



hunter circles

Hi friends! Welcome to 2026!

We hope you've had some time to rest and recharge over the holiday break. As the new year begins, we're thinking about what matters most: community, connection and how we show up for one another.

2025 was a year of deepening purpose for Hunter Circles. We strengthened our foundations as an organisation, welcomed new staff, and moved into our new home at 437 Hunter - a space that is already alive with connection, collaboration and possibility.

Most importantly, lived experience continued to lead the way. Peer leaders Leigh Creighton and Rob King, alongside our growing team of Social Connectors and community partners, shaped every part of our work — keeping it grounded in real lives, real relationships and real inclusion.

We're grateful to everyone who has joined us. Here's a snapshot at what we've been part of over the past few months — and what's coming as we move into 2026 together.



437 Hunter Building Launch

October - 437 Hunter Building Launch

We were proud to join our partners to celebrate the launch of 437 Hunter, the collaborative space that has become Hunter Circles' new home. It is already a vibrant, welcoming place where people come together, build relationships and create change.

The launch was MC'd by Leigh Creighton, with "OG" Social Connector Dan Galazowski sharing his story, and the space filled with partners, community members and a strong sense of shared purpose.

"437 Hunter is all about belonging and working together to create something bigger than ourselves." - Leigh Creighton, Peer Leader.

We are genuinely humbled by the talent, care and passion in this building, and proud to be part of such a vibrant community of organisations working for a fairer, more connected Newcastle.

[Find out more about 437 Hunter here.](#)



November - ASID Conference: Making Friends

In November, we travelled to Sydney to speak at the Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability (ASID) Conference. Our theme was simple and urgent: Making Friends.

Despite all its promises, we are worried the NDIS has often pushed people further away from community life. Too many people in group homes are ignored, bored, or deeply lonely in the name of “supported independent living.” What is called “community participation” too often becomes community tourism — wandering shopping centres, sitting in food courts, or going on endless drives, without ever building real relationships. Huge amounts of funding are spent keeping people segregated, instead of acting as a bridge to belonging.

That’s why our partnership with **Side By Side Advocacy** matters so much. Together, we are learning that small, practical actions can create real opportunities for connection and community membership — including for people who have been isolated for years.

Our work is guided by the principles of **Angela Amado**, which continue to shape everything we do:

- See the person as their gifts
- Find the people and places where those gifts can be shared
- Be consistent — same place, same time, same people - over shared interests in mainstream community groups
- Always ask, “*What more is possible?*”
- One person, one situation, one environment at a time
- Become an asker - asking opens doors to connection
- Be persistent - community building takes time

- Work at the pace of trust.

Another highlight of ASID was joining a panel with Shu Hua Chan, Bernadette Curryer and Kim Roots from Side By Side Advocacy, alongside Michelle King and Daelle Bunker, to explore “*What will it take?*” — a conversation about how to better listen to, support and include people with intellectual disability who are rarely heard.

We shared why we started Hunter Circles in 2021, when the last large institutions in NSW closed. We knew that closing a building is not the same as closing an institution. If institutions broke social bonds, the real work now is repairing them.

We are learning that when citizens are invited into meaningful roles — with care, clarity and purpose — they show up. Sometimes all it takes is one person who sees possibility, notices what brings someone joy, and creates opportunities for the person to be seen and heard.



November - Party time!

We held our first house party in November — **we wanted to bring a little more fun, connection and community spirit into our work.** These gatherings are a relaxed and easy way for us to connect with each other, share stories and take action together to build inclusion in our community.

It’s a chance for us to reach new people in our local neighbourhoods, spark conversations about what we’re doing, and grow our movement for change.

We have a big goal — **40 community leaders for social inclusion by 2026** — and these get-togethers are one way we can make that happen. By inviting more people to join in, we open the door for more of us to be part of something meaningful. If this kind of community organising worked for Jacinda Ardern, then we're giving it a crack here in Newy too. It's time to put the power to build inclusion back in the hands of the people — where it belongs.

A big thanks to Scarborough Wine Co for making our house party even more fun!

We will be hosting some more of these parties in the new year, so please watch this space!



December - International Day of People With Disability: *Listening to People Rarely Heard* Workshop with Dr Jo Watson and our AGM

To celebrate International Day of People With Disability, the fabulous Jo Watson joined us for a powerful workshop on supported decision making with people who have complex communication support needs. This workshop reminded us that:

- Autonomy is a human right - we have a legal and moral obligation to uphold people's will and preferences
- The right to loving relationships is universal - it's these relationships that help us all make decisions.
- Everyone is communicating, all the time - listen with your whole body, and your heart

- Stop talking about ‘best interests’ - we need to acknowledge, interpret and act on people’s will and preferences.

We followed this our Annual General Meeting, with over 30 people coming together to celebrate new films, resources and the growing community that is making this work possible.

[You can read our Annual Report here.](#)



December - UTS Disability Law Conference

To close the year, Rob King and Leigh Creighton joined the “**Accountability, Resistance and Disruption!**” Conference at the University of Technology Sydney. Their session, “*Remembering Institutions: Moving Forward By Looking Back,*” brought together advocates and researchers committed to learning from the past so the same harms are not repeated.

Rob shared his story and his film *Moving Forward from Institutions in NSW*, reminding us that people who lived in institutions have powerful stories that must be heard, respected and remembered.

Leigh spoke about the risk of repeating the past — particularly when people remain isolated and disconnected in group homes — and the importance of community-led repair that happens when real relationships are built intentionally between people, not systems or services alone.

This session reinforced something we hold deeply: remembering institutions is not only about history — it is about how people are living now. It's about making sure these injustices are never repeated, and that people can take their rightful place at the heart of community, living rich lives filled with purpose, love, connection and equal life chances.

Monthly Meet-Ups

Last Friday of each month



Together we can
do so much



What's coming up - Monthly Meet-Ups - You're invited!

Our monthly Meet-Ups are starting again - on the last Friday of every month. They're relaxed, welcoming spaces to connect, share, learn and explore what it means to show up for each other in real life. These gatherings are such a great opportunity to:

- Reflect
- Share stories, tools and connections
- Build local knowledge on what works
- Support and learn from each other

Date: **Friday 30 January 2026**

Time: **12.00pm - 1.30pm**

Where: **437 Hunter Street, Newcastle**

Light snacks provided

[RSVP now](#)



Build community through connection

Take that next step

- Join a circle of supporters
- Once a month or as often as you like

Together we can do so much

How you can be part of building a *Community For Everyone*

“I’m a Social Connector because I think community needs to do this sort of thing. We can’t rely on governments to run our lives for us. We need to, as people, come together and look after each other.

We could sit on the couch and talk about it forever - or we can get out there and do it. So I urge you - go on, have a go!”

- Dan Galazowski, OG Social Connector, Muloobinba/Newcastle

There are simple, meaningful way you can be part of building a **Community For Everyone**:

- **Tell a friend** about our work
- **Share what you love doing** – connect with someone who has similar interests and build a real relationship – ***people who do things together are more likely to become friends***
- **Start or join a Circle of Support** – contact us to find out how
- **Invite someone in** – bring a person into your local club, volunteer group, or community organisation (we can help connect you)
- **Share what you love doing**

Remember: you don’t need to be an expert - just a human.

If you or someone you know is interested, please get in touch!

- Reach out to us any time. Contact Jen (she/her) at info@huntercircles.org or 0401 388 164
- Tell us more about yourself by [filling out this form](#)
- Visit our [website](#) for more information
- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to keep up with the action.
- Share this email with others who may be interested in joining our [mailing list](#) to stay in touch.
- [Contact us for a chat.](#) We'd love to hear from you!

There are so many ways to get involved - join us and be the change you want to see. We hope to see you soon 😊

Our project partner, **Side By Side Advocacy** is running the Community For Everyone project in Parramatta and Ryde.

Contact Kim (she/her) at Side By Side

Advocacy: info@sidebysideadvocacy.org.au Ph: 9808 5500

There is no justice in this country without First Nations justice. Hunter Circles acknowledges the Awabakal and Worimi peoples as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.



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Our mailing address is:

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