

2024-2025 Annual Report

Strengthening community.
Supporting families.
Creating connections.



Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Awabakal People, the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and operate.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and recognise their continuing connection to Country, to land, waters, and community.

We acknowledge that this land always was and always will be Aboriginal land, and we are grateful for the opportunity to work and live on Awabakal Country.

We commit to walking together in respect, and to honouring the histories, cultures and contributions of the Awabakal People as we move forward.



Artwork by: Kyah Stewart

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Kyah Stewart for creating this beautiful artwork for The Canopy's Reconciliation Action Plan.

At the heart of Kyah's artwork lies a series of concentric circles and journey lines, symbolising the path we have taken together in developing our RAP. The central circles represent the gathering of people - our staff, families, and community - each bringing their own stories, experiences, and strengths. The flowing lines and dots reflect the many journeys that intertwine and connect us as we continue to walk together in respect and reconciliation.

The gatherings shown around the edges celebrate the strength and unity of the families and communities that surround our work. Through her use of earthy tones and light ochres, Kyah beautifully honours the deep connection to land and Country. Each dot holds meaning - representing a bond, a moment, or a shared experience that ties us together.

We thank Kyah for sharing her culture, her creativity, and her story with us. Her artwork stands as a visual expression of our collective journey - one grounded in learning, respect, and our shared commitment to reconciliation.

About Us

With over 40 years of experience supporting local communities, The Canopy is a trusted not-for-profit organisation dedicated to strengthening families, connecting communities, and creating opportunities across Lake Macquarie, Newcastle, and the Hunter region.

Our work is grounded in the belief that every person deserves to be safe, supported, and connected. We deliver a wide range of programs and services that respond to the needs of children, families, and individuals - helping people build resilience, develop skills, and thrive in their everyday lives.

At The Canopy, we bring people together. Whether it's through family services, Neighbourhood Centres, or community partnerships, our focus is on creating spaces where everyone feels welcome and valued. Collaboration, respect, and compassion guide everything we do.

Driven by a passionate team of staff, volunteers, and community partners, The Canopy continues to nurture belonging and inclusion throughout the region. We believe that when families are strong, communities flourish - and through our work, we are proud to help make that possible.

Child & Family Support

Intensive Family Preservation

Family Plus Program

Family Time

Parenting Programs

Neighbourhood Centres

Venue & Facility Hire






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President and CEO Message



This year marks the first time The Canopy presents a combined President and CEO Report - a reflection of our shared leadership and the close collaboration between the Board and management. With changes in our Board leadership and the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer, this joint report reflects our unity and collective commitment to the people and communities we serve.

A Year of Renewal and Progress

The 2024-2025 year has been one of renewal, reflection, and steady progress. It was also a time of significant change, as we farewelled our long-serving President, Iain Gardiner, and Executive Officer, Paul Procter. Their leadership helped shape The Canopy into the strong and trusted organisation it is today, and we acknowledge their many years of valued commitment and service.

The Canopy welcomed our new CEO Beau Newell who commenced in September 2025. Our interim CEO, Rob Watkins, provided steady leadership and vital support during a critical contract tender period.

Change can bring challenge, but it also creates space for growth. This year, our focus has been on navigating transition with care, maintaining stability, and continuing to deliver quality programs and services for our communities. Together, our Board, staff, and management team have worked to strengthen internal processes, modernise systems, and ensure our operations continue to meet community needs.

Our mission remains unchanged - to strengthen families, build community connection, and provide safe, inclusive spaces where people can thrive. Despite the challenges of transition, The Canopy has remained focused, resilient, and deeply committed to making a difference.

Our People and Culture

Our greatest strength is our people. This year, we invested in leadership, culture, and professional development, laying the foundation for a workplace where every team member feels valued and supported. Plans are underway for an engagement and culture project, alongside the creation of a new training matrix to ensure consistent staff development.

The Canopy continues to prioritise safety and wellbeing, taking proactive steps on WHS, psychosocial risks, and facility improvements. Our staff's dedication to supporting families and communities remains the driving force behind every achievement.

Delivering Impactful Programs

Throughout 2024-2025, The Canopy continued to deliver a broad range of programs and services that meet the needs of families and communities across Lake Macquarie and Newcastle. From family preservation and community engagement to finance, administration, and facilities management, every team has played an important part in keeping our organisation strong and connected.

Our Intensive Family Preservation Program continued to support families navigating complex challenges, providing tailored interventions that strengthen family relationships and improve safety at home, particularly for children. The Child and Family Programs across Lake Macquarie and Newcastle remained a trusted source of early support for parents, carers, and children, helping families build confidence and stability.

The Family Time Program maintained essential supervised contact, transport, and mentoring supports for children and families, while the Family Plus Program provided flexible, fee-for-service assistance to meet unique needs across our region.

Our Neighbourhood Centres at Maryland and Jesmond continued to deliver on their long-standing commitment to community connection under the Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) framework. These centres have remained welcoming spaces where people can access support, take part in programs, and feel a sense of belonging.

Behind the scenes, our Finance and Administration teams have worked tirelessly to ensure our systems, increasing compliance requirements, and day-to-day operations remain strong through a time of change. Our Facilities team has continued to maintain and manage community venues across multiple sites, ensuring safe, inclusive, and affordable spaces for local groups and events.

Across all areas of The Canopy, our people have shown incredible resilience, professionalism, and care. Their tenacity and teamwork are what make The Canopy not just an organisation, but a community within itself.

Community Spaces and Partnerships

Our network of community facilities, including Cameron Park, Pasterfield, Fletcher, Maryland, Elmore Vale and Minmi, continue to serve as the heart of local connection. Thousands of hours of bookings were managed across these venues, with strong recovery and growth in community use since the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnerships with councils (including City of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie City Council) and community groups remain central to our success, helping us deliver inclusive, accessible programs for all ages.

Strong Financial Stewardship

Financially, The Canopy remains stable and well-managed. While the organisation recorded a small deficit this year, this reflected one-off project investments and program transitions. Our balance sheet remains strong, supported by healthy reserves and clear financial oversight. The draft 2025-2026 budget sets a confident path forward, balancing sustainability with service growth.

Looking Ahead

As we move into 2025-2026, The Canopy is well-positioned for the future. Our focus will be on strengthening partnerships, expanding service reach, and enhancing digital capability. We will continue building sustainable funding pathways and exploring new opportunities for innovation and community impact.

Acknowledgement

We extend heartfelt thanks to our staff, volunteers, partners, and the families we support - your trust and commitment make everything possible. We also thank our Board for its steady leadership and strategic vision. Together, we've navigated change with optimism and purpose.

The 2024-2025 year has been one of transformation and unity. Under one canopy, we continue to grow stronger, lead with purpose, and build brighter futures for our communities.



Sandra Feltham
The Canopy President



Beau Newell
The Canopy CEO

Highlights: 2024-2025

Child & Family Services | Intensive Family Preservation | Family Time | Family Plus



Over
380

families supported through
early intervention and parenting
programs across Lake
Macquarie and Newcastle

6



**evidence-based
parenting programs
delivered**, including
Circle of Security, Tuning
into Teens, and Bringing
Up Great Kids

Minimum

92%

Maximum

100%

satisfaction rating

across all Child & Family program service areas



"I understand myself better as a parent and a person."

family feedback for Intensive Family Preservation programs

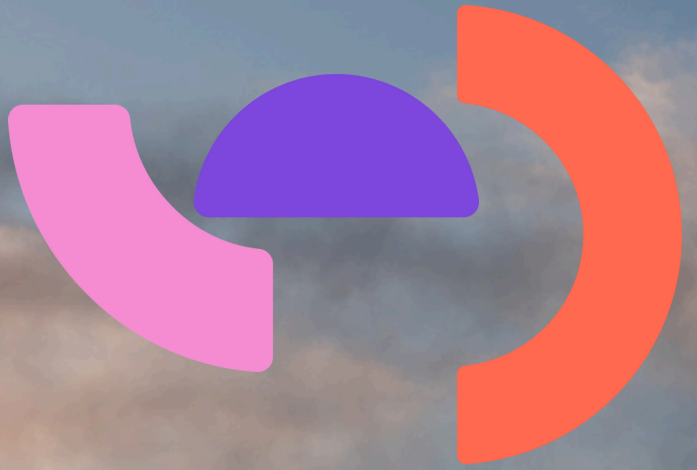


Over
3,300

**hours of supervised
Family Time visits** delivered
across 642 occasions of service

Expanded Family Plus reach
to 8 regional communities
including Singleton,
Belmont and
Salamander Bay





Pasterfield Sport Complex

Highlights: 2024-2025

Neighbourhood Centres | Facilities & Venues



Volunteers and staff
recognised at the
Wallsend & Community

Business Awards

60

people weekly
supported through
Jesmond Pantry
food relief program

Over

6,500

fresh food hampers provided
to Jesmond & Maryland families this year



"Lovely facility,
with a great kitchen"



Over

33,000 hours

of community facility hire recorded
across The Canopy's centres

*"The Canopy demonstrates
exceptional commitment and
oversight in program delivery."*

~ Department of Communities & Justice

4 Venues

hosted NSW Local
Government elections,
supporting civic participation



Jesmond Neighbourhood Centre



A Year of Growth, Belonging and Community Spirit

This year has been one of incredible growth and connection for Jesmond Neighbourhood Centre. We have continued to strengthen our role as a welcoming space where people can find assistance, share experiences, and build a genuine sense of belonging. Through both Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) services and broader community activities, the centre has remained a constant in the lives of local residents.

Jesmond is a diverse area, home to many social housing residents and a growing refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population. This diversity is one of our strengths. It means the centre has become a meeting point for people from all walks of life to come together and learn from one another. The issues our community faces - such as social isolation, food insecurity, and mental health challenges - are real, but the solutions are equally powerful: compassion, connection, and practical support.



Our Year in Action

We began the year by consolidating the partnerships and activities established in previous years and introducing several new programs that opened our doors even wider.

Our Holiday Fun Days became an instant success, with families flocking to the centre for two-hour sessions filled with crafts, games, entertainment, and morning tea. Delivered in partnership with several service providers, these events gave families a free, fun and inclusive way to spend time together. Parents joined in alongside their children, creating moments of shared joy that strengthened family bonds.

We also launched Connected Women in collaboration with Amany from the Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre. Meeting fortnightly during school terms, this group invited women of all backgrounds - and their young children - to come together to share stories, learn new skills and connect with others in the community. Many of the women were newly arrived refugees or from Arabic-speaking backgrounds, and the group quickly became a safe space for support and friendship. Sessions included guest speakers, arts and crafts, cooking demonstrations,

and discussions on topics like healthy relationships, emergency planning, and child protection.

Another highlight was The Shared Table, a program made possible through a City of Newcastle Social Inclusion Grant. This series of monthly multicultural lunches began in December and ran through to June. Each lunch celebrated a different cultural cuisine - Syrian, South American, Italian, Egyptian, Filipino and Kurdish - prepared by cooks from our local community. These lunches not only showcased food but also the stories and pride of residents sharing their heritage. Guests told us that the experience deepened their understanding of local cultures and helped create lasting friendships.

To make sure no food went to waste, we also started Social Eats, a weekly \$2 sit-down community lunch using rescued food from OzHarvest and SecondBite. Volunteers prepared hearty two-course meals - lasagne, roasts, curries, and burgers - turning simple ingredients into meaningful moments of connection. People came for the food, but stayed for the companionship.

By the end of the year, we had also welcomed a number of new



community services to the centre. Mosaic Multicultural Connections delivered casework and parenting programs, Services Australia provided case support, and the Vinnies Van visited weekly. The centre has truly become a shared home for support, information, and connection.

Impact and Outcomes

These programs have had a significant impact on individuals and the community. Our Holiday Fun Days attracted an average of 89 people in July, 72 in October, and 76 in April, giving children and families access to free, engaging holiday fun that otherwise might not have been possible. The Jesmond Pantry provided free groceries to an average of 60 people each week, representing more than 200 family members, while free bread was offered every Wednesday.

The Connected Women group held 18 sessions during the year, with 9-22 participants at each, while Social Eats lunches averaged 20-25 attendees by June. The Shared Table lunches brought together 30-40 guests each month, with overwhelming feedback celebrating the quality of the meals, the storytelling, and the sense of inclusion.

Our volunteer team grew to around 11 active members, helping deliver all these programs. Many of them came to

volunteer after receiving support themselves. One young international student, for example, joined the team after feeling isolated while studying and has now found friendship and purpose through volunteering several times a week.

Partnerships remain vital to our success. We thank OzHarvest, SecondBite, Foodbank, the Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre, Family Support Newcastle, Samaritans, Family Action Centre, Jesmond Public School, Jesmond Community Preschool, Mosaic, Vinnies, City of Newcastle, DCJ and Mission Australia for their continued collaboration and trust.

Stories and Highlights

Behind the numbers are personal stories of change.

One woman, who had spent six months caring for her frail mother and rarely left home, was invited to Social Eats by a neighbour. She now attends the centre twice a week, socialising and finding joy in simple routines.

Another story involves an older man living alone in local social housing. When he first came to the centre, he was angry and isolated. Through the patience and kindness of staff and volunteers, he found connection. Now he shares stories over lunch with a smile.

Parents also shared their gratitude for our holiday programs:

"My kids and I had a lot of fun. We visited both days, and they had a blast. Thank you so much for arranging this - it was much needed."

"Everything was extremely good... all the programs were fun. Morning tea was great, everything fresh. The staff and volunteers were so helpful. We're eagerly waiting for the next school holidays!"

These words remind us why our work matters. Every meal, every smile, every moment of connection strengthens the fabric of our community.

**Over
200
Families**
supported through
Jesmond Pantry



Maryland Neighbourhood Centre



Community, Care and Celebration

This year Maryland Neighbourhood Centre has remained a vibrant hub of connection and support for the local community. We've continued to provide a welcoming environment where people come together to learn, share, celebrate, and find the help they need during challenging times.

Our centre plays an important role in creating a sense of belonging for families and residents across Maryland and surrounding suburbs. Whether people come for information, referrals, programs, volunteering or social activities, we aim to make every visit positive, practical, and warm. We know that even small acts of kindness - a friendly greeting, a chat over coffee, or a supportive ear - can make a big difference in someone's day.

Our Year in Action

It's been another year filled with energy, partnership and participation. Our much-loved Halloween Family Disco was once again a highlight, with around 500-600 people coming together for a night of music, fun and connection. Seeing families

dance, laugh, and enjoy themselves reminds us of the strong community spirit that makes Maryland special.

The Reclaiming My Place program continued to empower participants to grow in confidence, express creativity and build resilience. Participants described feeling more connected and proud of themselves as they shared their journeys and achievements. Yarn Up also went from strength to strength, offering a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, community members, and service providers to gather, share, and learn from each other.

Our School Holiday Activities were as popular as ever. Partnering with UP n UP and Newcastle Council, we took activities into the community - meeting children where they already gather. These sessions encouraged play, creativity, and connection, offering affordable and fun options for families during the school break.

The Play Sessions at the centre continued to flourish. Parents, grandparents and carers told us they valued having a safe and supportive space to meet others, share experiences and let their children play. We have watched

friendships form and families grow stronger through these weekly gatherings.

We were also honoured this year when Maryland Neighbourhood Centre and several of our volunteers were recognised at the Wallsend Community & Business Awards. This acknowledgement from our community partners and peers reflects the dedication and heart our team and volunteers bring to their work every day.

Making a Difference

Rising costs of food, rent, and utilities have affected many local families this year. In response, we provided fresh produce hampers to nearly 3,500 people. These hampers helped families put meals on the table and eased some of the pressure of increasing expenses. Many of the people who came to us for help told us that reaching out was the hardest step - but that once they did, they were met with kindness, understanding, and practical support.

We work closely with our network of community partners to make sure no one is turned away. If we can't provide the assistance someone needs directly, we connect them with a service that

can. Our team continues to be known for its caring approach, with feedback consistently mentioning that visitors feel "welcomed," "listened to," and "never judged."

Often it's the little moments that leave the biggest mark - a smile at the door, a friendly conversation, or a warm cup of tea. These small gestures remind people that they're not alone and that support is available when they need it.

Stories and Highlights

One of the most memorable stories from this year came through a call from a local school principal. A family in crisis needed urgent support after the father experienced a sudden, serious health issue that left him in a coma for a month. The mother had been unable to work while staying by his side, and the family had gone from two incomes to none almost overnight.

We were able to provide food, vouchers, and help with utility bills, Centrelink payments and Christmas gifts for their children. At first, they were hesitant and embarrassed to ask for help, but they were assured that The Canopy was here to walk beside them until things improved. They later told us we were "angels that were sent to them."

Three months later, both parents had returned to work, were catching up on bills, and the father's health was improving. In an act of generosity, they began bringing in fresh produce and eggs from their garden for us to include in our hampers. They told us, "It's the least we can do - you gave us the strength and understanding to keep moving forward and never give up."

This story captures the spirit of what we see every day at Maryland - a community that gives as much as it receives.

Looking Ahead

As we move forward, we'll continue to build on the strong foundation of connection, compassion and community leadership that defines Maryland Neighbourhood Centre. We'll keep creating opportunities for people to come together, support each other and celebrate the strengths that make our community unique.

Over 
3,500
fresh food hampers
provided to Maryland
families this year

Over
500
people 
attended Halloween
Family Disco





Child & Family Services



Strengthening Families, Growing Confidence

This year the Child and Family team continued to provide early intervention support to families across Lake Macquarie and Newcastle, working alongside parents and carers with children up to 17 years of age. Our goal remains simple: to help families build confidence, strengthen relationships and create safe, nurturing environments where children can thrive. We achieve this through a combination of in-home support, group programs, and community partnerships that respond directly to what families tell us they need.

Our work takes many forms - from visiting homes to help parents establish routines and manage daily stress, to running evidence-based parenting programs in schools and community venues. The team has shown great adaptability and commitment in meeting families where they are, both geographically and emotionally. This hands-on, person-centred approach ensures that support is practical, respectful, and designed to create long-term change.

Our Year in Action

Throughout the year, we built on our strong foundation of evidence-based practice. Every team member completed Tuning into Teens and Bringing Up Great Kids facilitator training, expanding our capacity to deliver high-quality parenting programs. These programs have proven effective in helping parents understand their children's emotional worlds and build stronger communication skills within their families.

We also delivered a wide range of programs across the community - Circle of Security in partnership with Sustainable Play, Shark Cage, Reclaiming My Place Art Program in collaboration with the University of Newcastle, and Bringing Up Great Kids with Maryland Public School. These partnerships allowed us to reach new audiences and respond to local needs in creative, culturally safe ways.

The team actively participated in NAIDOC Week events in Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens, the Aboriginal Women's Wellbeing Conference, and the Cardiff North Kindy Expo. These connections help us celebrate culture and strengthen relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

Internally, we made major progress in professional practice. Every team member now has access to regular external clinical supervision, giving staff the opportunity to reflect, learn and grow. We also implemented the Common Assessment Tool (CAT), which has created greater consistency and collaboration across the early intervention sector.





Measuring the Impact

2024-25 was our strongest year of performance to date. For the first time in the life of this contract, 80% of all client outcomes were recorded in DEX, demonstrating our commitment to high-quality data collection and evidence-based decision making.

Our DEX results show that families are achieving positive outcomes across every service stream. In Lake Macquarie, we supported 94 of 102 targeted families through Family Capacity Building (39.8% assessed) with satisfaction scores of 4.6 out of 5. Parenting Programs recorded a perfect 5.0 satisfaction rating, while Info, Advice and Referral, and Intake and Assessment all performed strongly, averaging around 1.3-1.6 goal improvements.

In Newcastle, the trend was equally encouraging. Family Capacity Building achieved 179% of its target (43 families supported against a goal of 24), with satisfaction scores of 4.5 out of 5. Intake and Assessment also exceeded expectations, reaching an 81.8% assessment rate and satisfaction of 4.7, highlighting the program's strong performance and impact.

Feedback and Community Voice

At the end of the financial year, our DCJ Commissioning & Planning Officer provided outstanding feedback:

"I want to commend The Canopy for the due diligence and oversight you consistently demonstrate in tracking your data against targets. It is reassuring to see your organisation's commitment to understanding DEX and ensuring accurate data uploads. The data shows that many service types have exceeded the HSA targets."

"Please extend my sincere gratitude to your team for their outstanding efforts, hard work, and the positive outcomes they have achieved within their communities over the past 12 months. The data clearly demonstrates their exceptional commitment."

These words capture what the numbers already show - that the team's effort, professionalism and empathy are making a measurable difference for families across our region.

Feedback and Community Voice

The Child and Family team has shown remarkable strength and unity throughout a period of change at The Canopy. Despite leadership transitions and broader organisational shifts, they have remained a stable, dedicated presence for the families they support. Their commitment to cultural safety continues to guide their practice, ensuring Aboriginal families and staff have access to environments where they feel respected, valued and safe.

This year was one of steady growth, teamwork and tangible impact. It reaffirmed our belief that early, consistent support truly changes lives - and we look forward to building on that success in the year ahead.



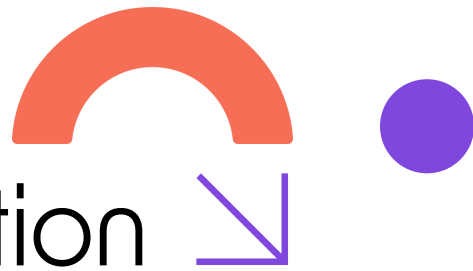
**Over
380
Families**
supported across
Lake Macquarie
and Newcastle



**Six
Evidence
Based
Programs**
delivered in
partnership with
schools and
community groups



Intensive Family Preservation



Supporting Families to Stay Safely Together

This year, our Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) program has continued to provide meaningful, hands-on support to families referred by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). Every family we work with faces unique challenges - but all share the same goal: to create a safe and nurturing home where their children can thrive.

The IFP program focuses on early, intensive and practical intervention to reduce the risk of children entering the out-of-home care (OOHC) system. By working directly with families in their homes, we help parents develop the confidence, routines and skills needed to keep children safe and strengthen their relationships. Our work is grounded in respect and collaboration, ensuring that families are active participants in setting goals and shaping their own progress.

Our Year in Action

Under new leadership, the IFP program expanded rapidly and reached full contract capacity within just three months. This achievement reflected both the strong demand for our service and the team's dedication to helping families achieve

sustainable change. After closing three families mid-year, the team maintained a steady caseload of nine families while continuing to accept new referrals as capacity allowed.

This year, we welcomed two new graduate caseworkers who have demonstrated exceptional growth and professionalism. In just six months, both have shown the ability to manage complex family situations with compassion and confidence. They've developed strong assessment skills, written effective family action plans, and refined interventions to suit the unique needs of each household. Their enthusiasm, openness to feedback, and commitment to reflective practice have strengthened the entire program.

Collaboration has been a major focus. The team maintained open, effective communication with DCJ caseworkers, health services, schools, NDIS coordinators, and other community-based agencies. This wrap-around approach means that families receive consistent and coordinated support, rather than navigating multiple services alone.

Weekly capacity updates to DCJ have also improved referral coordination. When referral numbers slowed briefly mid-year, we worked closely with DCJ managers to quickly restore a steady flow of families in need. This proactive communication has strengthened trust and ensured that support remains timely and responsive.

Impact and Outcomes

Our funded capacity remains at 11 families, with nine currently engaged. The majority of families we work with stay with the program for around six months, and some for up to twelve months where approved by DCJ. Across the year, we've seen families make significant progress. Parents have gained confidence in managing daily routines, communicating calmly, and understanding the root causes of child protection concerns. This self-awareness has often been the first step toward lasting change.

A family evaluation in May 2025 captured this beautifully:

"I understand myself a bit better as a parent and a person. I was also able to see what the [child protection] worries were."





This insight is what IFP is all about - helping parents see themselves differently, recognise their strengths, and build on them. Our close working relationship with DCJ has remained positive and constructive, allowing for open conversations, joint planning, and a shared commitment to family wellbeing.

Through persistence and empathy, we've supported parents to access counselling, navigate NDIS processes, build consistent routines, and connect with schools and community networks. These small, steady steps have led to stronger, safer family environments - and in some cases, successful reunification of children with their parents.

Stories and Highlights

One of the most inspiring stories this year came from a family that had faced multiple barriers. Both parents live with autism and social anxiety, and they care for a bright three-year-old boy with Type 1 diabetes. When we first met them, their confidence was low, and the challenges of managing daily routines and medical needs felt overwhelming.

Through regular in-home sessions, we focused on building structure and reducing isolation. We supported them to access community activities, develop confidence in social settings, and

establish consistent eating, sleep and household routines. The family also worked closely with the hospital's medical team as their son transitioned to an insulin pump. By the end of the program, the John Hunter Children's Hospital Endocrine Team commended the parents for their ability to manage his care.

Their son now attends Nikinpa Preschool, which has a strong focus on Aboriginal culture - something deeply valued by the family. He has become more social, confident and settled, and the parents have formed positive relationships with his educators. The family's progress was recognised by both DCJ and the hospital team. They have now successfully transitioned to lighter ongoing support with The Canopy's Child and Family team.

Stories like this remind us why IFP exists. They show that with the right support, encouragement, and trust, families can overcome even the most complex challenges and create safe, loving homes for their children.

Looking Ahead

As we look forward, our focus remains on maintaining strong relationships with DCJ and community partners, continuing reflective supervision, and supporting our staff to grow in their professional practice. The commitment of our small team - their care, empathy, and willingness to go above and beyond - has been the cornerstone of the program's success this year.

Full capacity
reached within
3 months



Family Time




Creating Safe, Meaningful Connections for Children and Families

This year, our Family Time program continued to play a vital role in helping children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC) maintain safe and meaningful connections with their families, communities and cultures. Every visit, car trip, or mentoring session represents a moment where a child's sense of belonging and identity is strengthened.

Our work provides more than just supervision - it provides stability, compassion and trust. The team's approach centres on creating safe spaces for family interactions while also nurturing emotional regulation, resilience, and healing. Through trauma-informed practice and genuine human connection, we support families to rebuild relationships and children to feel seen, valued and understood.

Our Year in Action

This year was one of reflection, growth and adaptation. Almost all Family Time workers completed Trauma Expression and Connection Assessment (TECA) training, a cornerstone in

trauma-informed care. This training helped our team understand how trauma can shape behaviour and emotional responses, and how to use connection and predictability to help children feel safe.

Workers have shared how this new knowledge has transformed their practice - from identifying a child's stress response to choosing calming strategies that meet each child's individual needs. This has strengthened trust between workers, children and families and improved the quality of visits.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, the program also transitioned to the Microsoft secure platform, ensuring we meet best-practice standards for data protection, privacy and information sharing - particularly important when working with sensitive family information.

In March, we farewelled a valued administrative team member and welcomed new staff who quickly became integral to the team. Many of our workers stepped up to backfill coordination and admin roles, maintaining continuity of service without disruption. Their flexibility and teamwork reflect the heart of this program.

When DCJ began delivering some supervised visits internally, we used the opportunity to refocus our program on mentoring, coaching and transport services. These areas have grown significantly and now form a major part of our work. Our next step is developing a structured mentoring framework to ensure consistency and impact across all sessions, giving young people reliable guidance and role modelling that builds confidence and connection.

Impact and Outcomes

Across the year, the Family Time team provided a significant level of service and support:

- 3,319 hours of supervised visits across 642 occasions of service, averaging 53 visits each month.
- 1,581 hours of supervised transport across 467 occasions, covering a total of 91,321 kilometres - roughly the distance from Newcastle to Perth and back 11 times.
- 667 hours of mentoring and coaching delivered across 152 sessions, growing from 3.6 per month to 21 per month in the second half of the year.
- 192 hours of respite care across 44 occasions of service.

These numbers represent thousands of meaningful moments - car rides filled with conversation, mentoring sessions filled with encouragement, and family visits filled with connection. Feedback from both our staff and partners has been overwhelmingly positive:

"The TECA training has given me a deeper understanding that children's behaviours often stem from trauma rather than defiance. I now respond with greater patience and empathy."

"Being able to identify trauma responses has helped me de-escalate conflict and ensure visits are calmer and safer."

A DCJ caseworker also shared:

"All the young people have expressed excitement about their mentoring sessions. As rapport builds, the sessions are becoming even more meaningful and impactful."

These reflections show how small, consistent efforts can create lasting change for children and their families.

Stories and Highlights

The greatest strength of this program continues to be our Family Time workers - their care, professionalism, and steady presence. They are often the bridge between children and families during difficult times.

One worker shared a story about a child who often displayed signs of "flight" responses - restlessness, scanning the room, and trouble transitioning. Using strategies from TECA, the worker introduced movement-based calming activities. Over time, the child's anxiety eased, and visits became calmer and more engaging. These quiet breakthroughs are the heart of our work.

This year, we also saw mentoring emerge as a powerful new focus. Young people told us they valued the consistency, conversation and encouragement from their mentors. For many, these relationships have become a source of stability in times of change.

As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing this important work - fostering connection, supporting family relationships, and helping children and young people feel safe, confident and cared for.



Over **3,300** hours of supervised visits

Over **1,500** hours of supervised transport

Family Plus



2024-2025

Breaking Down Barriers to Family Support

The Family Plus program continued to provide flexible, evidence-based in-home support to families across New South Wales. Using a Common Elements approach, our team focused on the evidence of what works - strengthening family relationships, improving communication, and building parenting skills to keep children safely at home.

Every family we work with faces different circumstances, but our purpose is the same: to provide tailored, respectful support that empowers parents and carers to create stable, nurturing environments for their children. Family Plus is a service for families who might otherwise fall through the gaps - where traditional programs can't reach or where added flexibility is needed.

Our Year in Action

Throughout 2024-25, the Family Plus team supported 12 families, each with its own unique journey. Some required visits two to three times a week, while others needed shorter interventions over several months. Each session - whether 12 or 36 visits in total - was an opportunity to listen, reflect and build trust.

Our partnership with DCJ remained strong, with all referrals coming through their teams. The program has been particularly effective for families working toward reunification, placement preservation, or prevention of removal.

The program also worked in close partnership with the Family Time team, drawing on their experienced staff to assist with practical in-home supports. This collaboration allowed us to reach families across multiple regions - travelling from our bases in Edgeworth and Maryland to areas including Nerong, Salamander Bay, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Belmont, Marks Point, and Mount Hutton. This willingness to travel ensured that support reached families who would otherwise have been isolated or without access to help.

In line with our commitment to evidence-based practice, both the manager and practitioner completed a nine-month accreditation with Griffith University's Parents Under Pressure (PuP) program. This is a major milestone in embedding proven, therapeutic approaches into our daily work. The manager, already an accredited PuP therapist, is now also a PuP supervisor, while the practitioner is now a qualified PuP therapist. This

shared learning has further strengthened the program's quality and impact.

Impact and Outcomes

Our work this year has focused on preventing family breakdown and promoting restoration. The outcomes speak for themselves:

- 12 families supported, with tailored interventions ranging from 12 to 36 sessions
- 4 families re-referred due to positive progress and ongoing needs
- Multiple cases where children were safely restored to their parents or placements were preserved

Our approach continues to prove effective at helping families strengthen their parenting confidence, emotional regulation, and overall sense of stability. Parents tell us that they feel more capable and supported, and that they now understand how to respond calmly to challenges at home.

Feedback from both DCJ and families has been affirming: "The family has shown really positive changes over the time you have worked with them." - DCJ Caseworker.

"This is all making so much more sense to me now." - Parent

Every success story is the result of collaboration - between our practitioners, DCJ, The Canopy's Family Time program, and the families themselves.

Stories and Highlights

One standout story this year involved a single mother preparing for her toddler's restoration after two years in foster care. Family Plus supported her every step of the way - from day visits to overnight stays, then full-time care. Together, we focused on emotional regulation, secure attachment and rebuilding confidence. The result was a smooth, supported transition home. The mother is now preparing for her two older children to return as well - a testament to her resilience and the power of patient, consistent support.

This year also reinforced our principle of accessibility. Whether driving hours to remote areas or adapting sessions to meet complex family needs, the Family Plus team has shown that no distance or challenge is too great when it comes to keeping families together.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to embedding evidence-based practices across all areas of our work and ensuring that every family we support feels empowered, respected and heard.



12 Families
supported across various NSW regions

4
Re-referrals
following success



Facilities and Vanue Hire



Creating Welcoming Spaces for Our Community

This year, our Facilities Team continued to ensure The Canopy's community spaces remained safe, functional, and welcoming for everyone who uses them. From managing day-to-day maintenance to coordinating thousands of hours of room hire, our focus has been on creating spaces that bring people together - for learning, celebration, connection, and community life.

The team manages all aspects of our facilities' operations, including maintenance, bookings, and relationships with contractors, hirers and local councils. Whether it's fixing a door handle, setting up for an event, or solving a last-minute technical issue, the Facilities Team works tirelessly to ensure that every experience in our spaces is positive and professional. Each day brings something new, and that variety is what makes the role so rewarding.



Our Year in Action

This has been a year of steady improvement and innovation. One of our biggest achievements was refining our online booking platform, making it faster and easier for both regular and casual hirers. By adding new booking fields, clearer conditions and tagging features, we've reduced errors, improved turnaround times, and boosted satisfaction for everyone using the system.

We were also proud to enrich our spaces through art. The Canopy received several large-scale artworks through a gifting project by aMBUSH Gallery, a social enterprise that showcases Australian artists across the country. Pieces from renowned artists such as Reka Makatron, Prizm, Anthony Lister, and Beastman now hang in the foyer of the Cameron Park Community Centre, adding vibrancy and creativity to the space.

Another key milestone was the upgrade of our security systems. We transitioned from two separate providers to a single vendor, creating consistent processes and simplifying management across all sites. Increased internal access to the system has reduced the need for technician callouts and allowed

us to manage user accounts directly. We also upgraded all older 3G systems ahead of Australia's 3G network shutdown - ensuring uninterrupted operation and improved reliability.

In September, our facilities played a role in supporting democracy by hosting the NSW Local Government elections. Fletcher Community Centre and Pasterfield Community Centre hosted pre-poll voting, while Cameron Park Community Centre and Minmi Progress Hall provided voting spaces on election day. These events bring significant community engagement and showcase our venues as trusted public spaces that serve civic as well as social purposes.

Finally, we coordinated a professional photoshoot across all facilities to align with The Canopy's updated branding. These new images have been integrated into our online booking platform, facility maps and upcoming website, helping the community better explore and book our spaces. The shoot, led by local photographer Wanagi Zable-Andrews, beautifully captures the warmth and energy of our venues.

Impact and Outcomes

Our facilities have once again been heavily used by community members, groups, and organisations of all kinds. Over the past financial year, we recorded more than 33,000 hours of hire - the equivalent of 1,385 consecutive days of use if every hour were run back-to-back. Of that, 27,000 hours came from regular hirers and over 6,000 hours from casual bookings.

These spaces hosted an incredible range of activities - from birthday parties, weddings, and cultural gatherings to sporting events, community meetings, and local business workshops. Every hour represents connection, creativity and community in action.

Feedback from our hirers has been overwhelmingly positive:

"We and the guests are happy about the space, parking and other facilities. Thanks!"

"We were very happy with the venue and its facilities. Thank you so much for your outstanding services."

"Thank you for an easy booking! The space was great."

"Great venue - very happy!"

These comments reflect what we hear most often: that our venues are clean, well-managed and welcoming, and that staff are responsive, friendly and professional.

We're proud that our facilities are more than just buildings - they're places where community happens every day.

Stories and Highlights

Every day brings a new story in the Facilities Team - and often a new challenge. One moment might involve coordinating with council after discovering a missing water meter, the next could be helping a volunteer-led community lunch or addressing a last-minute technical fault before an event begins.

As Jarrad often says, "It's never a boring moment in facilities!" Whether it's troubleshooting a freezer failure in the commercial kitchen, helping an organisation that supports women experiencing domestic violence, or welcoming a new volunteer into The Canopy family, each day offers opportunities to make a difference in practical and personal ways.

What stands out most is the teamwork, adaptability and care shown by everyone involved. Behind every event or booking is a story of people connecting - and a team working quietly behind the scenes to make it all possible.

The Facilities Team also acknowledges the invaluable contribution of our volunteers, whose friendliness and dedication bring heart to our centres. They help us keep operations running smoothly and ensure our spaces continue to feel warm and inclusive for everyone who walks through the door.

Looking Ahead

Next year, we'll continue to focus on streamlining systems, improving accessibility, and supporting community use of our facilities. We'll keep building relationships with local councils and community partners to ensure our venues remain safe, sustainable and welcoming spaces for years to come.







Our Reconciliation Journey



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

REFLECT

At The Canopy, we recognise that reconciliation is an ongoing journey built on respect, listening and action. This year, we acknowledge that progress on our Reconciliation Action Plan has been slower than we had hoped.

While our formal work has paused, we also recognise the strong commitment of staff who have continued to hold space for this work and advocate for cultural safety within our organisation. Their care and persistence remind us that reconciliation lives in our everyday actions, not only in written plans.

We particularly acknowledge the members of The Canopy RAP Working Group, who have continued to guide and hold this important space through a period of reflection and transition. Their contributions and leadership have helped keep reconciliation visible within The Canopy, even when progress has been challenging.

This has been a year for truth-telling - for acknowledging what has stalled, listening to hard truths, and reflecting on how we can rebuild stronger foundations for the future. Reconciliation is not about perfection; it is about honesty, learning and walking forward together.

Truth-Telling and Reflection

We know that meaningful reconciliation begins with truth. For The Canopy, the truth is that there is more work to do - and that listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices must guide our way forward. Over the coming year, we will focus on hearing from our First Nations staff and community partners, ensuring that their voices shape the next steps in our journey.

*"Reconciliation
begins with
truth, respect
and listening."*

~ Reconciliation Australia
Principle



Renewing Our Commitment

Looking ahead, The Canopy is focused on rebuilding our RAP with care and purpose. We will:

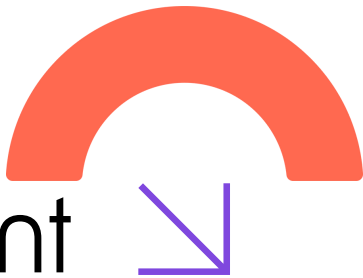
- Reconnect with local Aboriginal organisations and Elders to listen and learn.
- Identify clear, practical steps to embed reconciliation across our programs and workplaces.
- Create space for staff and leaders to grow their cultural understanding and confidence.

Reconciliation takes time, truth and care - and we're committed to moving forward with open hearts and renewed energy.

The Reflect RAP Stage

The Canopy is currently at the Reflect RAP stage, which focuses on building the foundations for reconciliation. This stage is about developing relationships, deepening understanding and exploring how reconciliation can be meaningfully embedded into everyday practice. Reflect RAPs are a time for listening, learning and planning - setting the groundwork for future action and stronger connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Board of Management



Directors

The following persons were Directors (also known as the Committee) of The Canopy Incorporated during the financial year reporting period.

- Paul Chidzero *
- Sandra Feltham ‡
- Iain Gardner €
- Janet Lee
- Scott Luschwitz £
- Kathryn Martin
- Rebecca North ¯
- David Price

Meeting Attendance

The number of meeting of The Canopy's Board held during the year ended 30 June 2025, and the number of meetings attended by each Director were:

Member:	Meetings Held:	Meetings Attended:
• Paul Chidzero	7	3
• Sandra Feltham	7	7
• Iain Gardiner	7	1
• Janet Lee	7	7
• Scott Luschwitz	5	3
• Kathryn Martin	7	4
• Rebecca North	7	3
• David Price	7	5

Held: represents the number of meetings held during the time the member held office.

* Paul Chidzero formally resigned from the Board after the October 2024 meeting.

‡ Sandra Feltham stepped up as Chairperson after August 2024.

€ Iain Gardiner concluded his term on the Board in late 2024 following an extended period of non-attendance, after which the Board formally resolved to vacate his position in accordance with the organisation's constitution.

£ Scott Luschwitz was elected to the Board in October 2024.

¯ Rebecca North formally resigned from the Board in May 2025.



Minmi Progress Hall

Acknowledgements

The Canopy proudly recognises the many people and organisations who make our work possible. Together, we share a vision of stronger families and more connected communities across Lake Macquarie, Newcastle, and the Hunter region.

Our Funding Partners

We extend our sincere thanks to the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) for their continued support and partnership. Your investment enables us to deliver essential family and community programs that make a lasting difference in people's lives.

Local Councils and Community Partners

We are grateful to our local council partners - Lake Macquarie City Council, City of Newcastle, and other regional councils - for your ongoing collaboration, advocacy, and commitment to community wellbeing. We also acknowledge the many schools, health services, community organisations, and universities who work alongside us to strengthen outcomes for families.

Our Volunteers

To our incredible volunteers - thank you. Across our Neighbourhood Centres, family programs, and community events, your time, care, and energy bring warmth and connection to everyone you meet. You are at the heart of The Canopy's impact.

Our Staff

To every member of The Canopy team - thank you for your passion, professionalism, and compassion. You continue to go above and beyond to support children, families, and communities through times of change and challenge. Your work truly changes lives.

Our Board

We also acknowledge our Board of Directors for their strong leadership, guidance, and commitment to good governance. Your wisdom and oversight ensure that The Canopy continues to grow sustainably and deliver with integrity.

To Our Community

Finally, we thank the families, children, and community members who trust us to walk alongside them. Your strength, courage, and connection inspire everything we do.



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