

I am delighted to present my second annual report since I had the pleasure of joining Grandcarers SA (Grandparents for Grandchildren) in May 2022.

In my previous Annual Report I said that “In recent months there has been a lot of change”, and this continued throughout 2023. The last 12 months have been a period of development, growth and the redefining of our operational direction.

The Board

The support of the Board has been fundamental to the renewal of the organisation, managing change and delivering success. In the last year they have had a part change of personnel with the appointments of a new Secretary and a Treasurer, and collaborated on numerous improvements including the development and delivery of a new Constitution, the Strategic Plan 2023 – 2025 and our Values and Inclusion statements.

This has set out a clear direction for the organisation and provided me with encouragement for a clear way forward, making it a pleasure to be able to lead the operations of Grandcarers SA.

Raising the profile and accessibility

One of the most visible organisational changes was the rebranding from *Grandparents for Grandchildren* to our new operating name of *Grandcarers SA* in May 2023. We were able to manage and promote this change at the same time as being announced winners of the Andamooka Community Project Award in the 2023 SA Volunteer Awards. This supports my continual drive to raise the profile of the organisation with clients, prospective clients, funding bodies and other stakeholders.

Having a greater profile has been a key focus during 2023. This has been supported through us becoming finalists in two other state-wide awards (within the Community Achievement and Child Protection Awards) and the continued development of our marketing and communications.

For example, thanks to the efforts of volunteer Bill Syrmas the website is much improved, and accessibility has been enhanced for those with a vision impairment or who cannot read English, and volunteer Celine Lawrence has improved the visual effect of our newsletter and marketing material. In addition, we have had more focussed and regular social media exposure, attendance at numerous Expos and Forums and consistent media publicity through various mainstream media.

This has created more widespread awareness of the role of, and support service provided by, Grandcarers SA whilst highlighting the issues faced by our clients.

A Local Hero and upgrades to our IT

In addition to the above mentioned awards, Frank Parsley, our Business Support Volunteer, deservedly reached the final three of the Westfield Local Hero Award, and although he didn't win, he and Grandcarers SA received much deserved recognition as well as providing us with an additional \$5000. Frank has spent a great deal of his voluntary time on improvements to our IT system. To date he has driven the change of our networked phone system and arranged complicated cabling to connect us to the NBN, whilst researching and sourcing a new cloud-based database.

This has provided improved cyber security and a reassurance relating to the protection of privacy and data.

Financial matters

We have resolved our financial management/accounting weaknesses, and I would like to take this opportunity of recognising the expertise and commitment of our new Business Coordinator Rebecca Campbell, who has realigned our financial and reporting processes whilst overseeing grant acquittals, and changing banks and our accounts management facility.

The funding of the Education and Development Fund (formerly the Education, Sports and Art Fund) increased to a record spend of \$110,000 for FY 22/23, thanks to the inspired grant applications of Operations Coordinator Joanne Lauritsen, who also has overall responsibility for our Villages and Volunteer Management.

Other successful grants have ensured we can work towards the development of our compliance framework under the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES) and further a partnership with The Wyatt Trust, as one of seven chosen organisations participating in their Linker Project, which has ensured the employment of former volunteer Kate Branson within Grandcarers SA.

These matters provide financial and compliance regulation adherence, greater clarity for Board oversight and continued support for client support programs.

Client support

We have also worked hard to grow the number and reach of our Villages (peer support group meetings) with many successes and one or two that were unfulfilled.

Starting with six villages in 2022, we now have a regular presence in 15 locations across South Australia, with work ongoing to replace those that have come to, or are coming to, an end of their natural lifespan.

At this point I must mention the support and commitment of volunteer Kerry Daly who has supported the program of Village development, personally facilitates six of the Villages and has helped bring new volunteers to support other new Villages.

Our inaugural 'Big Village' took place during October 2023 in the Adelaide Pavilion. This was our first foray into providing a large seminar style forum, which also celebrated our 21st year of providing carer support. The event was financially supported by generous donations and provided valuable information, entertainment and gifts for over 100 clients.

I am also pleased to report that we are developing opportunities to work with and support First Nations communities at three separate locations, and I look forward to reporting on those and hopefully our connections with other culturally diverse communities in 2024.

The Great Giveaway during the end of 2022 provided hundreds of children's gifts to our clients, and we are preparing to repeat that for the end of 2023, with gifts valued in the region of \$20,000 purchased or donated for our clients.

All the above ensure growth in client support and an increase in the number of clients and children provided with personal, peer or financial support.

Client engagement limitations

It has been necessary to focus on managing risk from the provision of unqualified advice by team members to clients, whilst ensuring that client support remains effective and appropriate to their needs. This has provided an opportunity to introduce a consistent team approach which is more commensurate with the available skills and qualifications of our team.

This ensures the provision of useful and appropriate guidance and support, with clarity of boundaries relating to unqualified legal advice or counselling.

Relationship building

I have again prioritised networking and relationship building both across the sector and the political arena. I have had the pleasure of developing particularly good working relationships with many of my peers and stakeholders in the carer sector, as well as building an understanding with numerous politicians including the Minister for Human Services and Minister for Child Protection, their respective Chief Executives, Shadow Ministers, and Commissioners for Children.

This has created a greater understanding of the organisation and the issues facing our clients by decision makers.

A national lead

Thanks to a collaboration with Dr Meredith Kiraly (University of Melbourne), Grandcarers SA is the lead organisation for an emerging national representative group for organisations supporting informal carers. It currently includes representatives from six states and the ACT, who have recently had the opportunity to meet with and lobby a supportive group Federal MP's about the plight of our clients, funding limitations and necessary changes to the Carers Recognition Act.

This has raised our profile nationally and provides an opportunity for a platform to raise carers concerns and seek legislative change at a Commonwealth level.

The people

None of the above would have been possible without the people within the organisation, some of whom I have mentioned within this report.

We have:

- developed a structure which has a greater focus on individual roles, is less centrally based, providing more practical volunteer roles, and retaining flexibility.
- changed from an organisation supported by nine volunteers to one with four employees and about 15 volunteers thanks to a rationalisation of our costs, improved grant funding, collaborations, and effective teamwork.
- been able to support and utilise a consistent flow of Master of Social Work Placements (all of whom stayed on as volunteers) and more recently, a Master of Communications placement.

A training needs analysis identified appropriate training for the team with the current delivery process continuing into 2024 and includes Child Safe Environment Training, Cultural Awareness and Mental Health First Aid.

These developments have provided us with a deeper skills/knowledge base, continuity of service and new perspectives.

The future

I have already alluded to the growth in villages and efforts to engage in Aboriginal and CALD communities. This progress will also include the introduction of two new Virtual Villages, one for carers across the state who have barriers preventing them from attending physical Villages, and one for Alienated Grandparents called *Next Steps*, to support their journey whilst separated from their grandchildren.

We are currently examining opportunities to provide client respite and children's camps during 2024, and will develop a Client Reference Group to provide lived experience advice to myself and the Board.

Our inherited weaknesses in data collection and collation will be rectified with internal processes improved to ensure we can provide accurate reports relating to our characteristics, clients and funding requirements.

Thanks to funding from the Department of Human Services, we are now able to plan to complete our ASES accreditation during 2024.

In addition, we will provide appropriate training supportive of team member's needs and roles, and build on our compliance and governance framework.

I am also concerned to develop us as a sustainable organisation, with a view to providing additional funding beyond a reliance on grants. I will use 2024 to examine a variety of projects to establish any that are suitable for development.

Thank you

Throughout this report I have mentioned funders. I would like to thank the Ministers for Human Services and Child Protection for their commitment to providing operational funding until 2030.

In addition, we are also grateful to the numerous philanthropic organisations who financially support our activities, particularly our Education Development Fund.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of the Board and our team for the excellent support they have given me and Grandcarers SA throughout.

I look forward to us all working together for the benefit of our clients and the children in their care.

Mike Feszczak



CEO Grandcarers SA

1 November 2023