CEO Grandcarers SA Annual Report 2026

Report from Mike Feszczak – CEO Grandcarers SA

I am pleased to present my annual report for the period October 2025 to October 2026.

The past twelve months have been another significant period of development for Grandcarers SA. We have strengthened our financial position, secured important commitments from the South Australian Government, expanded opportunities for Grandcarers and the children in their care, improved our organisational infrastructure and continued to raise the profile of informal kinship carers.

Most importantly, we have continued to ensure that the voices and needs of Grandcarers are heard.

The Board

The Board has continued to provide strong governance and strategic oversight, guided by our 2025–2028 Strategic Plan. The relationship between the Board, CEO and Operations Team remains constructive and professional, with a shared focus on sustainability and responding to the changing needs of our clients.

I thank all Board members for their commitment contribution of their expertise. I particularly thank Sandra Egege who is standing down after many years of service, and Kathryn House AM who is standing down as Chairperson.

Sandra has made a significant contribution to our governance and administration, including developing the Board Charter and strengthening governance practices as Secretary. We thank her for her dedication and professionalism.

As Chairperson, Kathryn has helped build valuable connections, strengthen our profile, raise funds and drive the organisation forward. I am delighted she will remain on the Grandcarers SA Board.

Financial and Funding Overview

This year has seen a significant improvement in our medium-term funding position.

Our pre-election advocacy resulted in a fulfilled commitment from the Premier to increase government funding to Grandcarers SA and provide an ongoing Social Worker position. This represents important recognition of both our work and the needs of informal kinship carers.

We have also secured substantial three-year philanthropic support from the RALI Foundation and The James and Diana Ramsay Foundation. This provides greater certainty for our client engagement activities and Education and Development Fund (EDF), while enabling the introduction of a Driving Lessons initiative, also supported by the RAA, Adelaide Rotary and the CMV Foundation.

The EDF remains financially healthy. During 2025/26 approximately $62,000 was provided directly to clients, with approximately $70,000 available for 2026/27. Some reimbursement limits have also been increased to encourage eligible Grandcarers to make greater use of the Fund.

Despite this stronger position, rising employee commitments, rent, insurance, IT and other costs mean diverse and sustainable income remains a priority.

CEO Grandcarers SA Annual Report 2026

Client Support and Service Development

Our fundamental purpose remains unchanged: to provide practical, personal and peer support to Grandcarers and other informal kinship carers and improve outcomes for the children in their care.

During late 2025 we reviewed our client records, removing approximately 300 people who no longer required our services. This has provided a more accurate picture of our active client base and accompanied the development of a significantly improved client database.

Our eleven **Villages** remain an important point of connection across South Australia. However, attendance has reduced, so we have listened carefully to what clients now want. A research survey and feedback through our Facilitators and my Village visits, confirmed that Grandcarers continue to value Villages but also want more guest speakers, social opportunities and family activities.

That feedback directly influenced two new initiatives:

The Village Studio provides opportunities to connect through art and creative activities to reduce isolation, build friendships and give Grandcarers time for themselves. Its first event was held at the Art Gallery of SA in September, with clients attending the Monet to Matisse exhibition.

A Conversation With… provides informal and entertaining conversations with interesting South Australians, including comedian/writer Maggie McGinty and our Ambassador Jane Reilly OAM.

Families Growing Together are also providing four **workshops** across SA on children's coping skills and cyber safety, while our regional Outreach has continued through visits to Port Augusta and Whyalla, with further opportunities being explored.

Supporting Children and Young People

We have expanded activities directly benefiting children and young people being raised by Grandcarers.

With Department for Education funding, our collaboration with Scouts SA has grown, with two weekend camps held at Woodhouse and more planned. An outdoor camp at Mount Crawford was also delivered through Beyond the Classroom. These activities give young people experiences they may otherwise miss while providing Grandcarers with some respite.

Our new Driving Lessons initiative reimburses driving lesson and licensing costs for young people being raised by Grandcarers, as a licence can be critical to employment, apprenticeships, education and independence. An initial trial is supporting five young people in the care of regional Grandcarers.

The 2025 Great Christmas Giveaway provided 206 children with gift packs valued at approximately $50,000. The James and Diana Ramsay Foundation also supported a Popeye cruise and lunch for 14 Grandcarer families, while Department for Child Protection and other ticket opportunities enabled families to attend Adelaide Crows games and other events.

These may appear small compared with our advocacy work, but their impact on individual families should not be underestimated.

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Advocacy

Advocacy has again been a defining area of our work.

Our State Election campaign focused on three proposals: a financial allowance for informal Grandparent Carers; increased operational funding for Grandcarers SA; and ongoing support for a Social Worker.

The Government committed to significantly increase Grandcarers SA funding and provide an ongoing Social Worker position for the next four years. However, a financial allowance for informal Grandparent Carers was not achieved and remains major unfinished business.

Our campaign has generated broader political discussion, including a Liberal Opposition push for a Parliamentary Inquiry into financial assistance for kinship carers.

Grandcarers SA and the Government's funding commitments were also acknowledged in Parliament by the new Minister for Child Protection, the Hon Alice Rolls MP.

Following our advocacy on amendments to the SA Carer Recognition Act, grandparents and informal kinship carers were specifically included in the accompanying Charter, extending recognition across all State Government departments. Grandcarers SA was also included in draft Charter Implementation Guidelines as an organisation representing carers.

We continue to seek recognition of Grandcarers SA as the Peak Body representing informal kinship carers under the new Children and Young People (Safety and Support) Act.

Our work with Carers SA has enabled the reduction of barriers to the Carer Gateway. Direct advocacy has also resulted in the Government's Inklings Program accepting the Grandcarers SA Statutory Declaration as evidence of a carer's authority, while Dental SA has agreed children in informal kinship care will not incur out-of-pocket expenses when the declaration is produced, adding to similar acceptance by SA Ambulance.

Individually these changes do not solve the disadvantages experienced by informal kinship carers. Collectively, they show that sustained, credible advocacy can change systems.

Relationships, Partnerships and Evidence

Grandcarers SA could not achieve its impact alone. We have continued to strengthen relationships across government, the community sector, philanthropy and business.

Our relationships with organisations including Carers SA, CAFFSA, CFKCSA, the Wyatt Trust, Habitat for Humanity, Families Growing Together, Uniting Communities, Key Assets, Scouts SA, and various State Government departments continue to provide practical benefits and advocacy opportunities.

Beyond Bank donated ten surplus laptops for eligible clients, and Grandcarers SA was selected as Charity Partner for the Silver Sirens National Conference, resulting in a $2,681 donation. Strong relationships have become one of our greatest assets, extending our reach well beyond what would normally be expected from an organisation of our size.

We are also placing greater emphasis on demonstrating impact through evidence. The BetterStart/Thriving Families project is assisting us to improve data collection and reporting, including development of a draft data dashboard.

Most significantly, 180DC has commenced a pro-bono Financial, Economic and Social Benefits Analysis of Grandcarers SA. This has the potential to provide stronger evidence of the economic and social value generated when children remain in safe and stable family environments rather than entering the formal care system.

IT, Administration and Communication

Considerable progress has been made in modernising our infrastructure. A new client database has been developed and secured in the Cloud, with our team undertaking the substantial task of checking and transferring records. Cyber insurance has been obtained, while a Pubs With Heart/AHA grant enabled replacement of ageing laptops, monitors and keyboards. A new contract for a photocopier/printer has also reduced ongoing costs.

Our profile continues to grow. Monthly newsletters remain an important communication channel, with printed copies now mailed to more than 30 clients who do not use email. Our Facebook following has grown to more than 1,550, compared with 976 in June 2022, and our LinkedIn presence has more than 400 followers.

Media engagement has included ABC Radio Adelaide, 5AA and other outlets, particularly around our State Election proposals and the Government's funding announcement. A particular highlight in June when Minister Rolls visited Grandcarers SA, and participated in a media conference with Grandcarers and myself which generated television and radio coverage.

Volunteer Sadie Goddard-Wrighton also developed the five-part *Life Interrupted* podcast series exploring carers' experiences, wellbeing and the impact of Grandcarers SA.

Our People

Everything in this report ultimately depends on people.

Our small but consistent team of employees and volunteers continues to achieve an extraordinary amount with limited resources.

The ongoing Social Worker position strengthens professional support for Grandcarers, builds knowledge across the team and supports our social work student program. Eight Master of Social Work students have assisted with client support, research, database work, projects and service development during the year.

Team development included Mental Health First Aid and Child Safe Environment training. During National Volunteer Week we also celebrated volunteer Bill Syrmas achieving ten years of service. I remain enormously appreciative of the flexibility, commitment and goodwill demonstrated by our employees, volunteers and students.

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Looking Forward

2027 will mark the 25th anniversary of the organisation that began as Grandparents for Grandchildren SA and is today Grandcarers SA. It will be an opportunity to celebrate how far we have come and consider where we go next.

We are considering Family Days, another Big Village Gathering, a stakeholder celebration and a publication recording our history.

We will continue developing the Village Studio, A Conversation With..., regional Outreach, workshops, youth camps and Driving Lessons initiative, while exploring a counselling service, supporting children's Diagnostic and Development Assessments and access to financial advice, subject to funding.

Our major unfinished business remains the financial inequality experienced by informal kinship carers. Grandparents and other relatives who step forward to raise children save governments substantial costs and, more importantly, provide children with stability, family connection and a loving home. Yet informal kinship carers continue to do so without financial assistance and with limited legal recognition.

Grandcarers SA will continue to advocate for that to change.

Thank You

The achievements in this report belong to many people.

I thank the South Australian Government, particularly the Department for Child Protection, for its increased financial commitment and the continuation of the Social Worker position.

I acknowledge our many philanthropic partners and donors, particularly the RALI Foundation and James and Diana Ramsay Foundation, whose multi-year support gives us greater confidence to develop and sustain services.

I thank our Ambassadors and Advisory Group, and the many government agencies, community organisations, businesses and individuals who work alongside us. Special thanks to the Hon Frances Adamson AC and Mr Rod Bunten whose support as joint Patrons ended on 6 October 2026.

I particularly thank our volunteers, employees and students, and the Board for its support, challenge and confidence in me as CEO.

Over the past twelve months Grandcarers SA has secured stronger funding, expanded services, introduced new programs, strengthened its infrastructure and achieved greater political recognition of informal kinship carers.

There is still much more to do. Our task remains to ensure Grandcarers are supported, their contribution is recognised and their voices are heard, and that the children in their care are given every opportunity to thrive.

Mike Feszczak, CEO, Grandcarers SA 7 October 2026