



# thriving bush communities

2025 Annual Report

July 2024-June 2025



outback  
futures

allied & mental health  
community wellbeing



**As we reflect on this past year, it's inspiring to witness the depth of care that humanity is capable of.**

For us, this was especially evident in the ways our bush communities responded to the catastrophic flooding event across Western Queensland earlier this year. As our teams responded to community concerns and needs in flooded areas, often to people in very tough situations, we repeatedly heard, "We're all right, but the bloke down the road is doing it much tougher than we are." This attitude of "I might be doing it tough but I'm ready to help the next bloke," is part of the community-driven DNA of Outback Futures.

Our work remains grounded in community invitation, with responses that are designed and owned by the communities themselves. For example, our programs supporting parent, carers and families are informed by community-identified needs and grounded in current mental health research. We know that the formative experiences children have, and the positive relationships they build with significant adults, play a vital role in brain development, particularly in the first 1000 days of life. Our family-focused initiatives have proven highly effective in supporting bush parents and their young children, helping to prevent wellbeing challenges before they arise and build long term resilience.

This year, our work has also expanded beyond our usual remote areas. Outback Futures was invited into several new regions to facilitate community wellbeing initiatives in areas impacted with particular societal challenges. Through this work we have further refined our community wellbeing assessment tool and facilitation work, helping shift attitudes to help-seeking and fostering whole-of-community wellbeing.

Our board and leadership team continue to grow in strength and maturity. Recently, Rhys Tregenza stepped into the role of CEO after many years as our CFO. It's been a privilege to work closely with Rhys during this transition, building on the great work done by Brent Sweeney, who led Outback Futures over the past five years.

Our board continues to maintain a strong bush voice and connection, with directors living across the state and contributing vital skills that have supported our growth and impact as an organisation.

We remain deeply grateful for the trusted relationships we've built with our donors and funders. Thank you to the individuals and organisations who journey with Outback Futures and contribute in significant ways to thriving bush communities.



**Peter Whip**  
Board Chair



*Peter Whip (left) and Rhys Tregenza (right)*



## Our vision

This year Outback Futures has continued to go the extra mile, providing support and care to some of Queensland's remotest residents. Our team has facilitated community wellbeing initiatives, and delivered allied and mental health services in ways that work for the bush.

**Our vision is to see rural and remote communities equipped with the confidence and tools to identify and address their own mental health and wellbeing challenges.**

### We are doing this by:

- Driving and facilitating whole-of-community change to shift the trajectory of mental health and wellbeing across generations.
- Focusing on prevention and early intervention to create lasting impact and tackle challenges before they escalate.
- Investing in the early years to build strong foundations for lifelong mental health and wellbeing.
- Strengthening families and communities as the backbone of thriving bush communities.

## Our values

### We build trusted relationships

by being reliable and consistent, and communities know we'll keep coming back.

### We are led by the bush

by listening to each community's needs and ideas, and co-designing solutions that work for the bush.

### We go the extra mile

to make sure people can access support where and when they need it—whether that's in town, on a property, or over the phone.

### We focus on today and tomorrow

by providing the support people need now while strengthening community wellbeing for the long term.



# Our people

**4** Speech Pathologists  
helping kids and teens with speech and language skills so they can communicate well



**200+** days in community

delivering face-to-face appointments and wellbeing initiatives

**4** Occupational Therapists  
supporting kids and teens with developmental, educational, social and self care skills



**250+** days online

delivering telehealth support to kids, teens, adults and families, and staying connected with community stakeholders

**7** Counsellors & Psychologists  
building mental health and helping people tackle life's challenges

**8** Region Leads & Region Coordinators

connecting with clients and community stakeholders to deliver services and facilitate wellbeing initiatives





# Tackling the mental health crisis in the bush

by delivering mental health support when and where it's needed.

## The issues

- 2.2x** higher suicide rates for males living in the bush compared to their city mates.<sup>1</sup>
- 45%** of Australian farmers have had thoughts of self-harm or suicide; close to 30% have attempted self-harm or suicide.<sup>2</sup>
- 40%** of 16-24 year olds will experience mental challenges like anxiety, depression and self harm this year - 2x the rate of the general population.<sup>3</sup>
- 6x** fewer psychologists available per 10,000 people in very remote communities compared to the city.<sup>4</sup>
- 80%** is how high annual turnover of health professionals can be in remote communities.<sup>5</sup>

## How we're addressing them



Giving bush kids, teens and adults access to regular telehealth mental health appointments, with additional face-to-face appointments to build trust and boost clinical outcomes.



Focusing on prevention and early support to reduce suicide, self-harm, and the escalation of mental health challenges.



Facilitating community wellbeing initiatives which build on existing community strengths to reduce stigma, encourage peer support, and normalise help-seeking.



Sustaining a low clinical staff turnover (annual average is 27%) to deliver continuous care and reduce wait times in communities where staff turnover is high and services are scarce.

“I like having therapy at home before I go to school and none of my friends know living in a small town.”

*Teenage counselling client*

## Sam's Story

Sam\*, a 30-something man from Western Queensland, has journeyed from darkness to a place of wellbeing with the support of Outback Futures.

When Sam connected with one of our counsellors he wanted face-to-face appointments when the Outback Futures team was in his small community, and opted out of telehealth support.

# Supporting communities devastated by the worst flooding in 50 years

In April 2025, large parts of western Queensland were hit by the worst floods in more than 50 years. It stretched over 700,000 km<sup>2</sup>, more than twice the size of Victoria, and an estimated 144,000 livestock were lost.

We immediately offered free mental health support to families and communities impacted by the flooding. But we know from experience that it's in the months and years after a disaster that mental health support is most needed.

Long after the mud has dried, our team continues to connect with these communities and provide mental health and wellbeing support.



**Counselling and psychology sessions** for kids, teens and adults as they recover and rebuild



**Support and care to help kids and families bounce forward** through this disaster, and boost longer term resilience



**Ongoing facilitation of community wellbeing initiatives**

“I didn’t think talking about stuff would help, but after my counselling sessions I feel lighter. My chest feels lighter, and my brain feels calmer.”

*Adult counselling client*

## Who we helped this year

**474** Western Queensland kids, teens and adults got support this year to tackle life’s challenges.

**3711** appointments in FY25 delivering allied and mental health support to Queensland’s remotest residents.

**21%** of the land area of Queensland, across 9 rural and remote LGAs.

## The impact

**78%** of adult clients showed clinical improvement in their wellbeing.

**93%** of clients reported feeling safe in telehealth and face-to-face appointments.

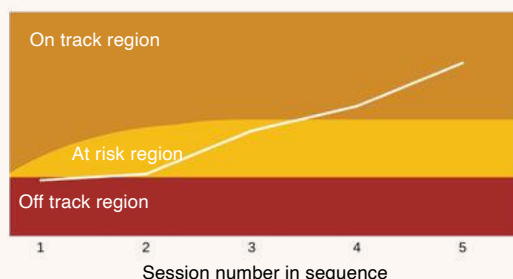
**84%** of clients rated the way their therapist/care team worked together as ‘excellent’.

**96%** of clients reported being included in decisions about their care, with 92% reporting their feelings were respected.

Over a period of nine months, Sam continued to work hard between sessions, and faithfully turned up for five in-person appointments. His sense of wellbeing steadily improved, as shown in the health outcome measure\*\* (right), and now Sam is tackling life and its challenges with confidence.

\*We’ve changed our client’s name out of respect for his privacy \*\*My Outcomes

### Sam’s 9 month journey with counselling support





# Preparing young Queenslanders for the future

by helping bush kids and teens build skills for life and learning.

## The issues

**46%** of children in very remote areas are developmentally vulnerable - more than double the 21% of city kids.<sup>6</sup>

**40%** of bush kids in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 need extra support in literacy and numeracy.<sup>7</sup>

**5%** of speech pathologists service rural communities nationally, despite these areas being 30% of the population.<sup>8</sup>

**25%** of rural families wait 6 months+ for speech and language assessments for their kids; 15% wait over a year.<sup>9</sup>



developmental vulnerability at school entry is associated with the onset of later mental health disorders throughout childhood and adolescence.<sup>10</sup>

## How we are addressing them



Giving bush kids access to regular and consistent allied health appointments.



Focusing on prevention and early intervention to address developmental challenges early.



Delivering a proven model that works in the bush, combining telehealth with face-to-face appointments.



Targeting developmental vulnerabilities with a multi disciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists and mental health clinicians.



Working with families, schools and communities to provide holistic, wraparound support.

## Who we helped this year

**321** kids and teens in FY25 across Western Queensland accessed allied and mental health support.

**206** bush kids received speech pathology and occupational therapy assessments.

**27+** schools and early learning centres in remote Queensland communities accessed services to fill the gaps and boost support for bush kids.

## The impact

**0.5** is the average effect size for kids and teens accessing psychology and counselling support, indicating overall our clients experienced a moderate and meaningful improvement compared to receiving no treatment.

**12 wks** is the maximum time families waited for face-to-face speech pathology and occupational therapy assessments.



## Gather The Girls

**In response to concerns raised by Winton State School staff in 2023, Outback Futures partnered with the Winton community to co-design Gather The Girls, a wellbeing initiative for teen girls aged 12–17.**

Through a collaborative framework involving Winton State School, Winton Shire Council, and community members, the program offers quarterly events that help girls strengthen peer connections, emotional literacy, and personal growth. The sessions are shaped by teen input and delivered in safe spaces that encourage authenticity, kindness, and vulnerability.

Since it began, Gather The Girls (GTG) has demonstrated the power of community-led design and cross-sector collaboration, and the program has also been adopted by other communities including Blackall and Cloncurry.

Feedback from both the girls and community leaders highlights reduced peer conflict, stronger teen–adult relationships, and improved emotional wellbeing.

“This has had a good impact on my mental health.”  
*GTG participant*

“What you are doing for our community and our girls is really valuable.”  
*GTG community facilitator*

### This year

4 Events

5-13 Participants  
 aged 12-17 years  
 at each event

30 Girls have  
 attended at least  
 one session

5 Girls accessed  
 additional counselling  
 support after  
 participating in GTG



“Our students have improved hugely and I have enjoyed the journey to watch the students grow, gain confidence, build self esteem at their own pace.”  
*Primary school teacher*

“My son looked forward to the sessions which is great to hear, as getting a 13 year old boy to therapy is quite difficult, so thank you for your service.”  
*Parent*



# Giving our bush kids a head start

by supporting parents, strengthening families and connecting communities.

## The issues

**90%** of a child's brain develops by the time they are 5 years old.<sup>11</sup>

**+** intentional and effective parenting has been linked to a wide range of positive child outcomes, including improved physical and mental health, cognitive development and educational attainment.<sup>12</sup>

**14%** of women will suffer with postnatal depression.<sup>13</sup>

**25%** of fathers can struggle with anxiety during pregnancy and after the birth.<sup>14</sup>

## How we're addressing them



Working with parents, playgroups and childcare centres to screen, identify and respond early to developmental delays.



Building a network of locally based Parent Peers who connect and support parents, carers and soon-to-be parents in informal and social ways.



Supporting parents and carers with regular counselling and psychology services.



Building community understanding and engagement around supporting families with young children.

## Who we helped this year

**600+** parent interactions, with Parent Peers providing practical help, support and connection.

**7+** childcare centres and kindys in remote communities supported with screenings, allied health service delivery, and professional development for educators.



## Parenting in the outback: you're not alone

**This year Outback Futures' Parent Peers in Longreach and Blackall-Tambo provided vital connection and support to families with young children, particularly those feeling geographically or socially isolated.**

Across both regions, they facilitated over 600 parent interactions:

### Community connection

- Supported weekly playgroups and First Five Forever sessions
- Established Tea and Tots for new mums in Longreach
- Facilitated First 1000 Days roadshow connecting child experts with playgroups
- Coordinated with local services including RAFS, Outback Independent Living, and aged care facilities
- Promoted the Parent Peer role and Outback Futures services

### Individual support

- Conducted regular one-on-one catch-ups with parents in town and on properties
- Followed up with new mums to offer individual support

### Collaboration and stakeholder engagement

- Met with local health professionals including OTs, nurses, council workers
- Supported inclusive initiatives like Play Matters for parents of children with disabilities

**There's something powerful about sharing the parenting journey with others, which is why Outback Futures' Parent Peers are building connection and support for parents across Western Queensland.**

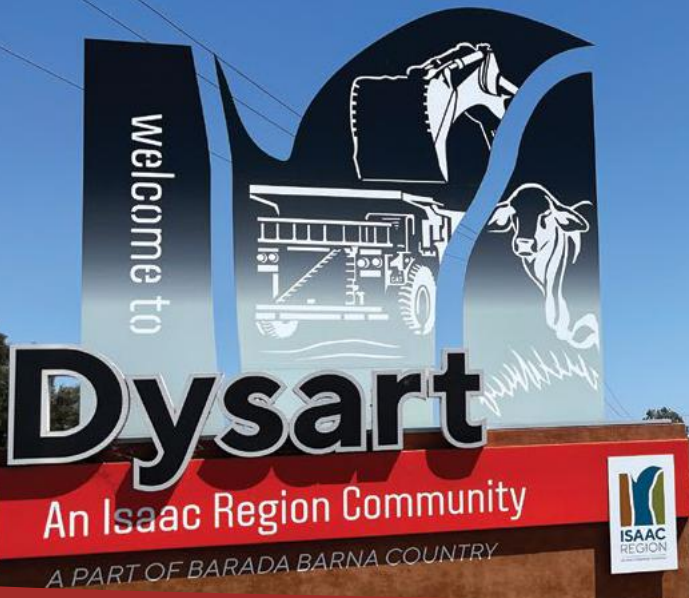
Parent Peers are local parents who understand the joys and challenges of raising kids in the bush. They're here to listen, share, and walk alongside other parents, whether it's over a cuppa, at playgroup, or a gathering of neighbours.

“The everyday moments like having someone to talk to, ask questions, or just have a cuppa would have been a game changer. That's the kind of support I hope to give.”

Ayla (pictured right), our Parent Peer in Longreach Region, knows how meaningful that support can be. “Every parent deserves connection and guidance,” she says. “When I had my first child, I felt welcomed and supported by Hannah, Outback Futures' first Parent Peer in Longreach. We shared the highs and lows, and now I want to give back what I got to experience.”

Leslie (pictured left), Parent Peer in the Barcaldine Region, also brings her own lived experience. “As a first-time mum new to a rural town, I know how isolating it can feel,” she shares. “The everyday moments like having someone to talk to, ask questions, or just have a cuppa would have been a game changer. That's the kind of support I hope to give.”





# Our whole-of-community model in action

**With regular and consistent allied and mental health support difficult to access, the community of Dysart, a small town in the heart of Central Queensland, was seeking a solution.**

At the same time, local leaders were keen to reposition Dysart as more than just a mining town, and to strengthen a sense of connection and belonging across the community.

After being invited into the community in late 2023 by funding partner BMA, Outback Futures co-designed a tailored response through individual and group consultations. The focus was on increasing access to services, facilitating community-led initiatives, and strengthening local identity. By July 2024, our team was on the ground, delivering allied health services and actively supporting community wellbeing.

One year on, children, teens, and adults have received regular support, and local leaders have shaped a more connected community.

Alongside regular telehealth appointments, our multidisciplinary team made five community visits to deliver face-to-face sessions. We supported schools and staff, and laid the groundwork to expand community leader training with volunteers and community groups.

While Dysart is known as a mining town, local leaders saw an opportunity to highlight its deeper values. Our community facilitation team worked with residents to co-design the Small Town Big Heart community campaign, celebrating Dysart's values of family, hospitality, connection, and friendship.

Outback Futures continues to walk alongside the Dysart community, building on strong foundations and deep relationships to support lasting wellbeing and community-led change.

## Allied health and school support this year

- 100** clients
- 312** appointments for kids, teens and adults
- 5** training sessions and workshops for school staff
- 5** support and coaching meetings for school staff

## Community campaign

- 50** people contributed to the co-design community forums
- 440+** people engaged with the Small Town Big Heart community Facebook page



# Innovative models of care

Evaluating how our model works for the bush.

**Outback Futures' participation in the Commonwealth Government's Innovative Models of Care (IMOC) program has provided a pivotal opportunity to demonstrate and evaluate the way we deliver allied health services in remote and very remote communities.**

The program supports the delivery of sustainable, multidisciplinary models of care tailored to the unique needs of rural regions, where traditional service delivery models often leave gaps.

Our co-designed Work-In Work-Out (WIWO) model ensures clients receive consistent support from our allied health team, both face-to-face when we're in town, and via regular telehealth appointments when working from our home base. This flexible, place-based approach directly addresses the challenges of distance, workforce retention, and continuity of care in remote areas.

The three-year IMOC grant has enabled Outback Futures to formally assess the clinical effectiveness, workforce benefits, and financial sustainability of the WIWO model across five Local Government Areas: Blackall-Tambo, Barcaldine, Longreach, Winton, and Cloncurry. The trial is generating robust data on client outcomes, practitioner satisfaction, and community preferences, to provide critical insights for shaping future service delivery in Modified Monash Model (MMM) 6-7 regions.

For government and sector stakeholders, the IMOC trial offers a scalable, evidence-based model that responds to the realities of rural and remote health care. Outback Futures is proud to contribute to this forward-thinking initiative. By embedding innovation, collaboration, and rigorous evaluation into our service delivery, we are contributing to the future of rural health care in Australia.

## Clients and community

**76%** of clients tracked via ORS/SRS\* reached above the clinical cut-off

**88%** of community stakeholders surveyed strongly agreed the WIWO model is a good fit

**100%** of community stakeholders surveyed said building trusted relationships is essential

**94%** of community stakeholders surveyed gave a 9 or 10 when asked how likely they were to recommend Outback Futures

\* ORS (Outcome Rating Scale): Measures a person's overall wellbeing at the start of a session. SRS (Session Rating Scale): Captures feedback on the session and therapeutic relationship at the end.

## Outback Futures workforce

**8.52/10** staff satisfaction score

**100%** of clinicians agreed they were making a difference

**88%** of clinicians cited client wellbeing as their top motivator for their work

**27%** annual average clinical staff turnover (can be as high as 80% in the health sector in remote areas)





# Partnering together for good

## Fundraising events and campaigns

This year our fundraising focused on two campaigns. Our 2024 Christmas Appeal launched on Giving Tuesday in early December, and highlighted the importance of our speech pathology services to help bush kids build strong communication skills, engage with learning, regulate emotions and connect socially.

Our 2025 EOFY Appeal kicked off with our Long Lunch, and focused on flood recovery, generating funds to help us deliver longer term mental health and wellbeing support across impacted communities.

Additionally we grew our community fundraising focus, and are thankful for individuals and organisations who chose us as their charity partner this year, including:



Morgan's Big Dry Friday Annual Appeal

Brisbane



RNA Future Directions Ekka Gala

Brisbane



Walk 4 Wegert Annual Walk

Longreach



Reef Seafood Mud Crab Long Lunch

Brisbane



Rolleston Livestock and Grain's Annual Bull Sale

Rolleston



River City Renewables Annual Golf Day

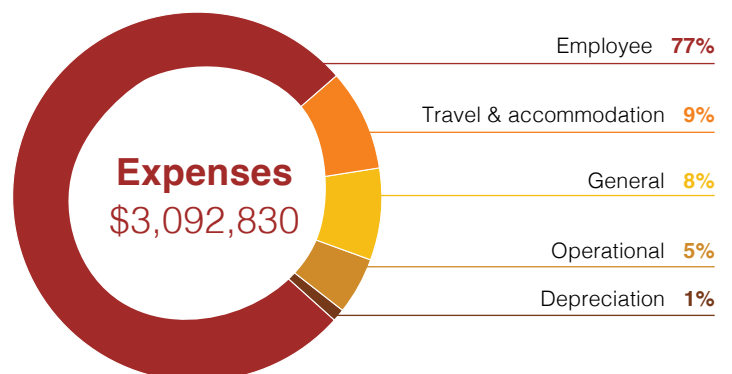
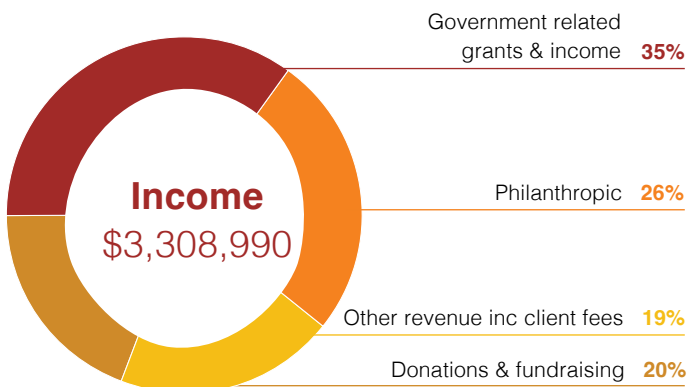
Brisbane

# Generosity that helps us go the extra mile

From philanthropic trusts and foundations, to government funders, corporate sponsors, individual donors and community fundraisers, we are thankful for our financial and in-kind supporters who are committed to our outback communities and us as an organisation, including:



## Financial statement



View our financial statement online



1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/suicide-self-harm-monitoring-data>
2. <https://nff.org.au/media-release/farmers-in-crisis-depression-and-anxiety-rife-among-aussie-farmers/>
3. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>
4. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health>
5. <https://human-resources-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12960-019-0432-y>
6. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/childcare-and-early-childhood-education>
7. <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>
8. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/rural-remote-australians/rural-and-remote-health>
9. [https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Committees/Senate/committee/clac\\_ctte/speech\\_pathology/report/c05.pdf?la=en&hash=55F948C66C179D97722D839F34D8332B8BA9A6E4](https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Committees/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/speech_pathology/report/c05.pdf?la=en&hash=55F948C66C179D97722D839F34D8332B8BA9A6E4)
10. <https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/2024-aedc-national-report>
11. <https://www.startingblocks.gov.au/resources/your-childs-development/brain-development-in-children>
12. <https://www.startingblocks.gov.au/resources/your-childs-development/brain-development-in-children>
13. <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Depression-during-pregnancy.pdf>
14. <https://aifs.gov.au/webinars/supporting-fathers-mental-health-during-perinatal-period#:~:text=So%2C%20three%20to%20six%20months,are%20experiencing%20post%2Dnatal%20depression.>




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outbackfutures.org.au     
info@outbackfutures.org.au  
0417 703 729