



ANNUAL REPORT



Proudly serving FNQ communities for over 25 years



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

VPG acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we deliver our services, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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Image: The people behind our work - VPG staff together on Mandingalbay Yidinji Country for a day of cultural immersion and shared learning.

Who we are

Vocational Partnerships Group (VPG) is a not-for-profit charity that has been transforming the lives of children, young people, and families in Far North Queensland for over 25 years. We empower youth, strengthen families, and broker partnerships between education and industry. As locals supporting locals, we strive to achieve real and sustainable outcomes for the communities we serve.

Inspired by the need for a smoother transition from school to work, our journey began with a school-based work experience program. Over the years, we have expanded our footprint to encompass a broad spectrum of programs for children, youth, and families responsive to the evolving needs of our communities.



We are committed to...

- Strengthening families and improving children's wellbeing and development;
- Supporting young people to transition through their adolescent years to engage actively within the community;
- Helping students in regional, rural, and remote areas participate and succeed in higher education;
- Building safer communities that positively influence behaviour, culture and attitude towards violence;
- Creating quality partnerships between parents, community, education, and industry; and
- Achieving real and sustainable outcomes for our local community.

In 2024, we delivered 14 services across the Tablelands, Mareeba, Cassowary Coast and Cairns - each grounded in strong relationships, built on trust, and shaped by the unique needs of our local communities.

OUR PURPOSE

To improve child and youth transitions.

OUR VALUES

COMPASSION 

GENEROSITY 

INCLUSIVENESS 

RESPONSIBILITY 

FUN 



A Message From Our CEO

In 2024, we stayed grounded in what works - developing our own talent and supporting homegrown solutions. Because strong regional communities are shaped from the inside out: by people and ideas that fit our landscape.

Our purpose remains clear: improving child and youth transitions. We continued doing what we do best - supporting children, young people, and their families to build the skills, confidence, and connections they need to navigate life's key stages, from early childhood through to education, decent sustainable work, and independence.

At the same time, we sharpened our role as a regional "solutions hub," leveraging 667 industry partnerships across 32 communities to turn complex, local challenges into practical action.

But we also backed bold new ideas.

- Tablelands Trail Builder Traineeships fused youth employment with the maintenance of vital social infrastructure, delivering tangible community benefits and drawing regional attention for their innovation and impact.
- A new youth-specific Mental Health Journey Coordinator model, delivered through the MyndKind consortium, now helps young people in regional areas access, navigate, and stay connected to the support they need.
- Tablelands Youth Energy used street art and skate sessions to engage 79 at-risk teens - building trust, resilience, and pathways to local support while diverting them from alcohol and drug harm through positive, creative engagement.
- We re-imagined Supported Playgroup as an inclusive space, embedding Auslan storytime and welcoming diverse families so every child feels seen, supported, and ready for kindy.

A major milestone was launching the Cassowary Coast University Centre in Innisfail - proving you don't have to leave home to pursue higher education. In its first four months, 65 locals enrolled and began mapping careers that keep talent close. Together with our Tablelands University Centre, which now supports students across 51 disciplines and reports that 95 % plan to study, work, or stay locally, we're growing future professionals who understand their communities and are here for the long haul.

We also strengthened families. Five hundred parents and carers participated in early-intervention programs that built confidence, connection, and practical skills - with 97% reporting stronger relationships and greater confidence in meeting their child's needs.

We know genuine change depends on reconciliation. Staff-led cultural immersion, new cultural protocols, and the growth of our First Nations workforce deepened our commitment to culturally safe practice and shared leadership.

This is only a glimpse of our impact, yet it shows what's possible when a region solves problems together. I'm immensely proud of what we've achieved - and grateful to our brilliant staff, Board, partners, and funders who make it all possible. Together, we're investing in the strength of our local communities - and proving that Far North Queensland can meet its own challenges, one place-based solution at a time.

Maryanne Tranter

Maryanne Tranter
VPG Chief Executive Officer

A Message From Our Board



It's been a turbulent year, full of momentum and complexity, through which VPG has remained focused on our most important objective: ensuring children, young people, and families in Far North Queensland have the opportunity to thrive - guided by local knowledge and delivered through local solutions.

As Chair, I'm proud to report that VPG continues to demonstrate best practice in regional leadership. Across every program and partnership, we saw the value of backing community-led initiatives that are grounded in place and shaped by the people who live here. In Far North Queensland, uniform approaches are not our friend - we need solutions that make sense for our context, our challenges, and our strengths. That's exactly what VPG continues to deliver.

Challenges remain, including the constriction of funds and the burden of compliance in the grant funding environment, as well as the constant pressure to grow a workforce requiring expertise not always available within our home region.

This year, the Board worked alongside our expert CEO and passionate leadership team to sharpen our strategic focus in three key areas:

- Strengthening local impact, by investing in responsive, place-based approaches that reflect the diversity of our region;
- Building organisational resilience, including workforce capability and governance systems that support quality and innovation;
- Positioning for long-term sustainability, through meaningful partnerships, regional investment, and strategic advocacy.

From expanding access to higher education through the Cassowary Coast University Centre to improving mental health pathways through the MyndKind consortium, VPG continues to prove that regional challenges are best solved within the region - by the people who know it best. These aren't just service expansions; they're demonstrations that viable, sustainable impact starts with trusting and resourcing local leadership.

Behind every outcome is a team committed to doing things differently - and doing them well. The Board is proud to support an organisation that leads with integrity, anchors itself in community voice, and remains fiercely committed to its purpose.

Looking ahead, we will ensure that VPG is equipped to continue driving local solutions with regional relevance. We'll keep championing the belief that Far North Queensland has the answers - and deserves the resources, trust, and autonomy to act on them.

On behalf of the Board, I extend my sincere thanks to our CEO, our leadership team, staff, funders, and partners. Your dedication is creating lasting, positive change - and setting a strong foundation for the future.

Tamilyn Brennan

Tamilyn Brennan
VPG Board Director

Image: Staff taking part in a cultural immersion experience on Mandingalbay Yidinji Country, engaging with traditional practices.



Reconciliation

Reconciliation is everyone's responsibility.

In 2024, our staff across all centres and services played an active role - planning, delivering, and getting involved in opportunities to build understanding, respect, and stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A shared experience that brought our team together this year was our Cultural Immersion Day on Mandingalbay Yidinji country. The day created space for staff to listen, reflect, and connect more deeply with First Nations culture, history, and Country.

The day was coordinated by Ryhanna Mundraby - a proud Mandingalbay, Gimuy Walubra Yidinji and Gungganji Gurugulu woman, VPG RAP Co-Chair, and Business Support Officer - and led by Mandingalbay Authentic Indigenous Tours. Ryhanna was joined by VPG Youth Worker Kayla Gagai, whose cultural connections span Yirrganydji Country and Badu Island. Together, they guided staff through working groups that helped shape priorities to strengthen our next steps in reconciliation.

Held as we walked into NAIDOC Week, the day gave us fresh perspective and purpose, and reaffirmed that reconciliation lives in everyday actions, shared leadership, and genuine connection.

Other meaningful steps taken in 2024:

- ▶ Engaging Traditional Owners through our service expansion, we were honoured to have Mamu Elder Tracey Dickman attend the official opening of the Cassowary Coast University Centre (CCUC) to deliver Welcome to Country. Here she shared that communities are like chains, strengthened by every link, and we are proud to be welcomed as part of this vital connection.
- ▶ Appointing a First Nations Student Development Coach to the CCUC to strengthen support for First Nations students.
- ▶ Finalising and rolling out internal Cultural Protocols, embedding culturally secure practices into our everyday work.
- ▶ Contributing local leadership - Our RAP Co-Chair was invited to serve as an independent panellist for Gindaja Treatment and Healing Indigenous Corporation.
- ▶ Taking an all-staff approach to leading activities during National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week across our centres and in school sites, creating space for celebration, learning, and connection.
- ▶ Taking part in NAIDOC community celebrations hosted by Mulungu Health Service in Mareeba and Wuchopperen Health Service in Cairns, where we ran activities and connected with children, young people, and families to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- ▶ Engaging local First Nations businesses and suppliers, exploring opportunities for meaningful partnerships and procurement.

OUR YEAR



32

Communities Served



59

Schools Engaged



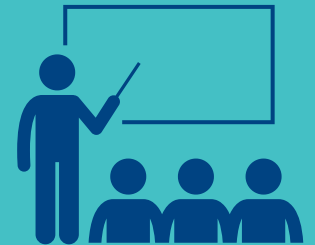
667

Industry Partnerships



1400

Workplace Experience Opportunities Created



1356

Children & Youth Engaged in
Respectful Relationship Education



500

Parents Supported

97%

Families Reported Positive
Changes to Circumstances

OF IMPACT



Skilled
191
Young People



78%
Young People Achieved Positive
Outcomes Through Our Skilling Initiatives



125
Young People Secured Work



258
Young People Accessed
Coordinated Care



Empowered
198
Regional Tertiary Students



28
Staff Employed
To Achieve Our Results



EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

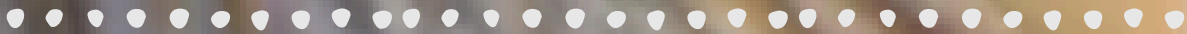




Image: After leaving school early in Year 10, Hannah built work readiness, rediscovered her motivation, and found direction through the VPG Get Set for Work, securing a Business Administration traineeship with Ngonbi Community Services Indigenous Corporation.

Skills for life, not just for work

Every year, we walk alongside young people as they take those early steps toward adulthood, and 2024 was no different. Across the Tablelands, Mareeba, and Cairns, 191 young people benefited from our targeted learning support, nationally recognised training, experiential real-world learning opportunities, and work experience.

Through small groups and one-on-one coaching, we helped young people build essential skills - communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving - the skills employers want and life demands. Many put these skills to work through placements and connections with local employers, gaining practical experience that boosted their work readiness and employability.

As they moved toward jobs or further study, young people gained confidence in resume writing, job applications, and interviews.

They also learned everyday skills - cooking, budgeting, and building healthy relationships - making them more resilient and independent.

These skills give young people a solid foundation for future opportunities - whether that's a job, a course, or something new. Because of this, they leave us more confident, capable, and ready for whatever comes next.



When I was with VPG I learned so much – about how to be a good person, put myself out there, and get into work. It gave me motivation to go after what I want, helping me get to where I am today.

Andy, former VPG participant, thriving 15 years on. From school disengagement and couch surfing to steady employment and now proud owner of Good Vibes Grooming Studio in Yungaburra.



Image: WorkSkills@VPG participant James gained in-demand skills, completed work experience & started a civil construction career with Mareeba Shire Council.

Getting young people into decent jobs

We helped 125 young people step confidently into work, including 29 apprenticeships and traineeships, with a strong focus on sustainable employment that meets local workforce needs.

Working hand-in-hand with local employers, we identified skills gaps and tailored training to ensure young people were job-ready for industries actively seeking talent. This included accredited training, employability skill development, industry visits, and work experience.

Through these strong local partnerships, we connected young people with jobs offering stability and opportunities for career growth, laying the groundwork for long-term success.

Our impact was recognised when our WorkSkills@VPG program was named a Top 3 Finalist for Community Training Initiative of the Year at the Queensland Training Awards, Far North Queensland Region.



Jordan secures apprenticeship through targeted training & work experience

Motivated to secure a trade, Jordan joined the WorkSkills@VPG program, gaining in-demand skills, industry-relevant qualifications, and strong employability through weekly training and site visits with local employers.

After completing his training, VPG brokered a work experience placement at Cold Frog Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, perfectly aligned with his goals.

By the end of the week, Jordan's skills and work ethic stood out, earning him an apprenticeship with the company. He quickly became a valued member of the Cold Frog team, taking an exciting step toward a rewarding career in air conditioning and refrigeration.

Showing young people what's out there

For many young people, choosing a career can feel like guesswork - especially when they haven't seen jobs up close or met people working in them. That's why we embed industry visits and mentoring into our approach, giving young people the chance to explore careers, connect with local employers, and imagine themselves in roles they might never have considered.

In 2024, we continued creating opportunities to visit local industries across construction, agriculture, retail, hospitality, amongst others. These visits let participants ask questions and see jobs in action. At Serra Drilling (pictured), participants experienced the scale, technology, and teamwork behind drilling operations. They spoke with workers, asked questions, and started forming clear career goals.

These experiences turn ideas into tangible plans. Each visit builds career awareness, practical skills, and confidence to take the next step - shaping motivated, work-ready futures in our communities. At the same time, local industries connect with potential workers, helping grow a skilled, homegrown workforce.





Growing local careers that meet local needs

In 2024, we took training outdoors, launching a new pilot traineeship initiative on the Tablelands that gave young people the chance to earn, learn and contribute to their community.

Backed by Tablelands Regional Council and Tablelands Cycle Sports, the 22-week environmental restoration project saw four young job seekers roll up their sleeves to help maintain the Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, a well-used community asset that has long relied on volunteers for upkeep.

Working alongside Council, QPWS, local nurseries, and contractors, the trainees took on trail maintenance, tree planting, and weed control, gaining hands-on experience and earning a wage while working toward a Certificate I in Conservation and Ecosystem Management.

Throughout the project, we focused on employability - helping trainees build confidence, develop strong work habits, and connect with employers in industries where local jobs are growing.

That commitment continues into 2025, as we support each participant to be job-ready and well-placed to take up future employment in their community.



Image: TTB trainees Keonie, Bailey, Andre & Hosea working on-site at Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, gaining hands-on experience in environmental restoration.



Gearing up for work

When Djuvaan relocated from Cape York to Cairns, he had a clear goal: to start a career in the automotive industry - a path that needed a licence.

Through VPG's Ready 4 Work program, he built confidence, refined his job search skills, and accessed driving lessons to keep moving forward.

Backed by his VPG coach, Djuvaan approached Zappala Motors directly. No job advertised - just a conversation. His initiative stood out, and the employer saw he was serious about the role and actively working towards his licence. He was offered a trial on the spot.

Now a first-year apprentice, Djuvaan is on the road to a bright future — and well on track to getting his licence.

Driving access to work & independence

In regional areas, a driver's licence isn't a luxury, it's a lifeline. It opens the door to jobs, training, and greater independence. But too often, not having a licence is the barrier that stops young people from working or moving forward.

In 2024, we continued to prioritise access to driver training for young people who faced practical and financial barriers. Without a car, a supervisor, or the funds for lessons, many were stuck - ready to work, but unable to get there.

We delivered 136 driving lessons, helping young people take one of the most important steps toward independence.

For many, a licence is the turning point, not just for getting a job, but for keeping it. We'll keep backing young people to get behind the wheel, because in our communities, a licence means more than mobility. It means momentum.



Image: VPG Ready for Work participant Janet gaining confidence behind the wheel through supported driving lessons.

Creating a place where everyone belongs

In 2024, we continued to create a space where young people from all backgrounds felt safe, supported, and able to be themselves. Our services welcomed people of all cultures, genders, learning abilities, and sexualities - providing an environment where everyone felt they belonged.

Cultural safety remained a priority. Guided by our First Nations Leaders, we strengthened the ways we support and affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

We worked with each young person at their own pace - helping them build trust, confidence, and the skills to take their next step. From sharing meals to joining group activities or simply showing up, connection played a big part in that journey.

Because when young people feel like they belong, they're more likely to engage, take part, and look ahead.

Meeting young people where they're at

The needs of young people are evolving, particularly in areas like mental health, neurodivergence, and long-term disengagement from school. Despite these challenges, the young people we support continue to achieve strong outcomes.

That's because we don't take a one-size-fits-all approach. We adapt, offering flexible, trauma-informed, relationship-based support that meets each young person where they're at.

Progress doesn't always mean landing a job or going back to school. Sometimes it's simply showing up, staying engaged, or setting a goal for the first time.

And that's where change begins. When young people start to take small steps forward, they begin to see they're ready for more.

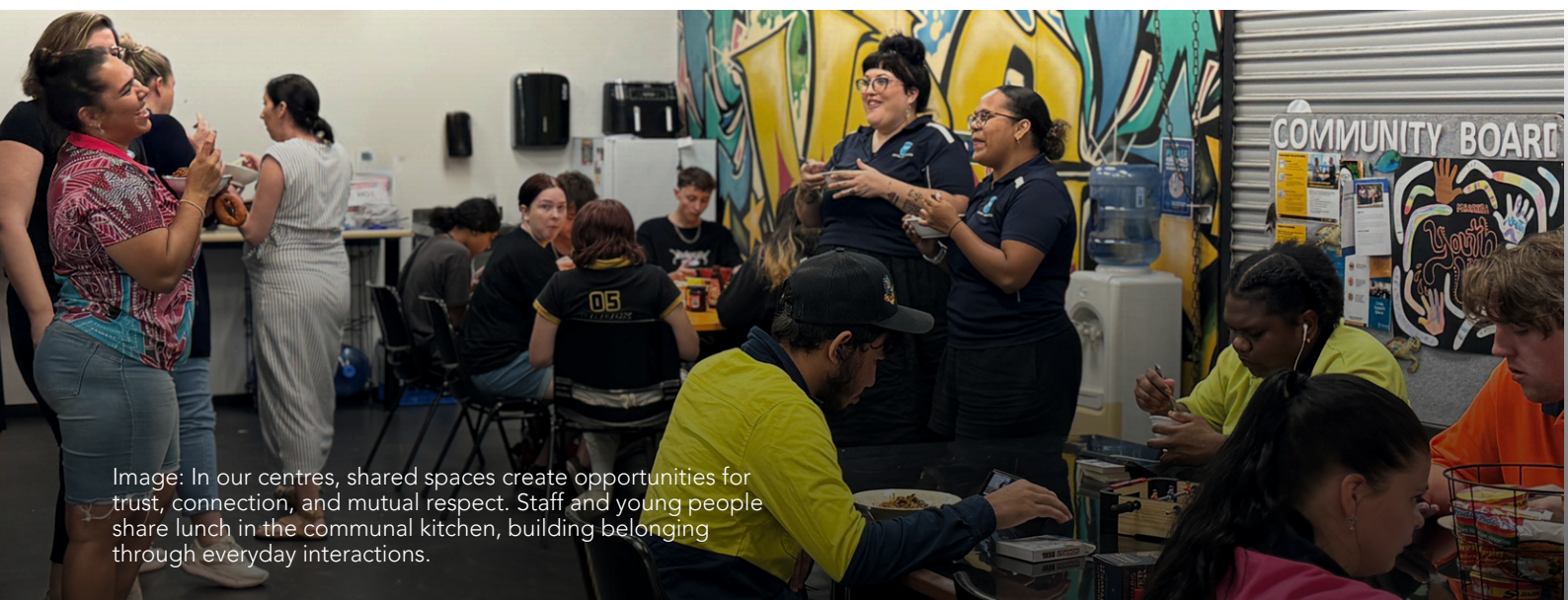


Image: In our centres, shared spaces create opportunities for trust, connection, and mutual respect. Staff and young people share lunch in the communal kitchen, building belonging through everyday interactions.



CONNECTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CAREERS





Image: Dreams take flight for Year 10 St Monica's student Belenda through VPG-coordinated work experience with Jetstar Aviation.

Making work experience work

In 2024, we coordinated work experience placements for over 1,400 Year 10 students across Cairns and the Tablelands, creating meaningful career exploration opportunities at scale. These real-world experiences connect young people with local industries, open their eyes to different career paths, and give them the skills and confidence to make informed choices about life after school.

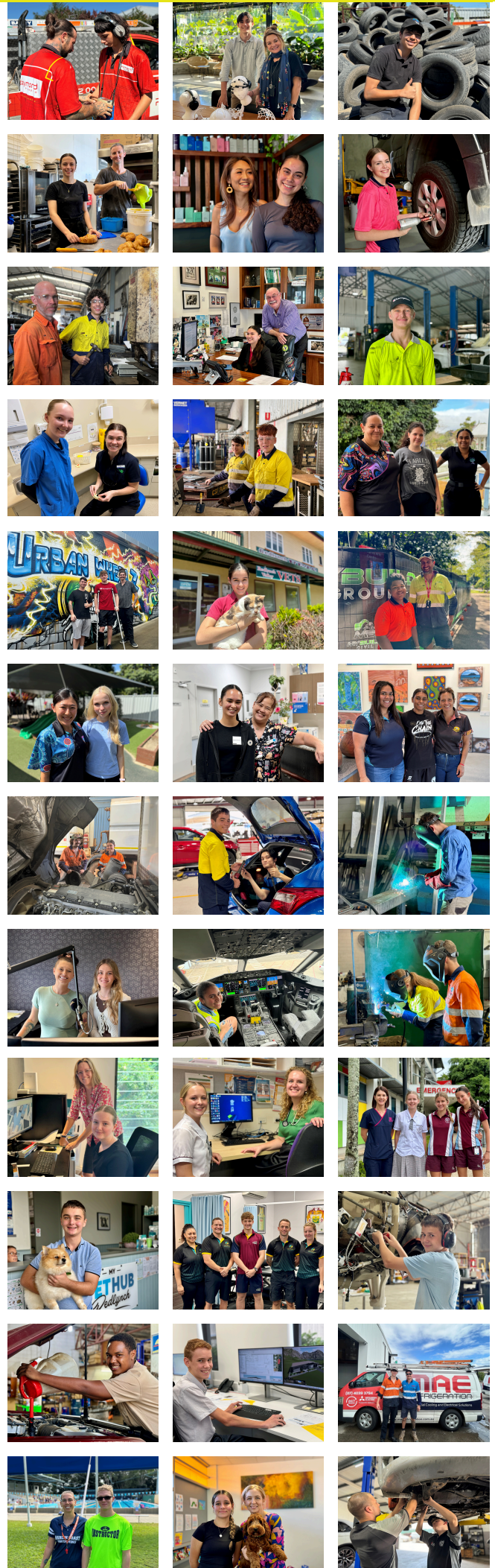
We believe work experience is a rite of passage - a milestone every young person should reach, regardless of where they live, their family income, or who they know. For some, it's the only chance they'll get to experience the world of work before finishing school.

Delivering this opportunity requires real commitment. Our team supports students and families one-on-one, prepares them for placement, liaises with employers, and manages all logistics, compliance, and follow-up. It's intensive, hands-on work – and demand keeps growing.

With over 25 years' experience, we've seen the impact firsthand - students gain clarity, confidence, and capability, while employers give back, share their skills, and connect with future talent.

This trusted model is effective but not fully funded. Without additional support, continuing at this scale, and maintaining the quality young people deserve, won't be sustainable.

As we look ahead, we're focused on finding new ways to keep this opportunity open to every young person, no matter their background – and we're seeking partners who share that vision.





Local employers stepping up for local youth

In a year when many businesses were still recovering from the late 2023 floods, some long-term partners paused placements. But community support stayed strong. In 2024, over 600 local employers welcomed young people through work experience, including 92 new hosts joining the program for the first time.

For many employers, work experience isn't just goodwill - it's a smart workforce strategy. With skill shortages growing, more are using placements to showcase their industry, connect with future talent, and identify recruits early.

Many also remember what it was like to start out - the uncertainty, the need for guidance, and the value of someone investing in their potential. That experience drives them to give back and support the next generation stepping into work.



Aidan, Site Supervisor at Bryant Building Contractors, remembers his early days in the industry and how influential the right support was when he was starting out. Now, he's paying it forward - mentoring Year 10 student Lars from Cairns State High School, who's exploring a future in the trades through work experience.



In 2024, Luke, in his third year as a cabinet-making apprentice with Pacific Kitchens, is now mentoring work experience students. VPG coordinated his year-long work placement in 2021, which led to a school-based apprenticeship and a strong start to his career.

More time for real world learning

In 2024, we created year-long vocational placement opportunities for 43 students, allowing them to spend one day a week across the school year applying classroom learning in real workplace settings. These extended placements helped students develop a broad range of practical skills, build confidence, and gain valuable experience over time - supporting smoother transitions from school into the workforce.

It's a bigger commitment for both students and employers - but one with real payoff. Employers valued the opportunity to mentor consistently, with many placements leading directly to job offers, apprenticeships, or further training.

When education and industry work hand-in-hand, it's a win-win. We're proud to facilitate these partnerships, because learning on the job helps young people see where they're going and how to get there.



GROWING OUR OWN REGIONAL WORKFORCE



Image: Jedidiah, an Innisfail local and former agricultural worker, studies for a Master's in Secondary Education through the University of Queensland using the Cassowary Coast University Centre as his space to study. He's proud to follow his family's teaching legacy while building a career and life in his home town.



Bringing university closer to home for the Cassowary Coast

In 2024, we broke new ground - opening the Cassowary Coast University Centre (CCUC) in Innisfail - making higher education accessible to even more rural and remote Far North Queenslanders.

Opening in late August 2024, we enrolled 65 students within the first four months, with 14 locals getting one-on-one help through early 'Connect-to-Uni' sessions - figuring out their study options and taking those important first steps toward skilled professions. This strong response confirms what we've long known - the appetite is here, and now, so is the support.

The hub is the result of a strong local partnership with Cassowary Coast Regional Council and a shared belief that access to higher education shouldn't come with a relocation price tag. People in regional communities deserve the same opportunities as those in metropolitan areas, and the CCUC delivers that support close to home.

Two dedicated local staff joined our team to lead the centre - a Centre Coordinator and a First Nations Student Development Coach - both focused on improving access and inclusion, supporting students before, during, and beyond their studies.

Funded as part of a national rollout of 10 new Regional University Study Hubs, the CCUC joins our Tablelands University Centre (TUC) in building a local pipeline of skilled professionals - keeping talent close and supporting long-term regional growth and prosperity.



Marking the moment

To celebrate the official opening of the CCUC, we hosted a community event that reflected the collective effort behind making higher education more accessible across the region. We were humbled by the strong turnout and support. Special acknowledgments went to Mamu Elder Tracey Dickman, who opened the ceremony with a Welcome to Country, Senator Anthony Chisholm, Assistant Minister for Education, Mayor Teresa Millwood, CCRC councillors, and education providers including JCU, CQUniversity, and TAFE. The event also welcomed members of the CCRC Youth Advisory Committee, whose early involvement was central to shaping our approach and strengthening advocacy during the CCUC's tender process. The opening marked a new chapter for the region, as the CCUC commits to nurturing local talent and building a skilled workforce for the Cassowary Coast's future.

Image: Mayor Rod Marti, Deputy Mayor Dave Bilney, TRC Councillors, VPG CEO Maryanne Tranter, and students at the TUC come together for a roundtable marking one year of the Centre and its positive impact on the local education landscape.



A milestone year for the Tablelands University Centre

In 2024, the Tablelands University Centre (TUC) completed its first full year of operation. As our flagship study hub, it laid the groundwork for VPG's future in this space - helping us learn what works, build stronger connections, and better understand the needs of regional students. It also gave us a front-row seat to the difference higher education access makes - and reaffirmed what we've always believed: regional people deserve opportunity.

In 2024, 133 students came through our doors, supported by a strong and inclusive community of remote learners. From school leavers and first-in-family students to working professionals and parents, the TUC community reflects the diversity of our region.

Students studied across 51 disciplines through 24 institutions. While 49% pursued advanced qualifications such as degrees, diplomas, and postgraduate study, 51% enrolled in uni-bridging or vocational certificates - developing skills that align with regional workforce needs. Top study areas include health, social work, agriculture, and environmental fields.

Our impact extends beyond enrolments. A 2024 Student Experience Survey showed:

- 100% feel supported by TUC staff
- 95% say the centre helps them stay, study, or work locally
- 91% believe it improves their academic success
- 95% report a strong sense of belonging

These results reflect what we see every day - regional students thriving with the right tools, space, and support. Backed by partners including Tablelands Regional Council, the TUC continues to grow as a local hub for learning, connection, and future opportunity.

Our priority is building stronger pathways between students and local industry, forging connections that drive sustainable regional workforce development for years to come.

Our pipeline of regional professionals

With over 198 students supported through our Regional University Centres in 2024, a homegrown talent pool is taking shape, poised to meet the future needs of our regions.

Our students represent our future nurses, teachers, counsellors, and social workers - critical roles that keep our communities strong.

Our local pipeline across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast is beginning to take shape:

- 45 future healthcare professionals – preparing to deliver essential care in local hospitals, clinics, and community settings
- 21 future educators – building skills to support early learning centres, schools, and training organisations
- 38 future human services professionals – working towards careers in social work, psychology, community services, and law

Students are also pursuing pathways in business, science, engineering, agriculture, creative industries, and trades - reflecting the diverse future workforce needs of our regions.

Supporting students to study where they live improves access to higher education and builds a future workforce with local knowledge, strong connections, and lasting commitment to their communities.

Strengthening local pathways from study to employment

With a growing future workforce preparing for local careers, the next step is connecting them directly with industry to build clear pathways from study to employment.

In 2024, we strengthened connections between students and local industry on the Tablelands. With over 46% of students enrolled in priority workforce areas such as Health and Human Services, we partnered with local industry to establish Advisory Groups for Social Work and Nursing. Co-designed with students and professionals, these groups provide mentoring, networking, and local insight - giving students the confidence and clarity to prepare for local careers and meet regional workforce needs.

By giving industry a seat at the table, we're shaping the next generation of regional professionals through local knowledge and lived experience. Building on this success, we plan to expand into Education, Agriculture, and Business - broadening our impact across the Cassowary Coast.

Our work in this space is about safeguarding our future workforce - supporting students to stay connected, confident, and career-ready in their own communities. Strong regional communities are built on strong regional workforces.



Image: Social Work students & industry at SW Industry Networking Advisory Group event, May 2024.



Holly graduates & secures local role with Council

Holly was in her third year of a dual Bachelor's degree in Business and Accounting, majoring in Financial Planning through CQUniversity when she joined the TUC. The centre gave her the support and community she needed to finish her studies strong. Since graduating, Holly has secured a position as an Accounting Officer with the Tablelands Regional Council. Her local education and connections helped her confidently step into this role, contributing her skills to the community she calls home.

“
Having access to resources,
support, and a community
of motivated, like-minded
people made such a big
difference in my study.”

Holly, Dual Bachelor of
Accounting & Business, CQU

Backing regional potential through partnerships

Behind every student's success is a strong network of support - and in regional communities, that network is built on partnerships. In 2024, our progress in expanding access to higher education across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast was made possible by the commitment of partners who share our belief that regional students deserve equal opportunity.

We continue to receive foundational support from the Australian Government, while local contributions from the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast Regional Councils remain essential to the long-term viability of our Regional University Centres.

This year, Costa Group and MSF Sugar renewed their support, providing financial assistance to directly enhance student experiences. 2024 also saw the launch of our first scholarship program, made possible through funding from the Kaban Green Power Hub Community Benefit Fund - helping to ease the financial pressures regional students face.

Alongside other employer partners who offer work placements, industry visits and student mentoring, these contributions help create a strong foundation for student success.

With every new partnership, we're strengthening the systems that help regional students start, stay, and succeed in higher education. This is how we grow our own.

Image: Kaban Scholarship recipient Sophie Jonsson, studying Agricultural Science and Business through Griffith University.



Celebrating regional success

In regional communities, recognising student achievement matters. It's a powerful way to mark progress, build confidence, and honour the support that helped get them there.

In 2024, we hosted graduation events across our Regional University Centres to acknowledge students completing vocational qualifications and university degrees. Each graduate represents a future professional, ready to step into their next chapter with skills, direction, and purpose.

One TUC event brought together families, trainers, staff, and Mareeba Mayor Angela Toppin to honour 19 local young people who earned vocational qualifications across the Tablelands and Mareeba. The pride in the room said it all.

From vocational pathways to university degrees, every student who crosses the finish line is a regional success story, and that's worth celebrating

Showing Regional Communities What's Possible

To make education goals feel real and within reach, we've worked hard to put local opportunities front and center. In 2024, we took part in career expos, led Year 12 transition talks, and hosted facility tours - showing young people and community members the support and pathways available at home.



Image (above): Celebrating 19 young people completing vocational qualifications at the TUC. Image (below): VPG and Atherton SHS teamed up to deliver the 2024 Atherton Careers Showcase.



A proud moment was partnering with Atherton SHS to support the delivery of the Atherton Careers Showcase, where more than 50 local industry representatives shared career advice, pathway insights, and hands-on demonstrations with students.

Through career counselling, we've helped locals set clear goals and map education pathways that fit their ambitions. Together, these efforts are nurturing aspirations, widening participation, and shaping a stronger, more skilled regional community.



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

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Image: VPG-supported playgroup family attending the annual Mareeba Family Fun Day in support of Child Protection Week.





Building confident parents to raise thriving kids

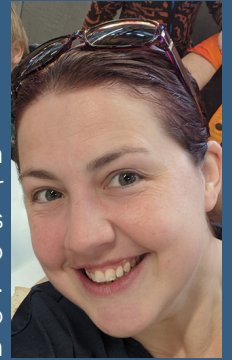
We worked with 500 parents and carers across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast, delivering evidence-based programs that build practical parenting skills.

Through tailored coaching and workshops, we focused on strengthening parent-child relationships, managing behaviours, and supporting key transitions.

Creating safe spaces for parents to connect and share challenges was central to our approach. We listened closely to families, tailoring sessions around the topics they cared about most - from managing big emotions and setting boundaries to behaviour strategies and school transitions - ensuring relevant, practical support.

Flexible delivery options, including online and after-hours sessions, made these programs accessible for busy families. As a result, 97% of parents reported feeling more confident and better equipped to meet their child's needs, laying a stronger foundation for children's wellbeing and development.

Image: In August, parents at Malanda Kindy took part in a workshop with VPG Every Family Officer Vanessa, building their skills in understanding and responding to children's behaviour. The session focused on positive strategies for encouraging and teaching new behaviours.



Malanda mum Elisha, with three young kids and another on the way, turned to VPG's Every Family program to strengthen her parenting skills. After completing Bringing Up Great Kids and Triple P with VPG Every Family, Elisha says the biggest shift has been in how she understands her kids' emotions, and her own reactions. "I used to get triggered by big feelings, but now we pause and handle them together." She also valued the chance to reflect on her own upbringing and to learn alongside other parents. "It was comforting to know I wasn't alone. Elisha's message to other parents considering parenting support is simple:

“...it's great to have an outside village and the right tools and strategies for parenting. It's not a sign of being broken – everybody needs a little help sometimes.

Elisha, Parent

Normalising parenting support

Parenting doesn't come with a manual, which is why support is so important. We aim to normalise parenting support, showing that asking for help is not a sign of failure but an act of care. Through our work, conversations, and presence in the community, we brought parents together to share challenges, practical strategies, and connection. By creating safe, welcoming spaces for open dialogue - whether about tantrums, teenage moods, or managing the mental load - we helped parents feel understood and less alone. Making support more visible and approachable is helping local families grow in confidence, connection, and resilience.



Fitting in with family life

With three kids under six and a husband working FIFO, Rosie's days on the Cassowary Coast are full. Managing school runs, daycare, and medical appointments for her nonverbal child with autism, she knew she needed extra tools to navigate parenting challenges. That's when she connected with VPG Every Family. Through flexible online workshops and one-on-one coaching with Every Family Officer Kate, Rosie gained practical strategies to understand and respond to her children's behaviour - avoiding the "parenting trap," tailoring approaches to each child, and reinforcing positive actions. The flexible delivery fit her busy schedule, giving Rosie tools she could apply immediately and renewed confidence to manage family life with greater ease.

“

I think every parent should do this program, because the more knowledge you have, the more positive impact - not only for your child, or children - but for yourself as well.

Rosie, Parent



Making playgroup more inclusive for every child

Supported Playgroup offers local families the chance to connect, while children learn through play. Co-facilitated by VPG and Mareeba C&K Kindergarten, these free weekly sessions use play-based activities to build children’s confidence and support a smooth transition into kindy. In 2024, we ran Supported Playgroups across three locations, reaching 139 children and their families.

Arts and crafts, messy play, sing-alongs, and storytime help children develop social, emotional, and communication skills. Alongside this, facilitators support parents too, creating a welcoming space to share experiences, build friendships, and link into community services when needed.

This year, we took a meaningful step toward inclusion. Vanessa, one of our VPG Every Family Officers, and Kate from Mareeba C&K completed an eight-week Introduction to Auslan and began signing along with storytime. These small actions made a big impact for children who communicate differently.

One parent shared:

“My deaf son attends the playgroup and I have heard many amazing stories about how much he loves storytime. Thank you so much for making playgroup accessible and enjoyable for my little man (and many more to come I’m sure!)”

By embedding inclusive practices into our service delivery, we aim to help more families feel supported and included.

Responding to adolescent mental health

We listen closely to what’s happening in our communities and shape our support around what families need. This year, that meant stepping in to support parents of adolescents, with a series of mental health workshops delivered across the Tablelands. The sessions offered practical tools to navigate the challenges of teenage years - from strengthening communication to managing big emotions and tough conversations.

Designed to be real, relevant, and supportive, the workshops helped parents feel more confident and better connected as they support their teens through a changing world.



Image: Parents and carers at Atherton State High School take part in a VPG Every Family workshop supporting adolescent mental health.



Keeping support visible & local

In 2024, aligning with Child Protection Week, we co-hosted our seventh Mareeba Family Fun Day - a now well-established community event that continues to connect families with the local services and support available.

More than 500 parents and children turned out once again, joined by 20 local organisations working together to create a fun and welcoming space with a serious purpose: making sure families know where to turn when they need help.

This event has become a key part of Child Protection Week in our region and a trusted opportunity to promote awareness, connection, and access to support - especially for families who might not otherwise engage.

To make sure we keep this message alive outside of our annual event, we never stop sharing information, resources, and supports with families in all our day-to-day interactions.

Through workshops, support, and coaching, we are letting people know that support is there and it's okay to ask for help. Keeping support top of mind, our efforts online reached over 60,000 people, sharing parenting tips, strategies, and information almost every day with our online community.



BUILDING RESILIENT CHILDREN & YOUTH





Image: VPG Service Coordinator Sarah Marsh and Groms Skate Coach Ryan Janda with local youth at a Tablelands Youth Energy session - a fresh initiative creating opportunities for young people to connect, belong, and thrive.

Creating space for positive connection & safe choices

Working to support prevention of alcohol and drug harm among young people across the Tablelands, we launched a community-led initiative focused on connection, belonging, and purpose.

Funded by the Alcohol and Drug Foundation and delivered in partnership with Tablelands Regional Council, Better Together, and ECHO, the Tablelands Youth Energy project created hands-on opportunities for young people aged 12–17 - particularly those at greater risk of isolation or harm - to connect with local supports, develop new skills, and build positive peer relationships.

Across four skate workshops and three community art installations, 79 young people got involved - creating, learning, and connecting in ways that mattered to them.

Street art sessions were led by youth artist and mentor Daniel “Wally” Wallwork, while Groms Skate Coaching delivered the skate workshops. Both gave participants the chance to build confidence, meet positive role models, and take part in something meaningful.

- 100% of attendees reported increased confidence to take part in community activities.
- 100% said they had a greater awareness of the protective factors that help reduce alcohol and drug harm.
- 93% said they’re more likely to seek help from a local support organisation if they need it.

Encouraged by these outcomes, we’ll keep pushing to create real opportunities that connect youth, build resilience, and reduce harm - making a difference where it counts.



A more connected response to mental health

In 2024, we became part of MyndKind, a new community-led mental health response across Mareeba–Tablelands, supported by the NQPHN. This initiative makes it easier for young people to access the right support at the right time.

As the youth-specific partner in a local consortium led by Better Together, we play a unique role in shaping a more cohesive and safe system for youth to seek help and stay supported.

Young people now have a single, trusted contact to guide them through care options and maintain consistent support. This person-centred approach reduces confusion and delays, helping prevent young people from falling through the cracks.

Early progress shows the strength of this shared vision: clearer pathways, earlier intervention, and better outcomes for our region.



Image: VPG Youth Support Officer Niree Fitzsimmons leads a youth engagement activity for Wear It Purple Day, in support of the resilience and strength of young people in our community.

Wraparound care for vulnerable youth



258 Young People
accessed coordinated care



80% of Young People
achieved positive outcomes

In 2024, we supported young people across Mareeba–Tablelands facing complex challenges, including mental health, school disengagement, social wellbeing, and homelessness. Operating within local high schools and our VPG centre, our team delivered early intervention and coordinated care right where young people already were.

We helped young people access information to make informed choices, advocated for their needs, and connected them to the right services at the right time. Focusing on independence, we helped them build the skills needed to navigate systems, access support, and pursue their goals.

Alongside one-on-one support, we created space for group connection. Our fortnightly Chat, Create, Connect sessions provided a safe, inclusive environment for young people experiencing social anxiety to build friendships, explore creative activities, and connect with peers. Young LGBTIQ+ community members also came together through group activities designed to strengthen identity, build connection, and link participants with local services.

In response to increased local need, we also extended our reach into Malanda through regular outreach at the Malanda Neighbourhood Centre (ECHO). By providing support where young people already are, we're helping them stay connected to local services and strengthening their capacity to achieve positive outcomes within their own community.

From finding housing and re-engaging with school to rebuilding relationships and accessing mental health support, we've seen young people make powerful progress - and we've been right there with them.



**BUILDING RESILIENT
CHILDREN & YOUTH**

Improving transitions

Starting Prep or moving into high school are big transition periods for children and their families. In 2024, we supported 482 parents and carers across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast to feel more prepared for these changes.

For families with children starting Prep, our focus was on building emotional readiness and healthy routines. Parents explored ways to support independence and ease first-day nerves - helping their children feel calm, confident, and ready to learn.

Further along the journey, our Year 6 Transition sessions helped students prepare for high school and adolescence. They learned how to manage change, build friendships, and understand their emotions - strengthening their confidence as they prepare to step into a new environment.

When families feel supported through key transitions, children are more likely to stay engaged in school and set up for long-term success.



Prep Transition programs were delivered in 17 schools across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast, supporting families to prepare their children for a confident start to school. At Mourilyan State School (pictured), parents joined VPG Every Family Officer Kate to learn strategies that support children's social and emotional readiness for Prep.

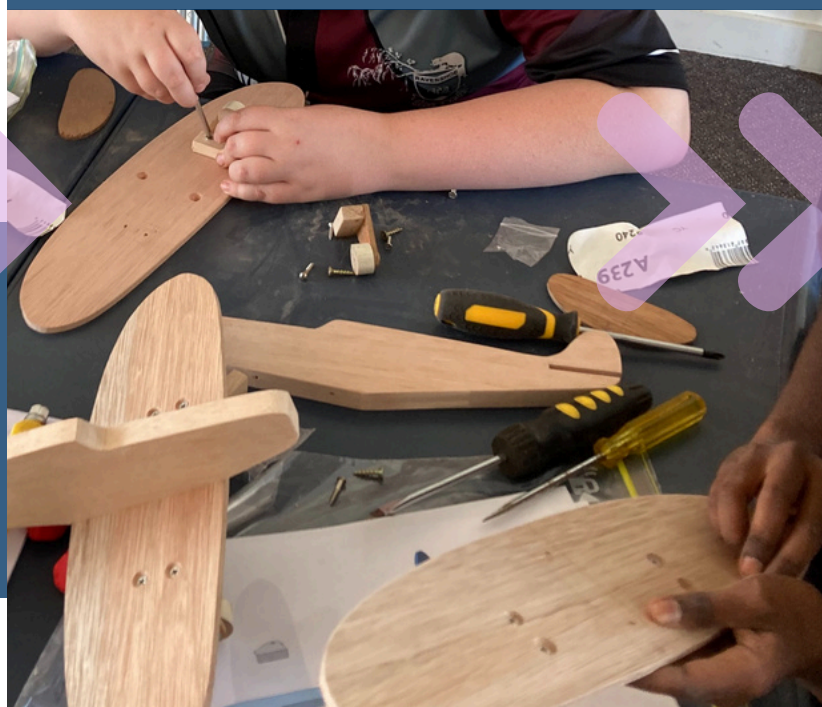
Positively impacting student wellbeing

Based at Herberton, Ravenshoe, Mareeba, and Atherton State Schools, our staff worked closely with school support teams to strengthen student wellbeing. Through one-on-one check-ins and small group activities, we addressed students' learning, social, and emotional needs - helping them build resilience, confidence, and the skills to navigate challenges that might otherwise disrupt their learning and connections.

Lunchtimes became a key chance to reset and re-engage - where our staff created safe spaces for play, conversation, and friendship that reinforced belonging and inclusion.

Our presence on school grounds boosts student engagement and confidence, creating positive ripples in classrooms and peer relationships. When wellbeing is prioritised, students are set to succeed in school and beyond.

In 2024, VPG Student Wellbeing Officer Kerry Barton facilitated a 10-week program for Year 6 boys from Atherton and Ravenshoe SS in partnership with local Men's Sheds. The students built wooden planes and garden trugs as they connected, created, and collaborated alongside Men's Shed mentors. This hands-on wellbeing initiative is just one of many activities our school-based wellbeing team led across local schools to foster connection, teamwork, and confidence.



Shaping respectful relationships

Recognising adolescence as a critical time for shaping respectful, non-violent relationships, our youth sexual violence prevention education efforts reached 1356 school students and early school leavers in 2024. Through school-based programs and targeted sessions in community settings, we increased capacity of children and young people to recognise and maintain respectful relationships and contextually understand affirmative consent.

Our approach takes a primary prevention lens – holistically addressing the drivers and factors of gendered-based violence and sexual violence amongst children and young people during key adolescent development stages. Through our programs, we equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to form healthy, equal relationships and understand their rights and responsibilities. By raising awareness of ethical behaviour and building skills around the prevention of sexual violence and intimate partner violence, we are actively working towards building a culture of respect, responsibility and support and helping to prevent gender-based violence before it occurs.

Working with school-based staff, we took a whole of school approach to build their knowledge and capacity to support ongoing education efforts beyond our sessions with students. This included professional development on affirmative consent language, responding to disclosures, and embedding respectful relationships education and culture into everyday practice within school communities.

We also expanded our reach through new partnerships with schools including Cairns & Hinterland Steiner School, Cairns School of Distance Education, Balaclava SS, and Gordonvale SHS - ensuring diverse learning needs and regional communities were supported.

Through ongoing engagement with families, community services, and local events, we kept the conversation going, reinforcing the shared responsibility we all have in creating safer, more respectful communities and decreasing youth sexual violence and gender-based violence.



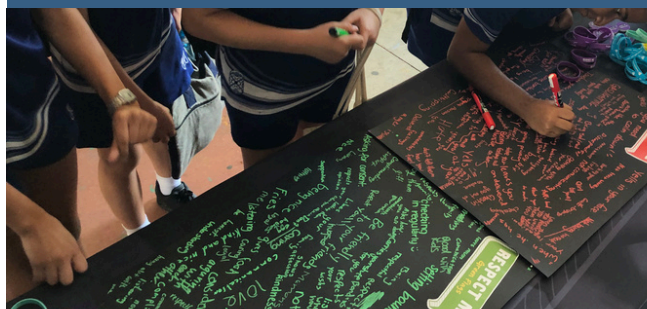
Young people need to hear these messages – and feel the warmth of confident adults reassuring them that it's okay to be who they are, free from judgment, and equipped with the tools to be respectful. A program like VPG RespectMe would have been a game changer for my generation. I'm so glad today's students have access to it.

Teacher
Peace Lutheran College



Image (above): VPG Respectful Relationships Education Facilitator Phoenix Smith delivering a Year 6 session at Cairns & Hinterland Steiner School.

Image (below): CSHS students engaging in VPG-facilitated Red Flag/Green Flag activity at Wellbeing Expo, prompting conversations about respect, boundaries, and healthy behaviours.





OUR PARTNERSHIPS



We acknowledge the many partners that have supported us in the past year, helping us all achieve more together.

We extend special thanks to the Australian Government and Queensland Government for their generous support. We also want to express our appreciation to all partners.

Funding Bodies

Alcohol & Drug Foundation
Australian Government
Department of Education
Australian Government
Department of Social Services
Northern QLD Primary Health Network
QLD Government Department of Education
QLD Government Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety
QLD Government Department of Trade, Employment & Training

Local Government

Cairns Regional Council
Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Mareeba Shire Council
Tablelands Regional Council

Schools

Atherton State High School
Atherton State Primary School
Balaclava State School
Bentley Park College
Butchers Creek State School
Cairns & Hinterland Steiner School
Cairns School of Distance Education
Cairns State High School
Cairns West State School
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 Mount Sheridan Early Education Centre
 MSF Sugar
 Muddy's Cafe
 Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation
 Mulungu Child & Family Centre
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