CEO AGM Report – 8 October 2025

Report from Mike Feszczak – CEO Grandcarers SA

I am pleased to present my annual report for the period October 2024 to October 2025.

This report reflects ongoing organisational and service delivery development which continue to strengthen our impact for Grandcarers across South Australia. I refer to our 2024/2025 Social and Financial Impact Infographic which provides a summary of these matters over that Financial Year.

The Board

The Board's proactive approach to governance, including the Board Charter and the new Strategic Plan (2025 to 2028), supports the effective professional relationship with the CEO.

Two new Board members brought expertise without affecting stability or governance and both were engaged in our successful project to receive Certification under the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES).

The Board have provided me with clear direction for the way forward, while asking critical questions to ensure the previous Strategic Plan was fulfilled and the new Plan will be enacted.

Financial/Grant Overview

Whilst we are financially viable, due to the impact of wage, rent and other unavoidable increases, and the limitations of our reliance on grants and donations, some difficult decisions relating to budgets and expenditure have been made.

The 3yr+3yr+3yr "Mutual Support" SA government grant is now in the middle of its second three-year period, but the annual indexation increases to this grant are not keeping pace with rising costs.

We are currently exploring opportunities to increase our government grants and develop an independent income stream though an Op-Shop.

Our security of tenure at 30 Pitt St was guaranteed until the end of 2027 following a rent and tenancy review, and the signing of a new agreement in January 2025.

During Financial Year 2024/2025 philanthropic grant income declined following difficulties in achieving grants, particularly towards the Education and Development Fund (EDF). However, we were able to supplement this through an unexpected grant of $50,000 from the Premier's Discretionary Fund.

In total, client reimbursements through the EDF amounted to $67,000 during FY 2024/2025, a much smaller amount than the previous year, resulting in a decrease in the number of children receiving our support (from 563 to 395). More recent grant submissions have been successful, and numbers are expected to rise in 2025/2026.

A grant of $50,000 was also achieved through the Minster for Education from the Department of Education towards a project to provide weekend outdoor camps for clients and the children in their care in FY 2025/2026. Initial discussions for a camps partnership with Scouts SA have taken place.

A small flurry of donations has also assisted our efforts, with donations from Carer & Community Support SA, Steadfast Insurance, Surewise Insurance and some private donors.

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Client Support

We have also worked hard to rationalise our client database (see also IT below) by contacting over 800 of our clients to establish their continued need for support. This ongoing project has held the growth in client numbers steady at about 1300, who we believe are caring for over 2000 children.

We continue to try to expand our 'Village' peer support groups. Unfortunately, Aldinga, Elizabeth and Kaurna Plains ceased, but we successfully started new Villages at Kadina and Somerton Park, maintaining a total of 12 Villages across SA.

Four other locations may provide Village opportunities, and we continue to provide Outreach services where resources and funding allow, such as our visits to Kadina and Port Pirie in early 2025.

Following the success of our 2024 workshops, partnerships with Lutheran Care and Families Growing Together provided four statewide sessions each on Youth Mental Health and Growing Resilient Kids in the second half of 2025. Attendance numbers in 2025 have reduced and we will review the provision of information workshops for 2026.

Plans for a second 'Big Village' and 'Grandads Gathering' were cancelled due to the low number bookings and efforts to support First Nations communities have been limited; the Kaurna Plains Village ceased, and a Port Adelaide Grannies mentoring trial was unsuccessful. However, our Village partnerships with the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Committee and the Taikurrendi Children's Centre (Christies Beach) ensure our involvement is maintained in those areas.

Where opportunities for occasional or ongoing service delivery partnerships arise, we take them. Clients have been able to participate in:

- The 2024 Christmas Party hosted by our Ambassador Jane Reilly (in partnership with CCS SA)
- The Brush with Kindness Program (Habitat for Humanity providing client home maintenance)
- Free tickets to the Adelaide Football Club AFL Home Games (via DCP)
- Free tickets to the Royal Adelaide Show
- A Morning Tea at Parliament House with Minister Hildyard

The 2024 Great Christmas Giveaway provided about $60,000 of gifts to more almost 300 children in the care of our clients. We are in the process of preparing for 2025 Christmas Giveaway, with gifts valued in the region of $35, 000 collected to date.

Recognition

Whilst it is clear we are now better recognised as an organisation that successfully supports a cohort of carers who are unsupported elsewhere, it is the feedback from those carers that means the most to us. Some recent messages say it all:

"Thank you for everything you do for Grandcarers, the day-to-day things and fighting for us in Parliament. Becoming a carer is the hardest thing I've ever done and every bit of support I've received from organisations like Grandcarers SA truly keeps me going."

"Just wanted to say thank you so much for the tickets to the football. I took my great nephew to his first game and because we had 3 tickets, I could bring a support worker with us which made it such a great experience. Taking a child with disability out to a large venue like that was very overwhelming for me but I'm so glad we did it."

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"We would like to thank you for funding [our grandchildren's] winter uniform needs. We really struggle to find the funds for the children. I'm only earning $20k a year, so we appreciate every little bit of financial assistance we are offered. Once again, thank you."

For the second time in three years, we were thrilled to be a finalist in the SA Child Protection 'Outstanding Service' Award. On this occasion it was in the 'Positive Impact' category for the supports we provide for carers across South Australia.

Client Communication and the Advisory Group

Client telephone calls and personal visits have reduced. It is apparent this is due to an increase in the use of email (7000 in FY 24/25) and our ongoing improvements in other forms of communication and connection, such as more Villages and workshops, regular newsletters, targeted social media and SMS's, and a redeveloped website (which now has audio playback and 18 languages available).

Our Advisory Group continues with four members after some personnel changes, and recruitment is ongoing to strengthen it. This is a most useful resource for the CEO who cascades relevant information from their quarterly meetings to the Operations Team and the Board.

Relationship Building and Partnerships

I have prioritised relationship building, developing particularly good working partnerships with stakeholders across the carer sector.

This has resulted in many successful collaborations, including (but not limited to):

- Carer and Community SA (Xmas Party and Stakeholder Breakfast)
- Habitat for Humanity (Brush with Kindness Program)
- Lutheran Care (Workshop Facilitation)
- Families Growing Together (Workshop Facilitation)
- Thriving Families - BetterStart (Data Collection Project)
- Backpacks 4 SA Kids (Christmas Giveaway)
- Treasure Boxes (Op-Shop development)
- King William Road, Adelaide Branch of the Commonwealth Bank (Christmas Giveaway and a financial donation).

We will continue to work hard to develop useful relationships for the benefit of the organisation and our clients and look forward to adding partnerships with others such as Scouts SA (Weekend Camps) and Key Assets (Therapeutic Training) during 2026.

I have also spent some time building effective professional relationships with numerous senior Parliamentarians (including the Minister for Human Services and Minister for Child Protection), their respective advisors and senior executives. This is has resulted in the introduction of regular diarised meetings with Minister Hildyard and her advisors and the support of the CEO of the Department of Child Protection (DCP) who facilitated our access to DCP Carer Training packages and the short term secondment of a Social Worker to Grandcarers SA.

Our successful Stakeholder Breakfast (April 2025), attended by the Her Excellency Governor of South Australai and 60 sector and government representatives, highlighted our expanding network. We thank Carer and Community SA for generously supporting this event.

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Advocacy

Our advocacy to Parliamentarians has had three main themes:

1. Provide Informal Grandparent Carers with financial support
2. Change the definition of Carer in the Carer Recognition Act to include Informal Kinship Carers
3. Provide appropriate funding for Grandcarers SA to effectively support Informal Kinship Carers

Our long-standing campaign to secure Grandparent Carer's payments continues to encourage the major parties to include this as a 2026 state election commitment.

Despite our recommendation, and that of the government's own review, the SA Carer Recognition Amendment Bill failed to include a change the definition of 'Carer' to include informal kinship carers. We have since presented an additional formal submission seeking the implementation of our original recommendation to specifically include Informal Kinship Carers. We await the result of this process and will advocate as appropriate.

In March 2025 I spoke to the *SA Parliament Economic and Finance Committee on Out of Home Care for Children and Young People*, where I presented the case for a Grandparent Carer Payment, changes to the Carer Recognition Act and sought additional funding for Grandcarers SA.

In September 2025 Minister Hildyard generously hosted clients, children and our team members for a morning tea at Parliament House. This provided clients and team members with the opportunity to speak directly to her and confirm the needs of clients.

We were also able to advise the Minister for Health and Wellbeing on issues relating to informal kinship carers being expected to provide substantial evidence to avoid charges for a child requiring an ambulance. This resulted in the South Australian Ambulance Service now accepting a simple Statutory Declaration without the need for further evidence.

We brought to the attention of the Minister for Education issues relating to the School Card, particularly the application form's exclusionary language. Our advice relating to these matters has been forwarded to the Department of Education who are reviewing the process.

Advocacy opportunities with the media have included radio interviews (5AA, ABC Adelaide), written media (The Advertiser, The Senior and Weekend Plus) and a podcast with Emerging Minds.

Our impact through social media continues to increase via Facebook and LinkedIn with substantial increases in followers and post views on both platforms.

In relation to national matters, we have stepped back from Kinship Alliance Australia and direct support for national advocacy issues. However, I continue to occasionally support it and Dr Meredith Kiraly and was honoured to be named as a "Friend" of the Alliance.

ASES and IT

Former volunteer Frank Parsley has been employed on a short-term contract to assist with gaining accreditation by the Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES). I am pleased to report that we received accreditation at Certificate Level in August 2025. This is a great achievement for such a small organisation with limited resources.

Database development continues with support from Adelaide University's BetterStart team and a private contractor, aiming for improved data security and reporting facilities by the end of 2025.

Frank has also driven some IT upgrades, introducing additional technology and security systems to support our database and administrative functions.

However, much of our IT hardware is aged and requires replacement. A recent DHS grant application may provide funding to renew this equipment.

The People

The numerous successes reported above have only been achieved as a result of the enthusiasm and commitment of our dedicated team.

Whilst there have been one or two changes in volunteer personnel, the main body of the team remains stable with a small increase in the number of volunteers. Feedback and a culture survey confirm a positive, safe workplace that encourages involvement and skill growth.

Our revolving door of Master of Social Work student placements continues to produce many enthusiastic and capable students to support our work. During 2025 we also included two Community Services student placements, which may continue depending on supervisory capacity.

We were delighted to welcome Senior Social Worker Sue Neumann on a secondment from DCP. Sue has been pivotal in improving service delivery, advice and student supervision and remains with us until the end of 2025. A submission has recently been provided to the Minster for Child Protection to fund a Grandcarers SA Social Worker or extend such secondments on a more permanent basis.

We were thrilled to congratulate our Ambassador Mrs Lan Lee, on being invested with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to the Crown and the community of South Australia.

Team Training

We held a Wellness Day for staff and Board members in May 2025 and are seeking funding for further Mental Health First Aid training in 2026.

Future training priorities include Child Safe Environments, LGBTQI+ Awareness, Elder Abuse, and Understanding Autism.

The Future

It is clear that Grandcarers SA delivers services and community impact beyond its size. We will continue to try to expand our reach and influence, increase our active client numbers and develop new opportunities to the benefit of clients and the children in their care, fulfilling the Vision of Grandcarers SA.

The biggest challenge for Grandcarers SA continues to be financial sustainability. We have seen recent increases in the SCHADS employee award, employers' superannuation contributions, office rent, IT/operations/administration costs, and the introduction of a Portable Long Service Leave payment.

Whilst we are grateful for our state government grant, and for essential grants from philanthropic organisations such as the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation and the RALI Foundation, our income reduces in real terms compared to the unavoidable increases in expenditure.

To counter this we have submitted a request for additional funding to the Minister for Child Protection and are looking at ways to raise funds through other opportunities.

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Op Shop Development

This project has been introduced as a means to provide additional funding beyond a pure reliance on grants and donations. Following Board approval, we engaged 180DC to complete a feasibility study on the development of a stand-alone Grandcarers SA Op Shop. The report was delivered in July 2025 and supported the development of an Op Shop. A seed funding grant was submitted to Impact 100 but was unsuccessful. The stand-alone Op Shop is awaiting a funding opportunity.

However, at our request, the feasibility study also included an overview of creating a small Op Shop in the front reception area of our offices at 30 Pitt St, Adelaide.

With the support of the Board, Uniting Communities (our Landlord) and the generosity of NJH Constructions, building alterations have been completed.

A partnership with Treasure Boxes will provide an experimental Pop-Up Op-Shop in the new space from mid-October into November, preparing us to conduct our own retail arrangements in early 2026.

Thank You

I thank the Ministers for Human Services and Child Protection for continuing our operational funding until 2030, and acknowledge our philanthropic partners whose support, particularly for the Education Development Fund, remains vital.

Finally, I thank our team and the Board for their ongoing commitment and support, without them I would have very little to report.

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

Mike Feszczak

CEO Grandcarers SA

October 2025