

# hunter circles

# Annual Report 2024 - 2025



We acknowledge that we live and work on the stolen lands of the Awabakal and Worimi people. We acknowledge Traditional Owners across the country and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present. This is, was and always will be Aboriginal land.

There is no justice in this country without First Nations justice.

# Who We Are

Hunter Circles is a grassroots organisation committed to building friendships and community connections so that people with disability can take their rightful place at the heart of community – living big, rich lives filled with purpose, love, connection and equal life chances.

## Our vision

A Hunter community where everyone matters, where everyone belongs and where everyone can be a full and equal citizen.

## Our mission

To build friendships and connections so that people with disability can take their rightful place in the heart of community.

## Our values

### Belonging

Building small, caring communities where everyone can feel valued, included and respected.

### Community

Building connections and relationships grounded in love, justice and reciprocity.

### Integrity

Acting honestly, transparently and responsibly to build trust, honour commitments and foster lasting relationships.

### Justice

Championing dignity, rights, and inclusion by challenging harm and using our relationships to take meaningful action.



# A message from the President

2025 is truly a year to celebrate. Together, we have achieved so much. As a Board, we continue to strengthen Hunter Circles — ensuring we are a solid organisation built on strong values and firm, up-to-date policies that will support everyone involved well into the future.

This year has seen exciting growth, with the creation of new staffing roles and our smooth transition into our beautiful new office at 437 Hunter. These changes set us up for continued growth and sustainability.

Lived experience is at the heart of everything we do at Hunter Circles. Thank you to Leigh Creighton and Robert King, whose leadership, insight and dedication have shaped every step of our “Community for Everyone” project, co-designing and co-delivering the work and keeping it grounded in lived experience and true inclusion. I would also like to thank our other staff for their outstanding work, especially Jen Cush — Jen, your determination, leadership, and advocacy continue to encourage us all.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow Board members for their ongoing guidance and strategic leadership, ensuring that Hunter Circles remains strong and able to support our growing community now and into the future.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to our ever-growing team of Social Connectors. You are doing ground-breaking work and setting the standard for what inclusive, community-driven support looks like.

**Cayt Weir, President**



# Our work this year

## Community For Everyone

Launched in May 2024 in partnership with Side By Side Advocacy, the “Community For Everyone” project is a two-year initiative connecting socially isolated people with intellectual disability to volunteer Social Connectors who share their interests. Together they make a collective contribution to our community. The project aims to foster genuine relationships, inclusive community participation, and opportunities for belonging.

The project builds foundation Circles of Support, where Social Connectors foster genuine relationships and bridge connections with the wider community through mainstream activities — always at the person’s pace, or the “pace of trust.” This helps to build friendships, strengthen confidence and open doors to new experiences in the community.

To date:

- 10 people with intellectual disability have joined the project
- 8 participants have been matched with a Social Connector or team of Connectors.
- Social Connectors support engagement in mainstream community activities - based on shared interests - such as parkrun, music groups, walking groups, gardening, and volunteering.



# Community For Everyone

## Highlights:

- One man now attends weekly parkrun and has become a valued volunteer.
- Another plays with a ukelele group each week.
- A man who had been isolated for years now attends regular men's dinners at his local church.
- Another participates in bush regeneration at a wetlands reserve.
- One man has reached his lifelong dream of volunteering with a gardening group - the first job he has ever had.

## Activities and Engagement:

- Delivered 20 community-based events and training workshops, focusing on recognising strengths, planning for a good life, and fostering meaningful relationships.
- All sessions co-designed and co-facilitated by peer leaders.
- Community outreach included social media campaigns, radio interviews, news features, a short film, and collaborations with councils, advocacy groups, service providers, universities, and faith groups.
- Project insights were presented at conferences, sharing the impact of lived experience leadership and inclusive community-building with a wider audience.

A key pillar of the Community for Everyone project is that it is led by people with intellectual disability. Peer Leaders have co-designed and co-delivered every stage of the project - from planning and promoting, to training, events and evaluation - ensuring that lived experience shapes both the direction and impact of the work.



**Robert King**  
Peer Leader



**Leigh Creighton**  
Peer Leader



**Jen Cush**  
Executive Officer &  
Project Lead

# Community For Everyone

Guiding Principles:

- See the person as their gifts.
- Find the people and places where those gifts can be shared.
- Be consistent — go to the same place, at the same time, with the same people. - over time.
- Always ask: “What more is possible?”
- One person, one situation, one environment at a time.

The project includes an inclusive evaluation led by researchers from UNSW and Flinders University, including researchers with intellectual disability. Oversight is provided by a Project Advisory Group, with peer leaders actively contributing to every decision.

Community For Everyone is not just about reducing isolation — it is about creating warm, inclusive communities where everyone is valued and has a place to belong. With the leadership of people with intellectual disability, the dedication of our partners, and the commitment of our volunteers, the project continues to demonstrate how inclusive communities can be built - one relationship at a time.



## Systemic advocacy: acknowledging institutional injustice

Our systemic advocacy work continues to focus on acknowledging the histories of disability institutions and supporting communities to learn from these experiences so that injustice is never repeated. In partnership with researchers and advocates from the University of Technology Sydney, Council for Intellectual Disability, and Action for People with Disability, we are working together to ensure that the voices and experiences of people who lived in institutions guide meaningful change today.

Together, we advocate that:

- People with lived experience of institutions must be heard.
- The lives and stories of those who were institutionalised must be honoured.
- Institutional practices can continue today, even after the buildings have closed.
- Real repair requires rebuilding social bonds.

In May, more than 90 people joined us for the launch of “Moving Forward From Institutions” - a film that reflects on the history of institutions in NSW and recognises the people who fought for their closure.

Our work focuses on truth-telling, acknowledgement and building pathways to restitution. We aim to show that healing from institutionalisation requires more than policy change—it requires community. Through citizen-to-citizen connection, we aim to rebuild belonging so people with intellectual disability can build real relationships, repair social bonds, be included, and contribute to community life on their own terms.



# Statement of Financial Position

as of 30 June 2025

## Total Assets:

Dollar amount of all the things we own and money we have: **\$132,494**

## Total Liabilities:

What we owe to others: **\$106,118**

## Equity:

How much we have if we sell everything we own and pay all the money we owe to others: **\$26,376**

# Statement of Profit and Loss for the year 30 June 2025

## Revenue:

How much money we got in this year: **\$178,425**

## Expenses:

How much money we spent this year: **\$153,608**

## Profit for the year:

How much money we have left over this year: **\$24,817**



# Thank you!

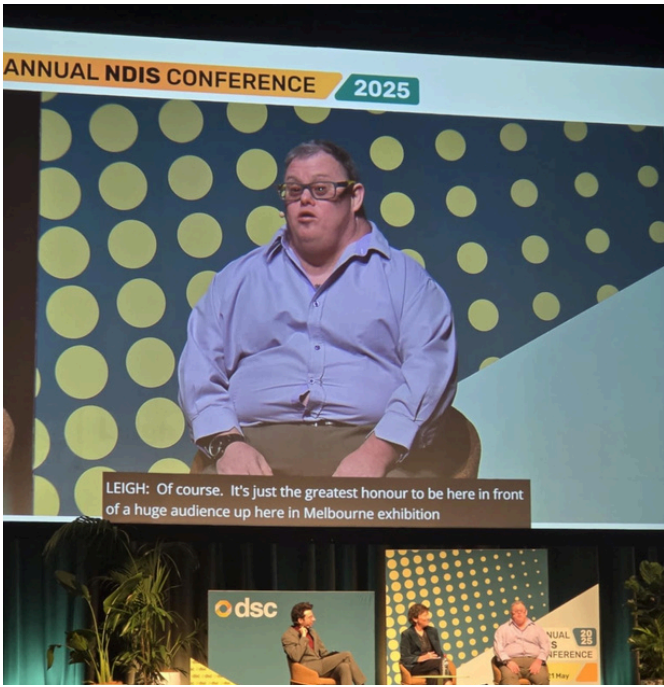
## Many people and organisations have supported Hunter Circles throughout the year.

We are deeply grateful for your generous contributions of time, knowledge, funding and other resources.

### Thank you to:

- Side By Side Advocacy – for your skilled, passionate and thoughtful partnership.
- Our Social Connectors – for your incredible commitment to building communities where everyone belongs.
- Voluntary Board Members – Cayt Weir, Matthew Dougherty, Sally Coddington, Mitchell Jones and Jo Watson.
- Project Advisory Group for “Community For Everyone” (not including staff members) – Dr Michelle Donnelly, Dr Michelle King, Dr Leighton Jay and Dr Jo Watson.
- ABC Newcastle and the Newcastle Herald – for featuring “Community For Everyone” and helping amplify its impact.
- New staff members, Katelijin Hullegie (Admin Officer) and Barb Mannell (Circles Coordinator)
- Ryan Wild, Alt Objectives – for your fabulous filmmaking.
- Scarborough Wines – for generous donations.
- Embrace People & Place – for our amazing office space and fostering a warm, collaborative community with our exemplary partner organisations who share 437 Hunter with us.





Hunter Circles Incorporated  
437 Hunter Street  
Newcastle, NSW 2302  
Website: [www.huntercircles.org](http://www.huntercircles.org)  
Email: [info@huntercircles.org](mailto:info@huntercircles.org)  
Phone: 0401 388 164  
ABN: 56 503 458 54

Hunter Circles is a registered charity. Donations are welcome and help us continue our community building work.

**Together we can do so much!**