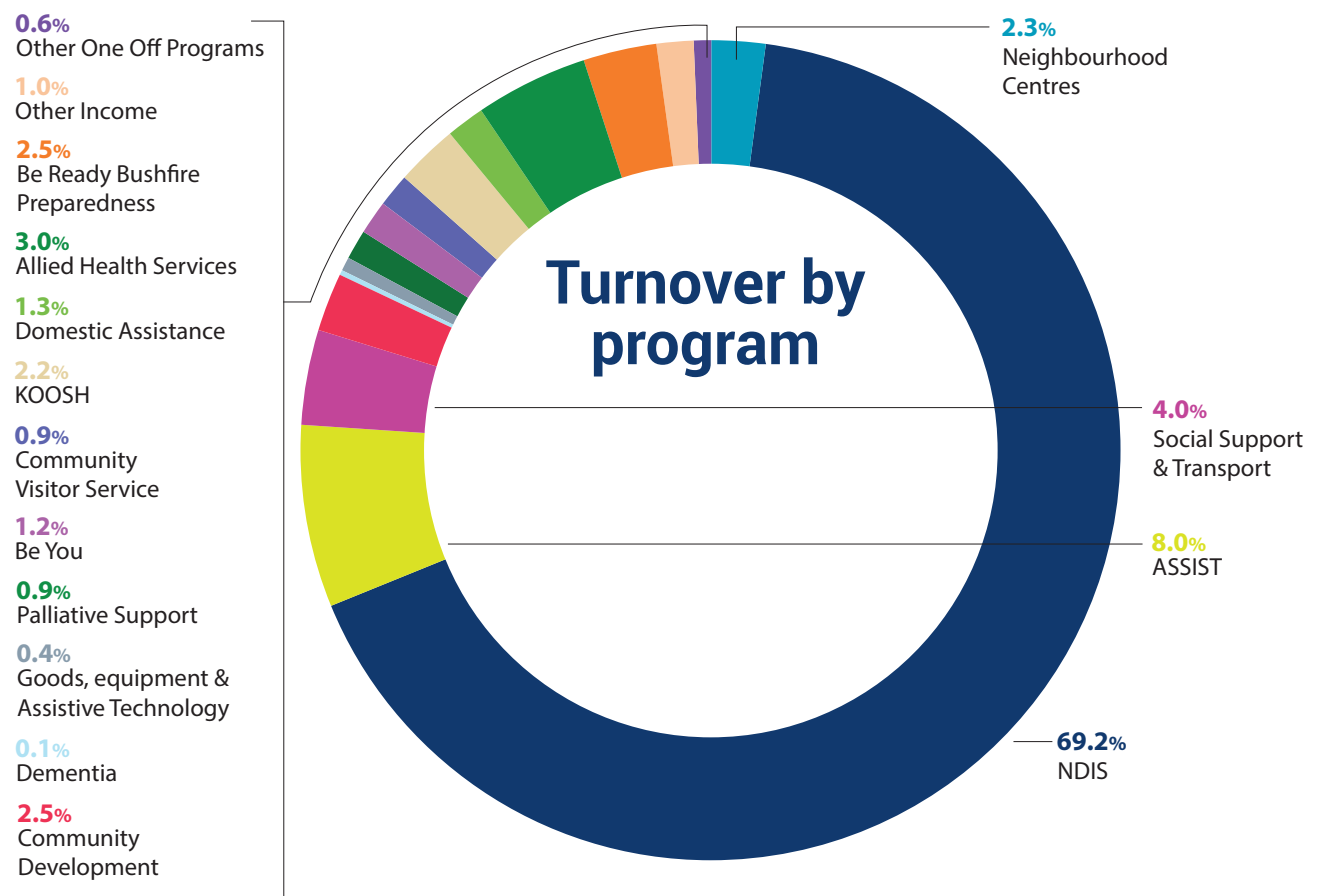
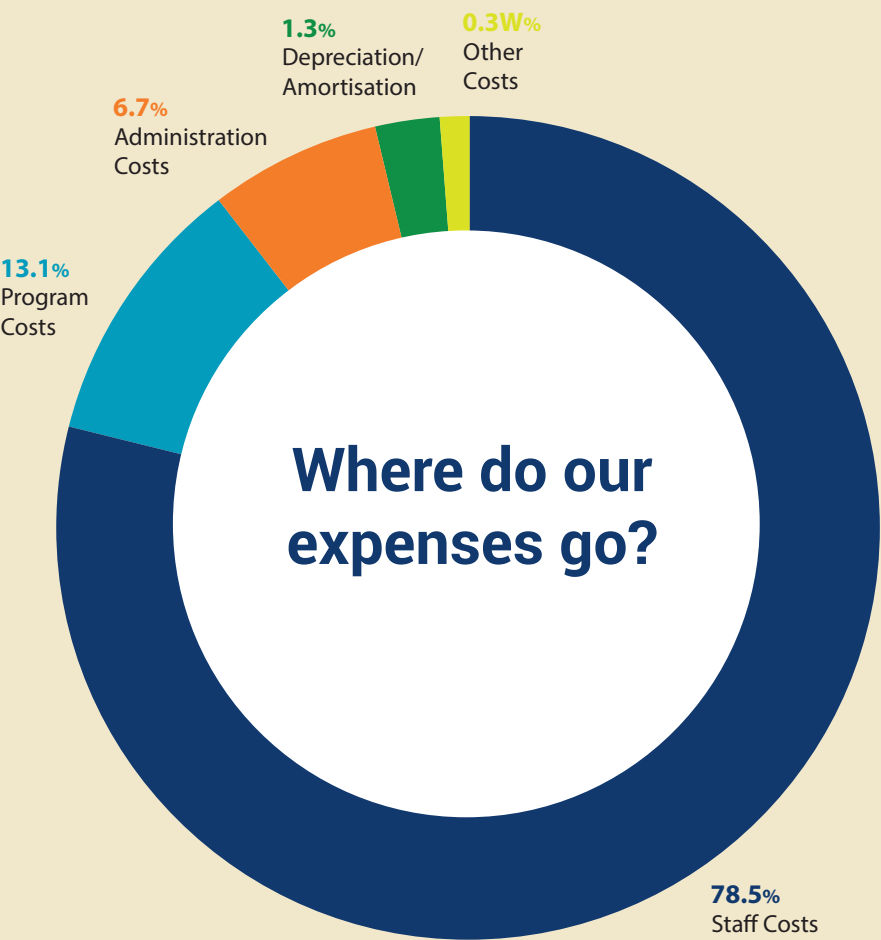
FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT 1 JULY 2022 - 30 JUNE 2023

| Income Statement     | 2022/23      | 2021/2022    | 2020/2021    |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Revenue              | \$16,073,093 | \$13,738,000 | \$12,282,000 |
| Expenses             | \$15,994,907 | \$13,933,000 | \$12,242,000 |
| Net Surplus/ Deficit | \$78,187     | (\$195,000)  | \$40,000     |
| Reserves             | \$440,746    | \$362,559    | \$594,000    |





# FINANCIAL REPORT continued



# OUR VALUED VOLUNTEERS

**B**elong BM has an amazing team of volunteers who generously provide their time, skills and experience across the organisation. We are enormously grateful for their support and could not achieve the community outcomes we all want without them.

We have a well-developed system of recruitment and training for our volunteers which is ably coordinated by Sonda Mitchell. Belong BM firmly believes that our volunteers are an essential part of our workforce, so our commitment to their support, training and encouragement is important to us. We hold various volunteer events through the year to show our appreciation and we regularly find that our volunteers are publicly recognised for their commitment at the Blue Mountains Seniors Week Awards.

Belong BM volunteers share their skills at reception for our three Neighbourhood Centres, help to organise outings and activities, visit isolated members of the community, drive our small buses and support a range of community groups. We are thankful for their generosity, their kindness, their skills and their ongoing commitment to supporting this community.



*Volunteer Vivienne at the reception of  
Belong Blue Mountains*



# OUR SUPPORTERS

Belong Blue Mountains wishes to acknowledge and thank the following:

## Government Support

### Australian Government

Department of Health under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP)

Department of Industry, Science Energy & Resources

Department of Social Services



### NSW Government

Department of Community & Justice

Department of Education

Department of Health, Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District



### Local Government

Blue Mountains City Council

Mayor: Mark Greenhill OAM

General Manager: Rosemary Dillon



### Members of Parliament

State Member of Parliament: Trish Doyle  
MP, Member for Blue Mountains

Federal Member of Parliament: Susan Templeman MP, Member for Macquarie

## Community donations

Thank you to all individuals and organisations who have donated to Belong Blue Mountains over the last year, either through cash donations, donations of wool or funding to the Wrap With Love project.

## Community partnerships, collaborations and support

Thank you to everyone in all services across the Blue Mountains who are committed to working collaboratively for a community that values justice and equality. Belong BM thanks the following businesses, organisations and partners for their contributions in 2022-2023:

Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT)  
Aged & Community Services Australia  
Aids Council of NSW (ACON)  
Apprenticeship Support Australia  
Australia Post Community Grants  
Bendigo Bank - Katoomba & Upper Blue Mountains  
Community Bank, Katoomba branch and  
Blackheath agency  
Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre  
Blaxland & Districts Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
Blaxland East Public School  
Blaxland Library  
Blue Mountains City Council Squalor and Hoarding  
Committee and Prue Hardgrove  
Blue Fringe Committee  
Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre (ACRC)  
Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI)  
Blue Mountains Food Services  
The Blue Mountains Gazette  
Blue Mountains Leisure Centres  
Blue Mountains TAFE  
Blue Mountains Women's Health & Resource Centre  
Caring Hearts Quilters  
Aunty Carol Cooper  
Carers NSW  
The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba  
Central Mountains Rotary  
Central Tablelands & Blue Mountains Community  
Legal Centre  
Commonwealth Bank Katoomba  
Community Care Forum and Prue Hardgrove BMCC  
Complete Care Team  
Connect Child and Family Services  
Gateway Family Services  
Girl Guides Association NSW; ACT  
Glenbrook Panthers  
Global Skills

Good Things Foundation  
 GREAT Community Transport  
 Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service  
 (for NILS)  
 Hazelbrook Association  
 HUBitat –  
 Lower Mountains Community Hub  
 Katoomba Radio Cabs  
 Katoomba High School  
 Katoomba North Public School  
 Katoomba Public School  
 KU Children's Services  
 Lawson Public School  
 LEEP Understand Technology  
 Link Wentworth (Community Housing)  
 Lithgow High School  
 Lithgow Information & Neighbourhood  
 Centre  
 Local Community Services Association  
 (LCSA)  
 Mental Health Commission of NSW  
 Mental Health & Networking Forum  
 Mid Mountains Cabs  
 Mid Mountains Family Support Network  
 Mootang Tarimi (Nepean Blue Mountains  
 Aboriginal Health Unit)  
 Mountains Community Resource Network  
 (MCRN)  
 Mountains Multicultural Interagency  
 Mountains Outreach Community Service  
 (MOCS)  
 Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST)  
 NCOSS – Council of Social Services NSW  
 Neighbourhood Aid Association  
 Nepean Blue Mountains NDIS CEOs  
 Roundtable  
 Nepean Community & Neighbourhood  
 Services (NCNS)  
 Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health  
 Network  
 Network of Community Services  
 Paint The Town Read  
 Partners in Recovery  
 Peppercorn Services  
 Resilience & Preparedness Working Group  
 Rotary Club of Upper and Lower Blue  
 Mountains  
 Rural Fire Service  
 Springwood High School  
 Springwood Neighbourhood Centre  
 Cooperative  
 Stronger Families Alliance  
 Thrive Family Support

Wendy's Home Care  
 Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF)  
 Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre  
 Youth Mental Health Illness & Substance Abuse Network

### **Bread and Food Donations**

Central Blue Mountains Rotary  
 Food Bank NSW & ACT  
 Woolworths  
 Lawson Baptist Church  
 Cornerstone Community Care  
 St Vincent de Paul  
 Todarellos Katoomba

### **Other Donations**

T Leuffeu  
 David Taylor  
 Lucy Keady  
 Zonta Club of Blue Mountains  
 Colin Semmler  
 The United Hospital Auxiliaries of NSW  
 Commonwealth Bank  
 Susan Lalaluddin  
 Audrey Anderson  
 Big Issue distributors  
 Holy Trinity Anglican Church Wentworth Falls  
 Emily Jateff  
 NRMA Katoomba  
 Michael Woodfine  
 Lorna Jackson  
 Blue Mountains Grammar School  
 Warwick Harrison  
 Kevin Schreiber  
 Sabina Danigawa  
 Blue Mountains City Council Community Assistance  
 Program

### **Consultants and Contractors**

Marty Walker, Still Moving Design  
 Michael Farrell-Whelan  
 Virginia Field  
 Wendy's Home Care  
 Tracey Willow  
 Deborah Sharpe  
 Rob Watson, Bridge the Gap  
 Nikki Boys, Blue Tide Consulting  
 Ray Bennett, Com Management

### **Annual Report Acknowledgements**

This report was written by staff at Belong Blue Mountains.  
 Editors: Jo Ridley  
 Proof-reader: Emma Wheeler  
 Photographs: Marty Walker and staff  
 Design and layout: Felicity Stannard  
 The Belong Blue Mountains Board and staff acknowledge  
 with thanks Bennett's Printing, Katoomba, for the  
 production of this report.



**BE HEARD • BE CONNECTED • BE SUPPORTED • BELONG**

We recognise, celebrate and thank everyone  
who contributes to the the work of  
Belong Blue Mountains  
for and with the people  
of the Blue Mountains community.

