

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



# Acknowledgement of Country



## Always was, Always will be

LINC acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, the Wiradjuri people, who have walked this beautiful valley for thousands of years, caring for the land, the water and the flora and fauna.

The ancestors have created the song lines, told the stories and created the artwork that defines the culture and way of being across the Seven Valleys. The Elders both past and present honour and continue to share the traditions and stories within our community.

LINC values the inclusion, the diversity and the people that we serve every day and strive to support and grow a happy, safe, inclusive and accepting community.

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# Our Mission

Strengthening our community by fostering unity and connections, through a diverse range of services that improve well-being and empowerment for families and individuals.



## Our Vision

To be a strong, resilient and inclusive community-owned organisation that supports and connects people across all life stages.

## Our Values

**Integrity:** The quality of being honest and having strong ethical principles with trust, authenticity and reliability.

**Respect:** Bringing value and dignity to all of our interactions.

**Empowerment:** To focus on individual strengths and abilities to make informed decisions that achieve goals.

**Inclusivity:** Equal access to opportunities and resources that embrace all people.

**Empathy:** A genuine concern for the needs, feelings and perspectives of others.



# Chairperson

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Board for their invaluable guidance, advice, and support throughout my tenure as Chairperson over the past year. Each Director brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, and their contributions have been instrumental in the continued growth and effective governance of our organisation.

The Board met monthly, adhering to our established reporting frameworks and governance protocols. Meetings were held both in person and virtually, ensuring flexibility and continuity. I would like to acknowledge that all Board Directors serve in a voluntary capacity, generously giving their time and expertise. Their commitment and leadership have been vital in overseeing and influencing the direction of this strong and resilient organisation.

Over the past 12 months, we have made significant strides in strengthening our internal processes and have collaboratively made progress with our strategic goals. This plan reflects the collective input of our staff, volunteers, and Directors, and positions us well for the future.

LINC has long been a foundation of our community, and its resilience continues to positively impact the lives of many. This year, we experienced several changes within the Board. We farewelled Toni MacDonald, Liz Soper, and Katie Woods, and warmly welcomed Karen Purser and Tony Delabosca. Each of our Directors brings unique expertise that will undoubtedly benefit LINC as we move forward.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks and congratulations to Lydia Balat, our CEO, for her outstanding leadership. Lydia has inspired and supported her leadership team and volunteers with dedication and vision.

We also extend our gratitude to every staff member for their ongoing commitment and service. A special mention goes to Narelle Thomas, who served LINC for many years and will be deeply missed. Our workforce, often the unsung heroes, remains the driving force behind our success.

To our volunteers, thank you for your selfless service and unwavering dedication to our community. Your contributions are deeply valued.

We also take a moment to remember Kathleen Williams, a cherished member of our LINC family who resided in one of our SIL homes.

With our strong foundation and a clear vision, the future of LINC is in capable hands. We look forward to another year of meaningful progress and community impact.

Warm regards,

Julie Murnane  
Chairperson

# LINC Board Members



**Julie Murnane - Chairperson**  
**Almy Bryce- Acting Secretary**  
**Sebastian Caruso- Treasurer**  
**Tony Dellabosca - Director**  
**Karen Purser- Director**

**Toni MacDonald- Vicechair person, Retired**  
**Liz Soper- Director, Retired**  
**Katy Woods- Secretary, Retired**  
**Bronwyn Webb- Director, Retired**

# CEO Report

**Lydia  
Balat**  
Chief Executive Officer



It is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I present the 2025 Annual Report for the Lithgow Information and Neighbourhood Centre Limited (LINC). This year has been one of significant transformation, marked by challenges and achievements that have strengthened our organisation and deepened our impact across the community, as the social and economic landscape continues to evolve.

LINC has remained steadfast in its mission to deliver inclusive, responsive, and community-led services. Our ability to adapt and innovate in the face of change is a testament to the dedication of our leadership team, staff, board, volunteers, and partners. Together, we have continued to build a stronger, more connected community.

## Strategic Highlights and Organisational Growth

- **Strengthening Governance and Leadership:** In collaboration with the LINC Board, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of our strategic direction and governance practices. By embedding training, mentorship, and sector expertise for advice and support, we are building a more agile and adaptable organisation.
- **Enhancing Team Cohesion and Capability:** Our leadership team has made significant progress in aligning our goals, identifying areas for growth and improvement, while fostering a culture of collaboration. This has enabled us to lead with clarity by supporting one another and celebrate our collective achievements. The teams have made significant milestones by adapting and implement changes guided by Policy and funding changes.
- **Elevating Client Voice and Experience:** We have implemented new mechanisms to capture client feedback and satisfaction, ensuring that our services remain responsive, relevant, and impactful. These insights are shaping how we deliver support and deepen our engagement with the community.
- **Driving Early Literacy Through Community Collaboration:** The rollout of the Paint the Town REaD initiative has been a standout success, bringing together preschools, childcare centres, services, children and families to promote early literacy. The positive community response reflects the power of collective action in shaping brighter futures for our children.
- **Investing in Service Infrastructure:** To ensure the safety and reliability of our transport services, we have upgraded our vehicle fleet with 11 new vehicles. This investment supports our commitment to accessibility and operational quality.

# CEO Report

**Lydia  
Balat**  
Chief Executive Officer



## Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2026

As we look to the future, our focus remains on strengthening our foundations while embracing innovation. In 2026, we will prioritise:

- **Diversifying Revenue Streams:** We will pursue new funding opportunities through government grants, philanthropic partnerships, and community-driven service models to ensure long-term sustainability.
- **Leveraging Technology for Impact:** We will implement strategic ICT solutions to enhance service delivery, improve client outcomes, and support staff development.
- **Building a Recognisable and Trusted Brand:** We aim to position LINC as a first-to-mind organisation by increasing our presence in the community and ensuring we are the service of choice. We will strive for our brand to one that is known for its integrity, impact, and purposeful commitment to community wellbeing.

## Acknowledgments

LINC was fortunate to be chosen as a recipient for the LJ Hooker Charity Auction along with Lithgow Community Private Hospital. It was with great pleasure and gratitude that we were granted \$30,859.50. I would like to thank LJ Hooker, Lithgow Workies and everyone who donated at the event. LINC will ensure the donation is very thoughtfully directed to better our current programs and to replace much needed equipment.

This year, we had to farewell valued team and board members. I extend my sincere thank you, for their contributions and wish them every success in their future endeavors. To our new staff, welcome, I look forward to the journey ahead and the impact we will create together.

To our staff, volunteers, and Board members-thank you. Your dedication, compassion, and professionalism are the driving force behind everything we do. I am honored to lead such a committed and capable team.

Finally, I express my deepest gratitude to our funding bodies, community partners, and the people of Lithgow. Your trust and support enable us to continue building a more inclusive, connected, and resilient community.

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on our achievements. I invite you to join us as we continue to grow, adapt, and lead with purpose.

# Finance Report

**Katherine Williams**  
Finance Manager



It is my pleasure to present the Finance Manager's Report for the financial year ending 30 June 2025. This past year has been one of significant challenge and reflection for Lithgow Information and Neighbourhood Centre Limited (LINC). Like many in the not-for-profit sector, we faced a tough financial landscape marked by rising costs, increased compliance requirements, funding reforms, and a more competitive environment for grants and support. Despite these pressures, our commitment to serving the community with excellence and compassion remained unwavering.

## Financial Overview

For the 2024–25 financial year, LINC recorded total revenue of \$6,987,140 with operating expenses amounting to \$7,041,648 resulting in a net deficit of \$54,508. While this outcome reflects the financial strain experienced across the sector, it also highlights the resilience and adaptability of our organisation.

Our balance sheet remains stable, with total assets of \$3,605,428 and net assets of \$2,549,074, representing a 34% increase compared to the previous year. This growth reflects our commitment to financial sustainability. We have taken proactive steps to strengthen our financial position through the implementation of enhanced budgeting, reporting, and cost control measures, ensuring greater transparency and accountability across the organisation.

## Key Achievements

Even in a challenging year, we achieved several milestones worth celebrating:

- **Fleet Renewal:** We updated our ageing vehicle fleet, enabling us to expand our NDIS individual support services and reach more people in need.
- **New Office Space:** We secured a second office on Main Street for our Communities & Kids department, a necessary move as our growing team could no longer fit under the one roof at our Padley St location.
- **Community Support:** We received over \$18,000 in donations from our generous community - an incredible show of support that we are deeply grateful for.
- **CHSP Growth:** Our Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) services experienced significant growth, allowing us to assist more seniors in maintaining independence and wellbeing.

On a personal note, I celebrated my one-year anniversary at LINC this year. It has been a true pleasure working alongside such passionate colleagues and engaging with the community we serve.

## Looking Ahead

The year ahead will not be without its hurdles. We anticipate further funding cuts, stricter compliance obligations, and new employer levies. In addition, renewed funding contracts are expected to come with only minimal increases, which unfortunately do not reflect the rising costs we face. The not-for-profit sector is stretched and struggling, but it is our mission, our vision, and our genuine love for what we do that keeps us striving.

Our financial focus for 2025–26 will be on optimisation, efficiency, and productivity. Rather than expanding our services, we aim to invest in and improve what we already do, so that we can truly be the best we can be for our community.

# Finance Report

**Katherine Williams**  
Finance Manager



As part of this, we plan to invest in better utilisation of our systems and IT infrastructure. These improvements will help us streamline operations, free up valuable staff time to focus more on service delivery, strengthen compliance, and enhance the overall quality and consistency of our services.

We are proud to share that we have already secured several new grants and funding opportunities, and we look forward to showcasing the impactful work these will enable in the coming months.

## Closing Thoughts

While the numbers may not tell a story of ease, they do tell a story of perseverance, community spirit, and unwavering dedication. We remain committed to transparency, accountability, and excellence in service delivery.

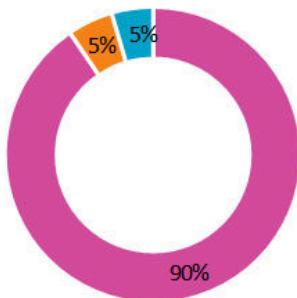
To our board, staff, volunteers, and supporters - thank you. Your belief in our work fuels everything we do. Together, we continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.



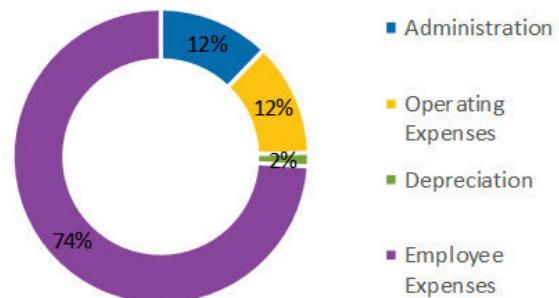
# Income Statement

|                                    | Year ended 30 June 2025 | Year ended 30 June 2024 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                    | \$                      | \$                      |
| <b>Revenue</b>                     |                         |                         |
| Government Funding                 | 6,323,097               | 6,194,987               |
| Service Users                      | 347,815                 | 324,752                 |
| Other                              | 316,228                 | 345,136                 |
| <b>Total Revenue</b>               | <b>6,987,140</b>        | <b>6,864,875</b>        |
| <br><b>Expenses</b>                |                         |                         |
| Administration                     | 860,043                 | 968,519                 |
| Operating Expenses                 | 871,702                 | 604,339                 |
| Depreciation                       | 103,524                 | 76,086                  |
| Employee Expenses                  | 5,206,379               | 4,962,246               |
| <b>Total Expenses</b>              | <b>7,041,648</b>        | <b>6,611,190</b>        |
| <b>Total Net Surplus/(Deficit)</b> | <b>(54,508)</b>         | <b>253,685</b>          |

Revenue



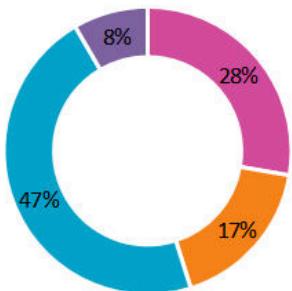
Expenses



# Balance Sheet

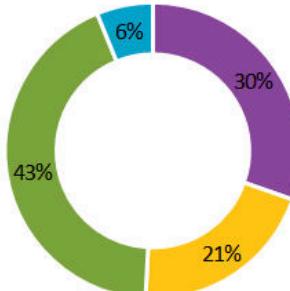
|                             | Year ended 30 June 2025 | Year ended 30 June 2024 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                             | \$                      | \$                      |
| <b>Assets</b>               |                         |                         |
| Cash & Cash Equivalents     | 999,722                 | 1,564,424               |
| Trade & Other Receivables   | 628,212                 | 620,189                 |
| Property, Plant & Equipment | 1,674,052               | 809,023                 |
| Other Assets                | 303,442                 | 130,537                 |
| <b>Total Assets</b>         | <b>3,605,428</b>        | <b>3,124,173</b>        |
| <br><b>Liabilities</b>      |                         |                         |
| Trade & Other Payables      | 320,467                 | 624,001                 |
| Lease Liabilities           | 216,181                 | 33,354                  |
| Employee Benefits           | 454,636                 | 468,485                 |
| Other Liabilities           | 65,070                  | 99,214                  |
| <b>Total Liabilities</b>    | <b>1,056,354</b>        | <b>1,225,054</b>        |
| <b>Net Assets</b>           | <b>2,549,074</b>        | <b>1,899,119</b>        |
| <br><b>Equity</b>           |                         |                         |
| Retained Earnings           | 1,844,610               | 1,899,119               |
| Reserves                    | 704,464                 | -                       |
| <b>Total Equity</b>         | <b>2,549,074</b>        | <b>1,899,119</b>        |

## Assets



- Cash & Cash Equivalents
- Trade & Other Receivables
- Property, Plant & Equipment
- Other Assets

## Liabilities



- Trade & Other Payables
- Lease Liabilities
- Employee Benefits
- Other Liabilities

# Community Engagement Report

**Chloe  
Mas-Stephens**

Community Engagement Officer



The Community Engagement Officer role commenced in March 2025 to strengthen LINC's visibility, partnerships, and communications with our community. In just over six months, the role has become very closely aligned with LINC's strategic investment in community engagement and brand identity, contributing to new funding, stronger networks, and greater awareness of LINC's work.

## Social Media and Digital Engagement

Social media has become a powerful tool for sharing LINC's story.

- **Facebook:** Reached 146,000 people (+41%), with 12,000 visits and 18,000 interactions.
- **TikTok:** Launched in April, achieving 37,000 video views.
- **LinkedIn:** Launched in May, already generating professional connections.

These platforms have broadened LINC's reach, attracted media attention, and celebrated various departments and volunteers in new ways

## Partnerships and Promotion

A key focus has been strengthening LINC's profile through partnerships and consistent representation. This includes connecting with 2LT radio, developing an ongoing relationship with the Lithgow Mercury, and regularly representing LINC at local interagencies. This role has also led the planning committee for the International Day of People with Disability, ensuring inclusive, community-led planning.



## Events and Community Presence

The role has supported LINC's presence at community events through promotion, design, and coordination, easing pressure on service managers and ensuring professional presentation. Highlights include Holi Festival, Neighbourhood Centre Week, Bowenfels Fun Day, Yellow Ladybugs Conference, and R U OK? Day. This work aligns with LINC's commitment to delivering events and pop-up stalls that strengthen visibility and keep services responsive to community needs.

# Community Engagement Report

**Chloe  
Mas-Stephens**

Community Engagement Officer



## Youth and Community Engagement

In partnership with Milk Crate Theatre, the WEST Program has engaged youth aged 11-17 through storytelling and movement. Over two terms, it has built confidence, friendships, and creative expression, while strengthening LINC's connection with young people and families. Planning is underway for a further term in 2025.

Through LINC's partnership with Work & Stay, this role also contributes as a Welcome Ambassador, supporting new workers and families to connect with services and feel included in the community.

## Funding and Departmental Support

Since March, Community Engagement has helped secure **\$13,700** in new funding, including:

- **\$5,000** for LINC Kids playgroups
- **\$4,500** for the International Day of People with Disability
- **\$1,200** for Welcome Ambassador program through Work and Stay

LINC departments have also been supported with communications, promotional design, event coordination, and bi-monthly wellness mornings with People & Culture, reflecting LINC's commitment to positive workplace culture and staff connection.

## Future Plans and Opportunities

Looking into 2026, priorities include:

- Hosting a dedicated fundraising event to complement LINC's community calendar
- Exploring AI tools to strengthen grants, fundraising, and marketing
- Expanding storytelling through short videos and community spotlights
- Growing youth engagement through TikTok and digital initiatives
- Building structured business sponsorship opportunities
- Philanthropy Outreach: engaging with aligned foundations to create new partnerships supporting community-led initiatives

In summary, the Community Engagement Officer role has strengthened LINC's visibility, built new partnerships, and supported both major events and individual community engagement. By strengthening LINC's presence across the community and amplifying our story, the role has added real value in building trust and connection.

I have greatly enjoyed stepping into this position and am passionate about the impact it is already having. With these foundations in place, the year ahead holds exciting opportunities for further innovation, connection, and community impact.

# Community Aged Care

**Brooke Hennessy**

Community Aged Care Manager



It is with great pride that I present this year's AGM report for our Aged Care services. Reflecting on a period of strong growth, renewed community confidence, and significant achievements across all our services, this year has been defined by consolidation and expansion. Not only have we met the high demand for our services, but we have also exceeded expectations in areas that were previously under pressure. Most importantly, we have continued to uphold our core mission of supporting our older community members to live safely, independently, and with dignity.

## Maintenance Services

Our Maintenance team has reached full capacity this year, a remarkable turnaround from previous years of under-delivery. With high demand continuing, the team's consistency and reliability have ensured that clients' homes remain safe and comfortable.

The significance of this achievement cannot be overstated. By reaching capacity, we have built community trust and demonstrated that our team is capable of keeping pace with the real and growing needs of the people we serve.

## Modifications

Our Modifications service has also had an outstanding year. We are fortunate to work with excellent contractors who share our vision. This has enabled us to expand capacity and deliver modifications that make a real difference, allowing older residents to remain safe and independent at home. These works continue to be life-changing for many clients.

## Meals on Wheels



Meals on Wheels continues to be a cornerstone of our service. The new menu introduced in February, along with the Let's Dine Out vouchers, have been very well received, and we have now transitioned to the Spring/Summer menu, which includes seasonal specials. Beyond providing nutritious meals, this service plays a vital role in fostering social connection through regular visits.

This year, we have welcomed new volunteers to the team while also saying farewell to some long-standing members. In particular, we would like to acknowledge David and Kathleen Terry, who dedicated many years to meal deliveries—David continuing well into his 80s before stepping back on his doctor's advice. We also celebrate Carol Farrah, who has been a committed volunteer for more than 20 years. Their dedication and service have made a lasting impact on the lives of our clients.

The purchase of a new oven has now been finalised and we are eagerly awaiting its installation. This will enable us to further increase outputs while also reducing the electricity costs involved in running a much older oven.

# Community Aged Care

**Brooke Hennessy**

Community Aged Care Manager



## Transport Services

Our Transport services continue to be in strong demand, providing vital support for clients' independence and social participation. Through this service, clients are able to access a wide range of community and social activities.

The introduction of new vehicles has made our transport safer, more reliable, and more comfortable for clients, enhancing their overall experience. This upgrade ensures we can continue meeting the growing demand while maintaining high standards of safety and service.

## Social Support

Our Social Support services continue to be in strong demand, providing vital support for clients' independence, connection, and wellbeing. LINC has expanded our social support services across a wide range of community and social activities, including our ever-popular "Lunch Bunch" outings, ensuring that all clients, regardless of mobility, can fully participate in community life. A highlight of our social programs this year has been the remarkable growth of our Gentle Groove exercise classes. What began as a single class has become so popular that we now run two sessions each week, with a third session under consideration. These classes not only support physical health but also foster social connection, confidence, and joy among participants, complementing our broader social support initiatives.



## Looking Ahead

This year has been one of significant achievement across all services. We have moved from a period of under-delivery to a position of strength, with our teams and partners providing services that truly meet the needs of our community.

Looking forward, we recognise that changes are underway within our sector. While the details of the new Aged Care Act are not yet finalised, we are as prepared as possible with the information currently available. Our team has consistently demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, ready to respond to new requirements as they arise. With this adaptability, combined with strong and supportive leadership, we are confident that we will continue to thrive even as the regulatory environment evolves.

Central to our success is the way our team works cohesively across all areas of service delivery. Guided by the vision and encouragement of our CEO and Board, staff, contractors, and volunteers are empowered to perform at their best, fostering a culture of collaboration, accountability, and care. In closing, I extend heartfelt thanks to our staff, contractors, volunteers, and Board members. Their dedication and compassion underpin all that we have achieved this year. Together, under strong leadership, we will continue to build on this success, supporting our community with the respect, care, and commitment they deserve.

# Community Development

**Nathan  
Mas-Stephens**

Community Development Coordinator



At the heart of Community Development, is a simple idea: when people feel connected and valued, they thrive. This year we have seen that idea come alive again and again - in young people who feel safe enough to try something new, in neighbours who found friendship through shared activity, and in volunteers who discovered their own capacity to lead.

## People turning up and stepping forward

Our volunteers continue to be the pulse of everything we do. This year 45 active volunteers have brought warmth and energy to LINC. They have taken brave steps into leadership, coordinating programs such as the Women's Safe Haven, Multicultural Women's Group, Cancer Support Group, Radio Plays, Dungeons & Dragons, and the expanding Trading Card Games and Board Game Nights.

This remarkable growth has been supported by the role of our part time Volunteer Coordinator, Cathy Kleingeld. Cathy has created a pathway that is welcoming and encouraging, helping every new volunteer find their place and purpose. This increase in volunteers would not have been possible without her hard work, and her leadership has allowed others to rise.

The Community Café has also been a quiet but powerful engine. More than just a place to share a cuppa, it builds skills customer service, teamwork, food safety and gives volunteers the confidence to lead. At the same time, the café's income flows back into all Community Development programs, funding equipment, training and uniforms so our ideas can grow without being held back by cost.

## Young people finding safe places and adventure

For our young people, this has been a year of resilience and discovery. When the Lithgow winter made outdoor gatherings tough, we were able to keep the Bowenfels Youth Hub close to home, moving into Fatima Hall with the help of Council's \$3,300 support. Staying within walking distance for our young people mattered – it meant safety, familiarity and easy access. Programs have grown too. Lives Lived Well brought in Cooking with Karla, a simple but impactful way for young people to build life skills while connecting with one another.

Our holiday programs invited young people to explore and be proud of their own backyard - climbing and abseiling at Mount Victoria, bushwalking the Lost City, Wolgan View Canyon, Glow Worm Tunnel, Hartley Historic Village, Deep Pass and the Lithgow Dam Walk. These adventures built confidence, strengthened friendships and created memories that say, "this is so much better than staying at home."

We have also worked quietly and proactively in times of crisis. Long before things go wrong, our team is building trust with young people and families so that when challenges come, we can act quickly and with care. Our partnerships with Headspace, Lives Lived Well, Community Projects and the AECG mean support is immediate and coordinated when it is most needed. This was evident after the tragic loss of one of our young people, when we were able to come together as a community, support one another through grief, and move gently into healing.

# Community Development

**Nathan  
Mas-Stephens**

Community Development Coordinator



## A hub for connection and culture

This year 3,305 connections were made through Community Development conversations, referrals, groups, events and moments that matter. Our spaces have continued to welcome vital external-support services like AA, NA, Lifeline Men's Group, Boomerang Bags and Sue's Yoga, giving the community free access to help and connection.

We have also celebrated and learned from our cultural diversity, forming new partnerships with the local Nepalese and Islamic communities which saw our halls come alive with Eid, Holi and Diwali. These fresh connections have deepened belonging and cultural pride across Lithgow. We proudly supported NAIDOC and Reconciliation events with Council and local Aboriginal organisations, honouring culture and strengthening inclusion.

## A voice at the table

Community Development has continued to bring the voice of local people into decision-making, not only through the LINC-run Community Service Interagency, but also through spaces like the Police Aboriginal Advisory Committee (PAAC), Council's Community Development Committee, Crime Prevention Committee and Planet Youth. These networks and new partnerships give us the reach to speak for those who might otherwise go unheard, helping decisions reflect the diversity of our community.



## Looking ahead with hope and purpose

Next year we will keep building on this foundation. We want even more volunteers stepping into leadership and more young people finding safe places and new opportunities. The Community Café will continue to sustain unfunded programs and skill building. We are excited for the relaunch of the Local Drug Action Team (LDAT), the delivery of Love Bites education, and the growth of partnerships that let us respond quickly and effectively when needs arise.

To every volunteer, staff member and partner who has been part of this work, thank you. Together we have built trust, created belonging and turned challenges into opportunities. This is what community looks like, and it is a privilege to build it with you.

# Child, Youth & Family Counselling

**Sue Craig**  
Counsellor



## Counselling, Specialised education & skills training

CYFC remains committed to improving access and equity in service delivery to our socially and geographically isolated communities. Partnering with Portland Central school has enabled the service to be embedded in the community, providing both drop in and appointment-based services for young people, parents & carers and their children. The service also provides information, resources, referrals and advocacy for community members and educators, working closely with the school executive to minimise risk, increase safety, and improve school engagement. At the end of the school year, we have also provided short term outreach to Capertee to assist students to transition from a small school environment into secondary education.

As noted in previous reports, the scope of presentations is broad and complex, resulting in longer support periods whilst families navigate the wait times for referral and assessments with more specialised services such as Mental Health, DCJ, Psychiatry and Occupational Therapy. Many clients have experienced domestic family & sexual violence, or present with neurodivergent needs requiring assessment, support and accommodations. Other presentations include grief & loss, relationship challenges including bullying, and mental health concerns, particularly anxiety. Flexible service delivery allows for a mixture of individual, family and small groupwork to strengthen relationships, family & community connections, self-confidence and agency, improving safety, help seeking, self-advocacy and general wellbeing.

In-session rating scales have been introduced inviting participant feedback, supporting reflection on session "helpfulness", and setting clear actions for both participants and CYFC between sessions. Currently this is a manual data collection system, however the majority of feedback forms report helpfulness of 8/10 or higher.

## Violence Prevention: Community Sector Co-ordination and Community Engagement

As part of our commitment to social justice, I am proud to Co-Chair the Lithgow Cares Violence Prevention & Child Protection Interagency Committee, a dedicated team of local service providers committed to improving safety for women, children, families and community through a variety of engagement activities, and efforts to enhance service system responses. *"I really appreciate the amazing work Lithgow Cares do in bringing such important voices to our region. Thank you"*

Over the past two years we have hosted community events with She Is Not Your Rehab Mataio & Sarah Brown, internationally recognised innovators and advocates supporting men to transform, instead of transmitting their pain to those around them. These events have provided a foundation for important discussions about the impact of domestic and sexual violence on children whom grow up to use violence to manage their hurt. This work is becoming increasingly urgent as social media algorithms are paving the way for isolated or hurt young men to be recruited into what initially seems like a welcoming community but ultimately serves to increase their alienation. In this increasingly complex sociopolitical landscape, a significant backlash against women and minority groups is being fostered. Unless we embrace and support these vulnerable and disaffected youth, our communities and families are at risk of becoming more divided and volatile.

# Child, Youth & Family Counselling

**Sue Craig**  
Counsellor



In response to these challenges, we are committed to engaging men and the broader community as active partners to eliminate domestic, family & sexual violence, promote healing from trauma, reduce associated psychological distress and suicide risk, strengthen families, communities and the local service system.

Our diverse interagency members have strong community connections that will support us to engage schools, workplaces and community-based sporting, social and cultural networks. We are partnering with specialists, to enhance the skillset of students, parents, community members and sector workforce with evidence based trauma informed programs which create safe spaces where difficult conversations can be held to unpack stereotypes, relationships and sexuality, including consent, social media, porn culture, whilst enhancing help seeking and Upstanding behaviours.

Recognising that young men without positive role models are at higher risk of disengagement, we are building sustainable safe spaces for men and young men to co-design strategies that share knowledge and strengthen community supports over time. We will build upon our foundations to formalise a Men's Consultation & Violence Prevention group alongside a Women's Safety Committee to ensure, transparency and accountability. Whilst we are mindful of not placing more responsibility on young people to solve the problem of gendered violence, we will also offer support to assist young people in the co-design and implementation of trauma informed activities that align with the broader aims and objectives of Lithgow Cares and NSW Pathways to Prevention. *"So grateful to have been a part of this experience. Thankyou, your work is precious and I don't know if I would chose to stay sober without the support of the inner boy app"*



I wish to extend my gratitude to the LINC leadership team for their efforts in strengthening connections and collaboration in our efforts to implement our strategic plan. The TEI team has also invested many hours in relation to contract reviews with DCJ. Throughout the recommissioning process we clearly outlined the needs of our community and our extensive, locally tailored programs and activities that provide significant value for investment. It has been reassuring to finally have the contracts confirmed. We look forward to reviewing and implementing the Community and Family Support (CAFS) program that is superseding the TEI guidelines.

We continue to experience challenges relating to data quality, working with our Client Management System (CMS) provider to ensure the system is fit for purpose. Negotiations are ongoing to improve collection, reporting options, and integration with DEX. Client feedback and needs assessment options are also being reviewed. While the DEX portal provides some reporting, it does not fully capture the breadth of LINC's activities and impact. CMS refinements are therefore a priority.

Finally, I wish to thank the broader LINC team and Board for their ongoing commitment and dedication our community. LINC is indeed the "heart of our community".

# Communities & Kids

**Jackie Vogel**  
Service Coordinator



It is with great pride and appreciation that I present the 2025 Annual Report for Communities and Kids. This year has brought a valuable mix of accomplishments and challenges across our work, funding landscape, and community engagement efforts.

Despite the hurdles, we have made meaningful progress and continued to support families and children with dedication and care. This report highlights the key achievements, milestones, and impact of our work over the past year.

## Working with Children and Families: Overview

Communities and Kids are committed to supporting children and families across the Lithgow Local Government Area (LGA). Our service is open to all families, with a particular focus on those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

We continue to offer holistic support that promotes child development, safety and wellbeing, access to advice and referral pathways, and the development of positive parenting skills.

Our motto, "We learn and connect through play," captures both our philosophy and the spirit of our work nurturing connection, growth, and community through inclusive and engaging play-based learning.

## Programs

As a non-profit organisation funded by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), Communities and Kids deliver Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) services for children aged 0–5 and their families. Our programs are designed to promote early learning, connection, and wellbeing across the Lithgow LGA.

## Playgroup Sessions

In partnership with the Department of Education, we proudly run weekly playgroups in the vibrant communities of Lithgow and Portland. These engaging, face-to-face sessions continue to attract new families, offering a welcoming space for connection, early childhood development, and the formation of meaningful friendships.

## Parenting Programs

Communities and Kids offer the Circle of Security Parenting Program (COSP) and Classroom Edition—an 8-week, relationship-based early intervention program designed to enhance attachment security between parents and their children.

Grounded in decades of Attachment Theory research, COSP helps caregivers better understand and respond to their children's emotional needs, laying the foundation for secure attachment, resilience, empathy, self-regulation, and school readiness. We deliver this program to parents, carers, and early childhood educators, recognising the broad community benefits of secure, supported relationships.

# Communities & Kids

**Jackie Vogel**  
Service Coordinator



## Literacy Programs

Since the Lithgow launch of Paint the Town REad a national, community-led early literacy initiative, we have made exciting strides in promoting a love of reading among young children across the Lithgow LGA.

This program encourages early and sustained engagement with books by establishing 12 permanent book swap stations throughout the community and fostering healthy reading habits from birth. A key highlight of the year has been the hatching of our reading mascot, a much-anticipated event that captivated children and educators alike. Our mascot, now affectionately named Pebbles the Platypus, has been lovingly embraced by children and staff at local centres.

This initiative is a collaborative effort between Communities and Kids, Thrive Services, the HIPPY Program, TAFE Children's Services, and Lithgow Library. Together, we have delivered fun, engaging literacy sessions featuring storytelling, music, and interactive activities to children at six local childcare centres, each now proudly hosting a dedicated book swap box.

## Good Start Speech Therapy

Through a strong partnership with the Speech Pathology team at Lithgow Hospital, we offer a targeted speech therapy playgroup focused on supporting children's communication development. The program promotes language understanding, clear expression, correct pronunciation, and strategies to reduce stuttering.

Speech therapists assess children at the end of each term and provide families with tailored recommendations and referrals where needed. We are deeply grateful for the team's dedication and expertise in improving the wellbeing of our youngest community members.

## Lithgow Cares Committee



Lithgow Cares is a collaborative network of local service providers committed to building a safe, connected, and resilient community. The committee works to strengthen families and reduce child protection issues and domestic and family violence through awareness campaigns, service collaboration, and community events.

Initiatives include the Bowenfels and Portland Family Fun Days. We are proud to contribute to this united front for community wellbeing.

## Highlight: Yellow Ladybugs Conference

Supporting Our Neurodivergent Girls, Women, and Gender-Diverse Individuals. In 2025, Communities and Kids and LINC's Community Engagement Officer, had the valuable opportunity to host the online Yellow Ladybugs Conference, a nationally recognised event dedicated to supporting neurodivergent girls, women, and gender-diverse individuals, including transgender females.

# Communities & Kids

**Jackie Vogel**  
Service Coordinator



The learnings from this conference have begun to inform our approach, helping us better understand and respond to the needs of neurodivergent children and families within the playgroups and programs. We are committed to fostering environments where every child and parent feels seen, valued, and supported.

## Main Street Office

We have been operating from our Main Street premises for a full year, and the feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive. Families and visitors regularly comment on the welcoming, warm, and safe atmosphere the space provides.

This central location has also strengthened our partnerships with nearby services such as Lithgow Community Projects (LCP) and Headspace, making it easier to coordinate support and share resources. The presence of our service in the heart of the community has brought benefits to LINC staff, partner organisations, and the public alike, reinforcing our role as a trusted and accessible service for families.

## Challenges: Program Venues

While we greatly value our partnerships with local schools, logistical issues such as space availability, scheduling constraints, and changes in school operations have impacted our ability to deliver programs as smoothly as we would like. These challenges have occasionally limited our capacity to provide a consistent and uninterrupted experience for families.

We continue to work closely with our school partners to find sustainable solutions, and we remain committed to delivering high-quality, accessible programs-regardless of the setting. Securing reliable and family-friendly venues will remain a key focus for the coming year.



I would like to thank our wonderful families, our dedicated staff Donna and Sarah for their commitment, experience and passion they bring to their work, our volunteers Michelle, and Mal (aka Santa) for bringing joy and community spirit to our playgroups and events. We are also incredibly grateful to our stakeholders, the LINC Board members, and the entire LINC team for their ongoing support and collaboration.

We remain deeply committed to LINC's mission and look forward to another year of growth, innovation, and strengthening our community together.



# Disability Services

**Felicia Fitzgerald**

Disability Business Manager



In 2025, our Disability Services team continued to deliver high-quality, person-centred support to nearly 100 clients across the Lithgow region. With a dedicated workforce of 70 staff, we remained committed to providing continuity of care and innovative support.

## Team Growth and Leadership Transitions

This year brought several key staffing changes that have strengthened our leadership and service delivery:

- Appointment of a new Disability Business Manager
- Permanent placement of our Individual Support Coordinator
- Introduction of a new Accommodation Coordinator
- Offering opportunities for internal staff, we were able to appoint a new Team Leader who was from Aged Care Service.
- The return of two valued team leaders, one stepping into a support coordination role

These transitions required flexibility and collaboration across the team. Staff often stepped into different roles to ensure seamless support for clients. While change can be challenging, it also presented opportunities to reflect, improve, and grow. Our team's adaptability and shared commitment to our clients were evident throughout the year.

## Responding to a Changing Sector

The disability services landscape continues to evolve, with increasing complexity and growing competition. In this environment, we remain focused on delivering exceptional, person-centred support and attracting the best talent. Our long-standing presence in Lithgow is a foundation we are proud of, and we are committed to building on this reputation through innovation, quality, and community connection.

## Accommodation Services

This year, we welcomed two new residents into our Supported Independent Living (SIL) homes. Their presence has brought fresh energy and new connections to their households, and we are thrilled to have them as part of the LINC family.

We are also planning exciting upgrades to one of our homes to enhance accessibility and expand support options. Our goal is to maximise the use of our existing assets and explore creative ways to meet the evolving needs of our clients.

We also welcomed a new Accommodation Coordinator, Chris, who brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to empowering people living with disabilities. His leadership, alongside the efforts of Starr and Courtney, promises exciting developments in the year ahead.

Sadly, we also experienced the loss of a long-time resident. This was a deeply emotional time for our team. The compassion, unity, and support shown across all levels of the organisation - from our CEO and People Culture Manager, to our frontline staff - was a powerful reminder of the values that underpin our work. The care extended to the resident's family and fellow housemates was a testament to the humanity and empathy that define our services.

# Disability Services

**Felicia Fitzgerald**

Disability Business Manager



## Individual Support

Our Individual Support program continues to thrive, offering dynamic and tailored supports to participants. Staff consistently demonstrate creativity and “out of the box” thinking to ensure clients are engaged in meaningful ways. This area of service is fast-paced and complex, and our coordinator Emilee has done an exceptional job navigating its many challenges with professionalism and care.

## Group Activities

Our Group Activities program has delivered a range of engaging experiences this year and is poised for further growth. Some activities have taken place at the LINC office, creating opportunities for staff and participants to connect more regularly. A highlight has been the cooking sessions in partnership with the community café - a fun and inclusive initiative that we hope to expand in the coming year.



## Support Coordination

Our Support Coordination team also experienced staffing changes during the year yet continued to provide outstanding support to clients navigating complex systems. Sally's dedication stood out as she supported a young man transitioning from out-of-home care and school into independent living, stepping in where other systems had fallen short. She also played a key role in helping a woman transition from a long hospital stay into a new SDA/SIL home close to her family.

Desiree, who recently joined the team, has already built strong relationships with the families she supports. This area of service holds great potential for growth, as LINC continues to build partnerships beyond our own programs - expanding our reach and improving outcomes for more people in our community.

# Disability Services

**Felicia Fitzgerald**

Disability Business Manager



## Acknowledging Our Team

My first engagement with LINC was at the Annual Meeting last year, and it's a privilege to now be showcasing the achievements of the Disability Services team over the past 12 months.

It is essential that we acknowledge the incredible work of our support workers. Their roles are complex and carry immense responsibility - especially for clients who may not have family support. Amid the busyness of each day, their dedication can sometimes go unnoticed, but their impact is profound. They consistently go above and beyond to support participants to live their best lives. The trust and relationships they build are the foundation of everything we do.

In 2026, we aim to offer more opportunities for training and development, and to strengthen team cohesion – which can be challenging when staff work across different programs and don't always cross paths. Investing in our people is key to the quality of support we deliver. LINC is committed to being an employer of choice, and we will continue to implement initiatives that support and empower our team.

## Closing Reflections

This year has been one of growth, transition, and resilience. Through every challenge and change, our team has remained focused on what matters most - the people we support. We are proud of the progress we've made, the relationships we've built, and the lives we've impacted. As we look ahead to 2026, we do so with renewed purpose, a strong foundation, and a shared commitment to delivering exceptional disability services that reflect the values at the heart of LINC.

# In Loving Memory

## *Kathleen Williams*

This year, we were deeply saddened by the passing of our dear friend Kath, who had been part of the LINC family for many years. She brought warmth, laughter, and kindness wherever she went and was always ready for a friendly chat.

Kath's absolute favourite thing to attend was Gorrie Ban, closely followed by the LINC lunch program, where she loved connecting with others over good food and company. She also enjoyed shopping and cooking, often sharing her joy for both in conversation. Kath will be fondly remembered for her beautiful spirit and the happiness she brought to everyone around her.





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# LINC

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