



Annual Report

CELEBRATING

25 years

VPG
VOCATIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS
GROUP



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

VPG acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 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.

Contents

5 WHO WE ARE

6 MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

7 MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD

8 RECONCILIATION

10 OUR YEAR OF IMPACT

12 OUR WORK

12 Empowering Youth Through Training & Employment

20 Connecting Young People With Careers

24 Advancing Education in Regional Communities

30 Strengthening Families

34 Building Resilient Children and Youth

39 OUR PARTNERSHIPS



Image: Colleen Postans, Learning Coordinator, facilitating social connections among VPG participants in community.

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 for 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 services to encompass a broad spectrum of programs for children, youth, and community responsive to the evolving needs of our communities.

In 2023, we delivered eight services across regional, rural and remote Far North Queensland assisting more than 3060 people.

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.

OUR VISION

With the right support, opportunities, resources, and networks, everyone has the potential to lead a successful and fulfilling life.

OUR PURPOSE

To improve child and youth transitions.

OUR VALUES

COMPASSION 

GENEROSITY 

INCLUSIVENESS 

RESPONSIBILITY 

FUN 



A Message From Our CEO

For 25 years we have had the privilege of serving communities across Far North Queensland, evolving from our early days delivering career and transition services within schools, to now delivering a wide range of place-based targeted initiatives. Guided by our purpose of improving child and youth transitions, we are proud of the meaningful connections and community growth we have achieved.

In 2023, we focused on building young people's capabilities and resilience, fostering hope, and providing opportunities for positive community contributions. We delivered coordinated case management and training tailored to their needs, helping them transition to independence, secure decent employment, and engage in education. We advocated for vulnerable young people, ensuring their voices were heard and their needs met.

Working closely with parents and carers, we saw significant growth and resilience as families acquired the knowledge and skills to foster safe and nurturing environments. Families reported positive changes following their engagement with our service, highlighting the impact of our early intervention efforts.

Our career and transition services hit a high, providing increased opportunities for young people to make informed decisions about their futures. We continued building strong relationships between local industry and schools to ensure a community approach to education and transition outcomes.

The establishment of the Tablelands University Centre was a proud moment, widening tertiary education participation in our regional communities. We exceeded enrolment expectations and strengthened partnerships with local councils, education institutions, and the community.

Another important focus has been reconciliation. Embedding the Reconciliation Action Plan into our business-as-usual practices is an accomplishment that will have a lasting impact across VPG and our local communities. Learning remains our focus, helping us to develop a deeper understanding of First Nations cultures so we can create culturally secure spaces for all First Nations people within our centres and services.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to our brilliant staff and our Board. Our achievements in 2023 reflect their talent and commitment. And of course, none of this would have been possible without the support we receive from the Australian Government and Queensland Government.

The work we achieved this year positions us strongly for the future as we continue to grow and adapt, creating more impact in our communities and positively changing outcomes for our local children, youth, and families.

Maryanne Tranter

Maryanne Tranter
VPG Chief Executive Officer

A Message From Our Board



VPG has been supporting young people in Far North Queensland continuously since 1999, and such is the positive nature of the services provided that our board contains members who have maintained their involvement for most of that period.

As I reflect on the past decade that I have been actively engaged in the strategic direction of VPG, I see that it has grown from a young pup of an organisation, through some challenging teenage years, and has emerged as a leader in our region.

Our forward focus as a board will be to further strengthen the sound governance base, embrace ESG principles in the context of our services, and expand our service offerings and reach.

VPG is responsive to the needs of our young people and supports their positive development. Informed by our young clients, families, community, and stakeholders, and guided by an outstanding team led by our passionate and committed CEO, we will anticipate the needs of future generations, so VPG remains the preferred provider of support, empathy, and personal development, along with education and skilling to prepare our emerging community leaders and future workforce.

Exciting things are happening at VPG, and I thank you all for your continued support for our organisation – and stay with us as we share our plans to adapt and better meet the changing needs of Far North Queensland's young people.

Tamilyn Brennan

Tamilyn Brennan
VPG Board Director



We will
anticipate the
needs of future
generations, so
VPG remains the
preferred
provider of
support

Image: Ryhanna Mundraby, VPG RAP Co-Chair & Business Support Officer, captures Vincent Mundraby's story, which embodies the theme 'Be a voice for generations' during National Reconciliation Week.





Reconciliation

Our commitment to reconciliation at VPG is rooted in our dedication to learning, listening, and respecting the rich cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We continuously strive to create culturally secure spaces for all First Nations people, within our centres and our services. Through our Reconciliation Action Plan, we aim to forge meaningful relationships with communities, to enhance opportunities for First Nations peoples in work, life, and learning.

Throughout 2023, our RAP Working Group, co-chaired by Ryhanna Mundraby, a proud Yidinji woman and VPG Business Support Officer, along with our VPG First Nations Leaders and executive team, met quarterly to collaborate on initiatives and foster a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultures within our team and broader communities. This included investing in cultural safety training and engagement opportunities for our staff.

Some key highlights of our reconciliation efforts included:

- Identifying and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to explore opportunities for collaboration and engagement.
- Celebrating local First Nations Leaders during National Reconciliation Week, sharing their story via a digital campaign.
- Honoring local Elders during NAIDOC Week in collaboration with Atherton State High School.
- Participating in the Indigenous Voice to Parliament to inform and educate our staff through a Q&A session.
- Developing our cultural protocols document to guide our team in respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural beliefs and practices, creating a culturally secure workplace, and embracing protocols that honour First Nations Peoples.
- Widening participation and nurturing aspirations of First Nations youth via attendance at a regional First Nations career exhibition.
- Introducing RAP design on staff uniforms.
- Procuring goods from First Nations suppliers.

OUR YEAR C



25

Communities Served



46

Schools Engaged



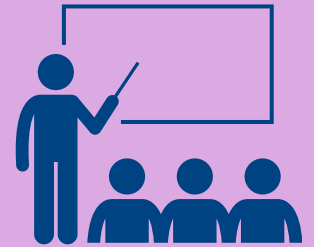
637

Industry Partnerships



1499

Workplace Experience Opportunities Created



662

Children & Youth Engaged in
Respectful Relationship Education



497

Parents Supported

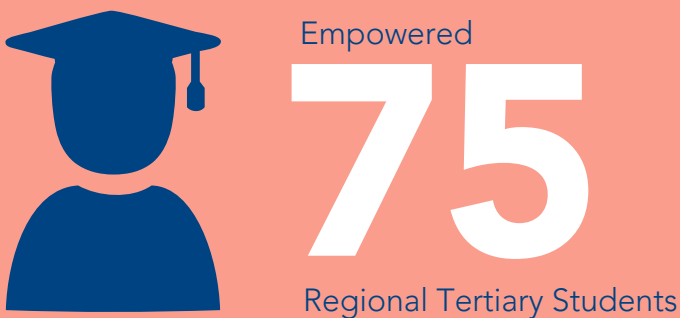
90%

Families Reported Positive
Changes to Circumstances

OF IMPACT



Young People Accessed Coordinated Care





EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

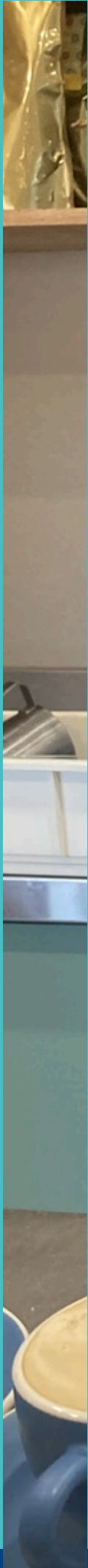


Image: Charlie disengaged from school and found a renewed passion for learning through the VPG Get Set for Work program, securing employment at a local coffee shop and reengaging with education.



15 years of helping young people get set for work

Get Set for Work is a Skilling Queenslanders for Work program and in 2023, we celebrated 15 years of service delivery. 945 young people aged 15 – 19 years have benefited from our targeted learning support, nationally recognised training, experiential real world learning opportunities and work experience. Our Get Set for Work project supports young people across Cairns, Mareeba and Tablelands area.

Our longevity and continual success has established us as a leading provider. Throughout 2023 we supported the Department in the delivery of SQW information sessions and workshops to community organisations.

For every one of the past 15 years we've been on a mission - getting young people into jobs, back into school, and sparking that desire for something more. We've been preparing them for whatever comes next – be it work or education. But it's more than that; it's also about building self-worth, purpose, and belonging. We've worked hard to create a renewed sense of confidence and well-being, helping young people move forward with their heads held high.

“ Since Jack's been attending VPG, I have seen him evolve and become so much more confident in himself. It's just blown me away.

~ Sarah, Jack's Mum,
GS4W Participant

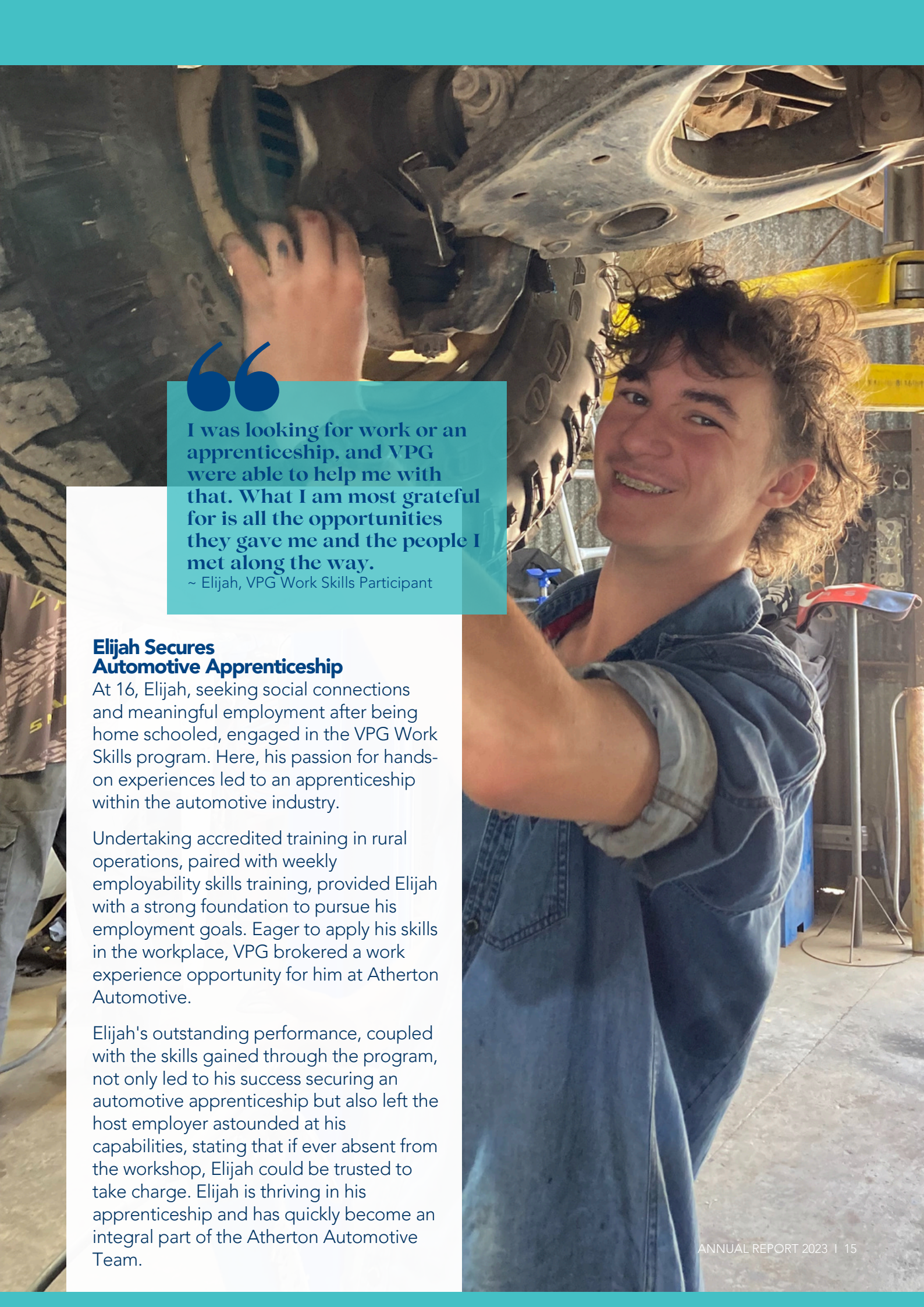


Image: Work Skills Participant, Naomi completes work experience and secures a Metal Fabrication apprenticeship at Eclipse Fabrication, Atherton.

Sustainable youth employment that meets workforce needs

Our success centres on working closely with industry to skill young people for their specific workforce needs. Through accredited training, employability skills development, industry visits, and work experience, we achieved decent and sustainable employment for young job seekers. Notably, among these were 13 apprenticeships and traineeships, marking the beginning of an exciting period as these young people lay down the groundwork for their future careers.

Our partnerships allowed us to extend learning beyond the classroom, creating practical opportunities for young people to apply their new skills and demonstrate their capabilities in action. Recognising the impact of our work, we were thrilled to be awarded funding renewal for 2023-2024.



I was looking for work or an apprenticeship, and VPG were able to help me with that. What I am most grateful for is all the opportunities they gave me and the people I met along the way.

~ Elijah, VPG Work Skills Participant

Elijah Secures Automotive Apprenticeship

At 16, Elijah, seeking social connections and meaningful employment after being home schooled, engaged in the VPG Work Skills program. Here, his passion for hands-on experiences led to an apprenticeship within the automotive industry.

Undertaking accredited training in rural operations, paired with weekly employability skills training, provided Elijah with a strong foundation to pursue his employment goals. Eager to apply his skills in the workplace, VPG brokered a work experience opportunity for him at Atherton Automotive.

Elijah's outstanding performance, coupled with the skills gained through the program, not only led to his success securing an automotive apprenticeship but also left the host employer astounded at his capabilities, stating that if ever absent from the workshop, Elijah could be trusted to take charge. Elijah is thriving in his apprenticeship and has quickly become an integral part of the Atherton Automotive Team.



Krystal earns her provisional licence, opening doors to employment at a local timber mill.

Activating young people through licencing

We see firsthand the challenges many young people face in obtaining their driver's licence. Getting 100 hours under their belt without access to a supervising driver or an appropriate vehicle can be tough. Also, entry-level positions, especially apprenticeships, often require a licence - either as a job prerequisite or to ensure safe and reliable travel to work. That's why we made licensing a priority.

In 2023, we provided 148 driving lessons to young people, contributing to their success securing employment. For many, a driver's licence is a game changer when it comes to finding and sustaining employment, and for that reason we will continue to prioritise work in this space as we move forward.

Supporting young people to re-engage with school

In 2023, we supported 33 early school leavers in re-engaging with education, addressing various reasons for disengagement, such as mental health challenges, learning difficulties, and strained social connections. We delivered tailored learning support within a small, safe, and inclusive environment, creating a sense of belonging and self-belief in the learning capabilities of young people. As always, we prioritised social inclusion, leading to meaningful connections and bonds among peers, boosting young people's confidence in returning to school and navigating friendships and connections.

Complementing these efforts, our career exploration activities reinforced the link between education and aspirations, making the importance of education clearer and reaffirming young people's commitment to schooling.



Disengaging from school in Year 9 due to social and mental health challenges, Kiyana found renewed confidence and belief in herself after completing the VPG Get Set for Work program, empowering her to return to school and secure her first job.



Deakin Returns to School & Secures School-Based Traineeship

After disengaging from school in Year 10, Deakin engaged with VPG, acquiring essential skills for work, finding motivation to secure employment, and reigniting his interest in education.

His GS4W Coach provided valuable information about school-based apprenticeships, emphasising the advantages of completing senior years while starting a career. Through career exploration, Deakin identified an interest in becoming a butcher.

Empowered with a well-crafted resume and supported by his GS4W Coach, he approached a local butcher in person, expressing his desire for employment. Impressed, the employer offered him a school-based traineeship.

Ensuring a holistic approach to Deakin's development, his GS4W Coach initiated contact with the school to develop an effective transition back into education plan, culminating in his successful return to school and enrolment in his school-based traineeship.

Empowering youth with the skills needed to thrive

We are proud to have skilled 153 young people in 2023, laying the foundation for success in the workplace, school, relationships, and at home. Through a combination of group work and one-on-one coaching, we supported young people to develop essential life skills, giving them the tools to successfully navigate adulthood and maintain their mental health and wellbeing.

We focused on important skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving - skills that help them tackle life's challenges head-on and move forward with confidence. To help young people put these skills into practice, we arranged real-world experiences like work placements and networking events with potential employers.

As young people prepared to enter the workforce, we were there to help them brush up on resume writing, job applications, and interview techniques, making sure they felt prepared and confident in their job search. We also worked with them to build everyday life skills like cooking, budgeting, and building healthy relationships, all aimed at boosting their self-confidence, resilience, and independence.

Collectively, we laid the groundwork for these young people to thrive in every aspect of their lives.



Building on the strengths of Young People

Image: Team building activity at Northern Outlook, 2023

Creating a place where everyone belongs

We maintained our commitment to fostering a collaborative, equal, and inclusive environment. Our services provided essential support to people from diverse backgrounds, genders, learning abilities, and sexualities. We ensured that young people felt welcomed and safe to be their authentic selves.

Our First Nations Leaders played a pivotal role in enhancing our efforts to create a space where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We are committed to ensuring they are confident in receiving respect, being heard, and accessing our support.

Our training remained tailored to individual skills and capabilities, emphasising trust, support, encouragement, and compassion. We saw strong growth in social bonds and connections, creating a sense of purpose and belonging among our participants. Our communal kitchens, shared meals, and engaging activities also contributed to the development of these relationships.

So young people can reach their full potential, creating a place where everyone belongs will always be a priority for us.

Guiding young people with disability to shape their own futures

We helped create positive change for young people with a disability through our skilling programs. 56 Young People with disabilities were supported to complete accredited training, employability skills development and work experience. Our aim was to foster their confidence, enhance their wellbeing, and facilitate meaningful social connections.

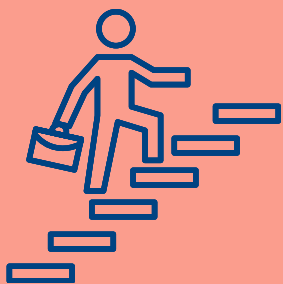
Understanding young people by what they can do and aspire to be helps us to promote their potential to thrive.

With an increasing number of neuro-divergent young people, we worked to grow the knowledge base of staff to better support people with a disability and will assess our access and inclusion strategies as our next steps for creating positive impacts for people with a disability.



Creating safe spaces

Image: Engagement Activity, VPG Atherton



CONNECTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CAREERS

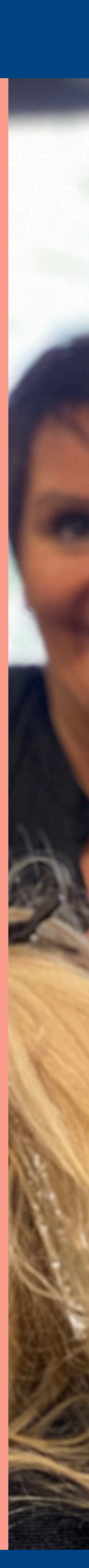




Image: St Monica's College Student, Emma explores aspirations in hair and beauty with Nikki's Hair Design

More opportunities for informed decision making

In 2023, we created 1,499 work experience opportunities for school students, marking a recent annual high. By maintaining strong relationships with existing school partners and forging new connections within our community, we expanded learning opportunities outside the classroom to support smoother transitions post school.

Our efforts provided more young people with hands-on work experience, enhancing their employability, career development, and skills. They had the chance to explore careers or industries of interest firsthand, gaining valuable experience and insights. Along the way, they also forged connections with local industry partners, strengthening their resume portfolios and achieving personal growth in maturity, confidence, and self-worth.

These opportunities helped young people to feel more confident in their career decisions, allowing them to establish goals early and support smoother transitions from school into further education and employment.



Recognising Cairns State High School student Asato's mathematical skills and interest in finance, we connected him with TCM Strata for work experience. His standout performance led to securing his first job, and putting him on track to pursue his financial career goals.

Asato is amazing, we wish we had three of him! Our finance manager cannot believe how quickly he moves through tasks.

~ TCM Strata

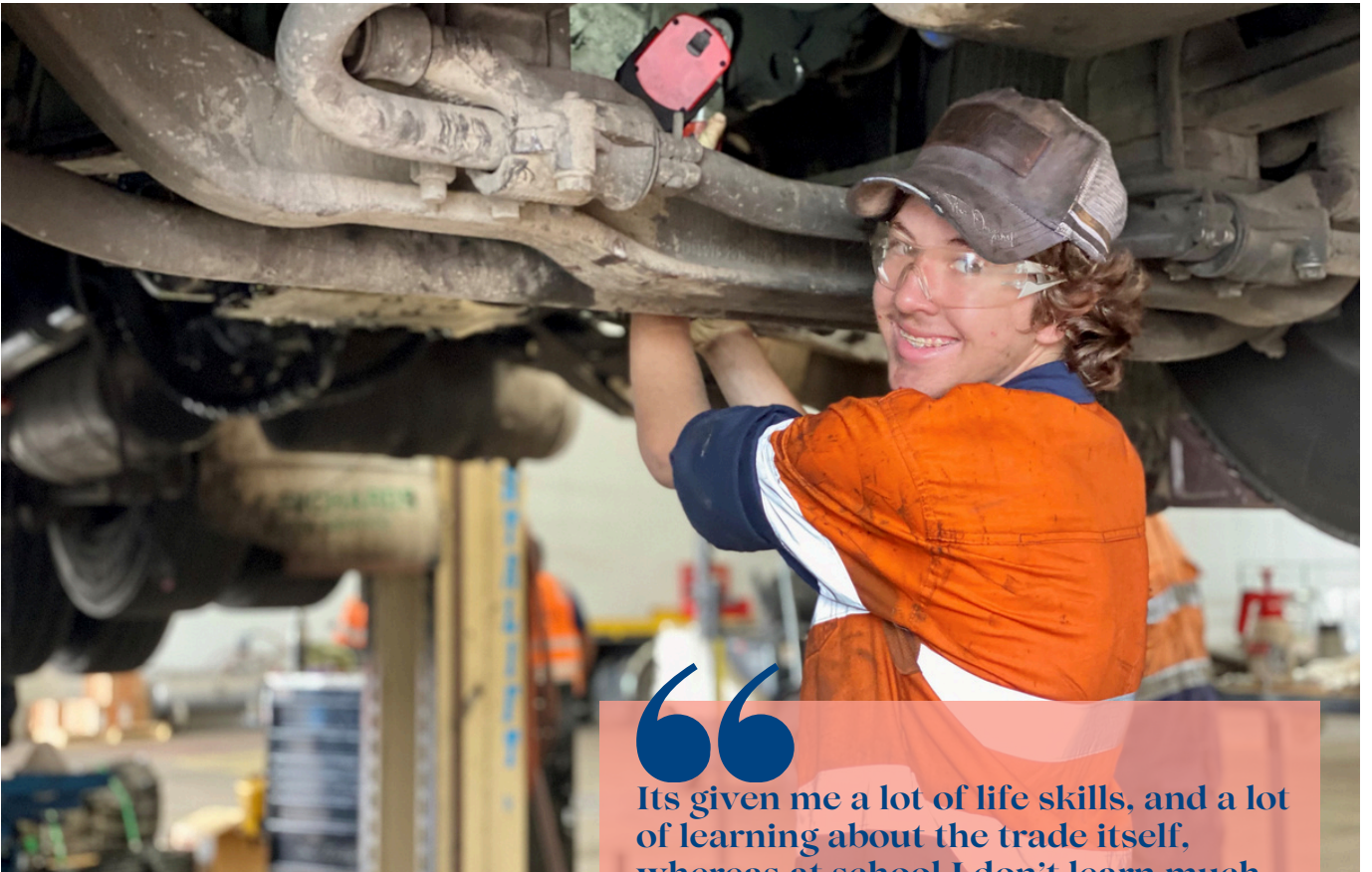
Attracting the workforce of tomorrow

Every year, we are amazed by the support from local employers who create workplace learning opportunities for young people. In 2023, 616 employers committed their time, energy, and resources to give local youth an insight into the workforce, with 94 new employers coming on board for the year.

This presents a unique opportunity for employers, as they are able to attract young talent to their industry and identify potential candidates for entry-level positions.

We saw a higher number of school-based apprenticeships, traineeships, and casual job offers resulting from work experience placements. Some of the employment offers came from Complete Business Solutions, Hillebrand Property Group, Hinterland Aviation, Irene Costa, Optimal Pharmacy, Sunlover Reef Cruises, Thomas Baldwin, and Wholelife Health Food.

Cairns Hospital and Cairns Regional Council, as the region's largest employers, took on the most students for the year, emphasising the importance of providing workplace learning opportunities to young people to spark their interest and address potential future skills shortages.



Year 11 St Mary's Catholic College student Jahdyn completed 1-year of workplace learning with Penske Australia, gaining hands on experience in Diesel Fitting.



Its given me a lot of life skills, and a lot of learning about the trade itself, whereas at school I don't learn much of this hands on stuff. I've learnt a lot, like services, bearings, basically anything you can do to a truck.

~ Jahdyn, St Mary's CC VET Student

Bridging the pathway between education & work

In 2023, we created opportunities for 37 students to undertake vocational placement one day per week during school term as an extension to their school based vocational education and training courses. This allowed them to apply their theoretical learning in a real-world environment, helping students develop a broad range of work skills to support a smoother transition into the workforce.

From an employer's perspective, these work placements offered the chance to shape and guide a young person, helping them build the skills they are looking for in future recruits and providing a fresh, youthful perspective on their work. Employers were also able to create opportunities for their own staff to train and mentor up-and-coming talent.

Among the students engaged in one year of workplace learning, some secured ongoing employment with their hosts, while others are in ongoing conversations about potential employment after completing Year 12.



ADVANCING EDUCATION IN REGIONAL COMMUNITIES



Image: Donna and Bel from ECHO in Malanda advancing their careers with TUC's backing, pursuing Diplomas of Community Services through TAFE Queensland to enhance their roles in the community service sector.



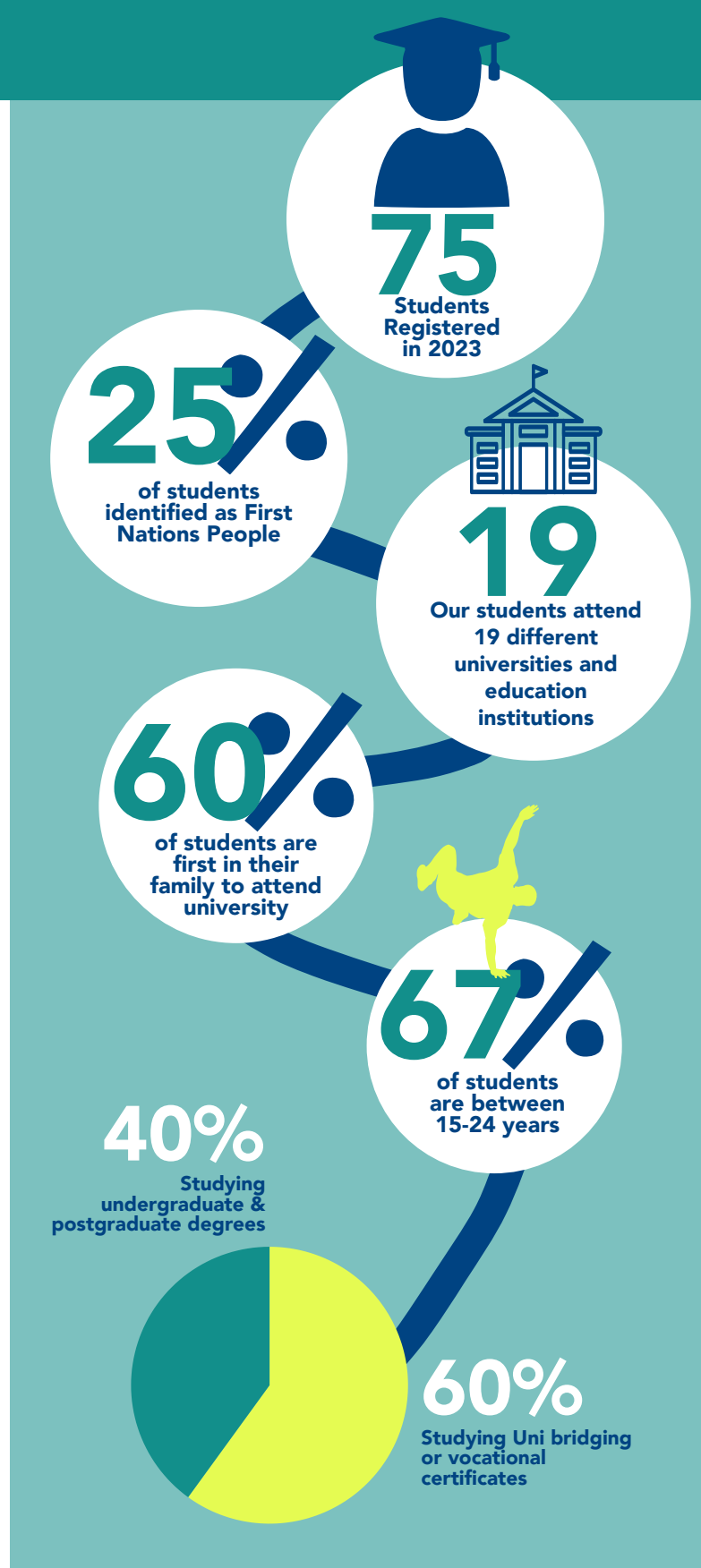
Creating accessibility & success in higher learning

March 2023 was an exciting time for us. We opened the Tablelands University Centre (TUC) in Atherton, providing facilities and support for regional students to access and succeed in higher education without relocating.

Within the first six months, we exceeded our goal, enrolling 62 regional students. Among them, 40% pursued advanced studies, including diplomas, degrees, masters, and PHD Studies, and 60% were enrolled in Uni bridging and vocational certificates. Our TUC community includes first-in-family students, early school leavers, those balancing work and study, and those with caring responsibilities.

As locals ourselves, we understand the needs of our community. Our efforts have reduced the financial challenges people face when having to relocate for study or travel long distance to get to their campus. We have improved access to connectivity for local students, offering fast, reliable internet, and provided technology like computers, dual monitors, and video conferencing so students have the necessary resources at their fingertips.

We welcomed a dedicated Student Development Coach to the team to provide academic and wellbeing support services to our student community. Bringing regional students together, we have created a community of remote learners, where likeminded people can work together to support one another on their academic journey.



TOP AREAS OF STUDY

-  **17% Society & Culture**
-  **14% Agriculture, Environment & Related Studies**
-  **13% Education**
-  **13% Health**

Contributing to a skilled local workforce

We know that students who study locally are more likely to engage in the local workforce, providing regional businesses with new opportunities to employ skilled professionals. Atherton has strong school completion rates, and in the past, young adults needed to leave the community to pursue education, and are often not returning, contributing to skill shortages across key industries. Our support is keeping locals in the community, putting them in the pipeline as skilled professionals to meet future workforce demands.

Kim, pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting through CQUniversity, is just one local student doing exactly this. Studying and working within the community she spent most of her life in, she is committed to achieving career progression through higher education and has contributed her skills to the financial services sector in the region, working at a local accounting firm.

The more local education opportunities and support we can provide for our locals, the better chance we have to keep them here, supporting areas facing skills shortages.

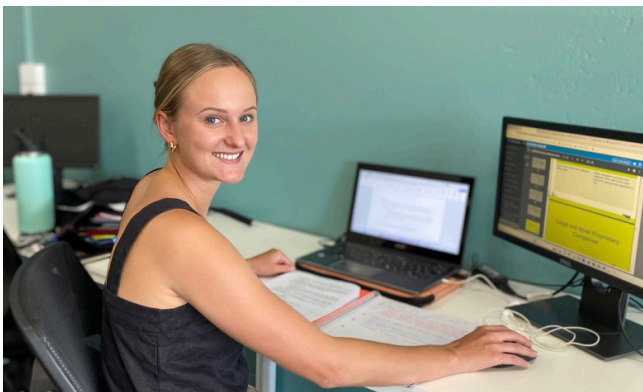


Image: Kim, TUC Student studying a Bachelor Degree in Accounting through CQUniversity



Image: Jubilee College Students visit the TUC to learn about higher education opportunities after school.

Nurturing career aspirations

To help locals see their education dreams as realistic and achievable goals, we've been proactive in our efforts. We participated in school expos, conducted Year 12 transition talks, and hosted facility tours, highlighting the local support and opportunities available to create interest in learning among the region's youth.

We also attended community career expos and events to further our reach in nurturing aspirations and widening participation. Our aim was to let locals know that higher learning is achievable locally, and we are here to provide support along the way. We also collaborated closely with local council and employers to promote upskilling and reskilling opportunities for their staff.

Career counselling was provided to community, helping people identify their goals and map out education pathways to suit. By helping community recognise the options available, we saw a positive shift in community aspirations for higher education.

Enhancing opportunities through partnerships

We are grateful to have the Commonwealth Government seed our work, and in 2023, our success was also attributed to the community partners that backed us and believed in us. Tablelands Regional Council came on board as our Founding Partner, and Ark Energy followed as a Champion partner, both providing contributions to enhance student services. Partnerships with local businesses, including the Costa Group, also extended a hand to our regional students, offering opportunities to gain work experience and network with industry while studying, ensuring our students are well-equipped for post-grad job hunting.

Grounded in community, we were pleased to have formalised MOU's with CQUniversity and James Cook University. This step allows us to reach more local students, offering targeted assistance for their education goals, and we look forward to further developing these relationships in the year ahead.



Image: Celebrating the TUC official opening with Tablelands Mayor Rod Marti, FNQ Employment Facilitator Tamilyn Brennan, VPG CEO Maryanne Tranter, Ark Energy GM Anthony Russo, Ark Energy Communications Melissa Pisani & Missing Link Director Ben Clarke

Advocacy for expansion

We want to help more regional students. We know our model works, and our efforts in the last year have shown we can do it well. To expand our reach and support, we collaborated with Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Together, we sought funding to establish a regional university study hub in Innisfail. To understand the needs and challenges faced by local youth on the Cassowary Coast, we worked closely with the Youth Advisory Committee and local community members, allowing their stories and experiences accessing higher education to direct our proposed impact. The application has been submitted, and we look forward to the progression in 2024.



Image: Cassowary Coast Youth Advisory Committee and community members that contributed to our regional university study hub advocacy campaign in 2023.



Creating a community of learners

Jasmine (left), an early school leaver with dreams of pursuing law and criminology, and Sophie (right), who has always aspired to become a teacher, have found a path to higher education through a bridging course with CQUniversity, and are using the TUC as their space to study. Learning is a shared journey, which is why we believe it's so important to provide a common space to foster motivation, purpose, and connections among local students who share similar experiences. By creating a supportive environment with all the necessary resources in the heart of Atherton, we are making sure that regional students like Jasmine and Sophie not only thrive academically but can also uplift and empower each other along the way.



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES





Building confident and connected parents & children

Working with 722 parents and carers across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast, we delivered evidence-based positive parenting support to improve children’s wellbeing and development. We focused on strengthening parent-child relationships, providing tools and strategies for managing child behaviours and supporting successful transitions.

Through coaching and workshops, we created a safe space for connection and peer support, alleviating feelings of isolation that parents often feel. Always open to input from our local families, we addressed specific topics, challenges, and behaviours that mattered to them. To make our services more accessible, we offered online and after-hours skill development opportunities, which saw great interest and uptake, particularly from working parents, and parents who wanted to join once the kids were asleep.

We worked towards normalising the challenges of parenting, removing any stigma around parents seeking help. Through our efforts, 92.5% of parents shared that they experienced a positive change to their circumstance and goals after connecting with us.

Image: Parents at St. Thomas’ Mareeba participate in the Fear-Less Triple P program, facilitated by Judy, Every Family Officer, to gain insights into anxiety management and effective ways to support their children through challenging emotions.



Image: Every Family Officer Melissa and Social Work Student Drew join children and families at Mareeba C&K Kindergarten in celebration of Book Week 2023.

Supported through play

We co-facilitated 3 Supported Playgroups across two locations with Mareeba C&K Kindergarten in 2023, providing local families and children the chance to engage in play-based, shared experiences guided by early childhood facilitators. These sessions attended by 84 children, were delivered to help them make confident transitions into kindergarten, contributing to their school readiness. Arts, craft, messy play, story-time, and sing-alongs were just some of the activities enjoyed during these sessions.

Children weren’t the only ones benefiting. We saw the beginning of many new friendships form as parents came together, shared experiences, and supported one another. Our facilitators were there to guide these connections and conversations, stepping in when additional support or information was needed and linking families to community services for further assistance.



Responding to community needs

Recognising the local need for supporting parents of children with autism, we held events and workshops in Atherton and Mareeba, bringing together families to develop strategies for better understanding and supporting their children at school and at home. During these sessions, parents openly shared their personal stories, connecting with others who had similar experiences. This created a supportive space where they felt understood, heard, seen, and no longer felt alone. To strengthen these connections, we also managed an online forum for parents and carers experiencing the day-to-day struggles raising children with autism, allowing them to connect and support one another outside of our events.



Image: Melissa, Every Family Officer, hosted "The Autism Toolbox" in Mareeba, offering parents and carers practical strategies and resources to build a comprehensive toolbox of ideas for supporting their family in various settings – at home, at school, and in the community.

Fostering informed communities

In 2023, we co-hosted our sixth annual Mareeba Family Fun Day, aligning with Child Protection Week. Over 700 local parents and children attended, along with 20 local organisations and community services. This event is always such an amazing opportunity for families to learn about the local supports available and how they can access them if they need to.

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 an impressive 61,700 people, sharing parenting tips, strategies, and information almost every day with our digital community.

The Mareeba Family Fun Day, co-hosted by VPG and Mareeba Community Centre in support of Child Protection Week, has become a well-known annual community event, that families and children look forward to each year.







BUILDING RESILIENT CHILDREN & YOUTH



Image: New friendships fill the air as young people engage in some friendly competition and creative expression, facilitated through our Tablelands Youth Support program.



Improving transitions

In partnership with local primary and secondary schools across the Tablelands and Cassowary Coast, we worked with 517 parents and children during key transition periods. Whether a child was starting Prep or gearing up for high school, we helped families build the skills, knowledge, and strategies to achieve smoother transitions.

Starting school is such an exciting milestone for little ones, packed with all sorts of new experiences. It can also stir up a mix of emotions, nerves, and questions for both children and parents. That's why we worked closely with families to make sure they could give their child a strong start and foster a lifelong love of learning early.

For students stepping into high school or just starting out, we delivered relationship education equipping them with the tools and knowledge to confidently navigate the challenges and changes ahead. Targeting these key milestones, we were able to build children's confidence, resilience, and social-emotional skills, and identify opportunities for early assistance and prevention supports when necessary.



Prep Transition programs were locally delivered in 17 schools across the Atherton Tablelands and Cassowary Coast.

Image: Parents at Malanda SS 'Step Up Day' learnt strategies to ensure their children are socially and emotionally ready to start school.

Positively impacting student wellbeing

Based at Herberton SS, Ravenshoe SS, Mareeba SS and Atherton SS, our staff worked on the ground with school support teams to enhance student wellbeing. We engaged with students one-on-one, addressing their learning, social, and emotional needs. Through group activities, we fostered self-esteem and confidence, which led to stronger engagement both inside and outside the classroom, as well as within the broader school community.

We nurtured friendships and created inclusive lunchtime environments where children felt safe, respected, and comfortable being themselves. We saw confidence, self-belief, and personal growth soar fostering strong student connection to self, education and community,



Lacey, one of many students who thrived with school-based student wellbeing support. With guidance and encouragement, she overcame her social anxiety and emerged as a confident leader, taking a positive risk and achieving the role of House Captain.

Image: Lacey, Herberton SS student, with her mother, Megan.

Creating safer communities

In 2023, the mandate for consent education in all Australian schools was an exciting time for us, reflecting our ongoing advocacy in this space. Recognising adolescence as a critical time for shaping respectful, non-violent relationships, our preventative education efforts reached 662 school students and early school leavers, helping them to understand what constitutes healthy and respectful relationships. Working with school-based staff, we took a whole of school approach to build their knowledge and capacity to support ongoing education efforts.

Outside the classroom, our outreach efforts engaged over 200 young people in the community, raising awareness about ethical behaviours, respect, and consent in relationships. While there's still much ground to cover, we're encouraged by the progress we've made and look forward to continuing this important education in the year ahead.



662
Young People engaged in respectful relationship education



Image: Local youth sharing what a healthy and respectful relationship means to them.

Care along the way



266 Young People
accessed coordinated care



81% of Young People
achieved positive outcomes

In 2023, we assisted 266 young people across Mareeba and the Tablelands to address complex needs, spanning mental health, school disengagement, social and emotional support, and homelessness. Our efforts were embedded within local communities, delivering early interventions and coordinated care from Atherton SHS, Mareeba SHS, and our VPG centre.

We helped young people access information to make informed decisions about their lives, we advocated for young people, and made referrals to appropriate support services, connecting them with the right support at the right time. We worked with young people to build their capacity to navigate systems and supports, as they worked towards independence.

As allies, we stood by their side, offering guidance and instilling belief in their ability to achieve goals. We saw young people kick some big milestones throughout the year - securing employment, finding stable housing, connecting with mental health supports, improving family relationships, just to name a few.

In recognising a shift in our community's needs, we pivoted from our traditional support methods of group settings towards more intensive support approaches, aligning with the urgent demand for increased resources and early intervention supports within community.



Image: Sarah Marsh, VPG Service Coordinator - Communities with Donna Cifuentes ECHO Coordinator, working together via the CCYP & MACP.



GOOD NEWS STORY

New to the local area, a 19-year-old First Nations young person was referred to VPG for assistance with a complex housing situation, lack of income, limited family support, and restricted access to food. They were supported to apply for financial assistance and received intensive case management support to achieve goals such as obtaining identification, opening a bank account, and applying for a tax file number.

Immediate support included utilising brokerage funds to purchase shoes, essential items, and food. Additionally, the young person received ongoing food hampers from local services until government assistance was processed.

During engagement, the young person expressed a desire to secure work and received support to undergo work readiness training and skill development in preparation for employment. As a result of these efforts, the young person achieved greater financial independence, stability in housing, and improved overall health.

Improved collaborations & practice through the CCYP

In 2023 we hosted and actively participated in the Mareeba-Tablelands Coordinated Care for Vulnerable Young People (CCYP) and the Multiagency Collaborative Panel (MACP). Working in full cooperation with Government and local community agencies, we helped to promote an integrated system of care, ensuring inter-agency collaboration to meet the needs of vulnerable Tablelands young people.

Across our communities there are young people who, because of individual, historical or environmental circumstances are more vulnerable. For these young people an individual care panel of services is established to concentrate our collective efforts and support young people to reach their full potential.

Postvention Response

Understanding the vulnerability of young people during a period of community grief, we implemented a response plan, collaborating with local schools and StandBy to make sure ongoing support was available, particularly during the school holiday period. Alongside this, we launched a community-wide awareness campaign, offering mental health information through strategically placed corflutes in high-traffic areas visited by young people. We also organised a school holiday program to foster connections among youth, and had a dedicated mental health professional on-site, ready to offer support when needed.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS



Thank you

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 the following employer partners.

School Partners:

Atherton State High School
Atherton State Primary School
Balaclava State School
Bentley Park College
Cairns State High School
Cairns West State School
Cape York Girl Academy
Edge Hill State School
Freshwater State School
Gordonvale State School
Hambleton State School
Herberton State School
Holy Cross Primary School
Machans Beach State School
MacKillop Catholic College
Malanda State High School
Malanda State School
Mareeba State High School
Mareeba State Primary School
Mother of Good Counsel School
Mossman State School
Mount St Bernard College
Parramatta State School
Peace Lutheran College
Ravenshoe State School
Redlynch State College
St Andrew's Catholic College
St Augustine's Catholic College
St Francis Xavier's School
St Gerard Majella Primary School
St Joseph's Primary School
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
St Mary's Catholic College
St Monica's College
St Stephen's Catholic College
Trinity Anglican School
Trinity Bay State High School
Woree State High School

Employer Partners:

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Balance! Edmonton Family Practice
Banjo's Bakery Cafe
Benevolent Society
Better Together
BME NQ
Boscon Construction
Britek Auto
Bunnings, Atherton
Burger Urge
Butterflies Early Learning Childcare
C&K Boopa Werem Kindergarten
C&K Cairns Community Kindergarten
C&K White Rock Community Kindergarten
CA Architects
Cairns & Hinterland Hospital & Health Service
Cairns Basketball
Cairns Dental Boutique
Cairns Hardware
Cairns Historical Society
Cairns Magistrates Court
Cairns Marine
Cairns Personal Trainers
Cairns Precision Dental Group
Cairns Radio FM 89.1
Cairns Regional Art Gallery
Cairns Regional Council
Cairns Sheridan Hotel
Cairns Steel Fabricators
Cairns Supreme & District Courts
Cairns TAFE Community Childcare
Cairns Total Physiotherapy
Cairns Veterinary Clinic
Cairns West Medical Centre
Cairns ZOOM & Wildlife Dome
Calypso Reef Cruises
Cashcor Engineering
Cassowary Coast Regional Council
CCW Cabinet Works

Chemist Warehouse, Cairns & Bentley Park
 Civil Safety
 CJS Mechanical
 Clarke & Prince
 Coles, DFO
 Community Kids Kewarra Beach
 Early Learning Centre
 Complete Business Solutions
 Coral Motors & Pacific Hino
 Costa Group
 CQUniversity
 Crave Cairns Eatery & Bar
 Cristaudo Industrial Electrics
 Cubby Care, Mooroolooloolo
 Duncan Powersports
 Dundees Restaurant
 Earlville Early Education
 Eat Real Cairns
 ECHO Community Centre
 Edmonton Veterinary Clinic & Cattery
 EDMS Australia
 EK Design Kitchens
 Emergency Vets 24/7
 Endeavour Foundation
 Entrada Travel Group
 Enviromart
 Ergon Energy
 First Steps Early Childhood Learning Centre
 Five Star Automotive
 FNQ Volunteers Inc.
 Freedom Constructions
 Fresh St. Market IGA
 Freshwater First Grammar Early Education Centre
 G James Glass & Aluminium
 GBR Biology
 Genesis Fitness Redlynch
 GHD
 Goodstart Early Learning
 Gordonvale Physiotherapy
 Great Adventures
 Hartley's Crocodile Adventures
 Hartley's Crocodile Adventures
 Heiner Constructions
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 Hinterland Aviation
 Humac Design
 I-Med Radiology Cairns
 Infinity Pharmacy Earlville
 Inspired Signs
 Intersport
 Iron Strength Power & Performance
 J & R Refrigeration
 Jackley's Bakehouse
 Jan Lyons Hair Design
 Jax Tyres & Auto Cairns
 Jett Aviation
 JM Switchboards
 Junior World
 Just Kids Early Education House
 Keir QLD
 Kindy Zone, Manoora & Mount Sheridan
 Koru Furniture & Homewares
 Lendlease
 Lillipad Cafe
 Little Sparrows Therapy
 Mareeba Shire Council
 Mark Dodge Motoring
 Mount Sheridan Early Education Centre
 MSF Sugar
 Muddy's Café
 Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation
 My Pet Hub Redlynch
 National Rugby League
 Ngoonbi Community Services
 Indigenous Corporation
 Norship
 North Queensland Veterinary Service
 Northern Innovations
 Northern Mechanical & Batteries
 Northern Specialised Electrical
 Norweld Engineering
 Novotel Oasis Resort Cairns
 NQ Ortho
 Ochre Restaurant & Catering
 Optimal Pharmacy Plus
 O'Reilly Stevens Lawyers
 Outdoor Solutions
 Pacific Hotels Cairns
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 Parramatta Service Centre
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 Pro-Lift Training FNQ
 Pullman Cairns International
 Pupstars Daycare & Grooming
 Pynes Garden Management
 Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
 Queensland X-Ray
 Rebel Sport, Cairns & Earlville
 Redlynch Valley Vets
 Reef Orthopaedic Clinic
 Reef Unlimited
 ReeFresh Australia
 RGM Maintenance
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 Rockridge Farms
 Schnitz
 Seaswift
 Sequal Mechanical
 SGS Australia Pty Ltd
 Shed-76
 SILK Laser Clinics Cairns
 Skybury
 Skyrail
 Skytek
 Smithfield Village Early Learning
 Southside Veterinary Surgery
 Status Signs
 Subway, Cairns Central
 Sunlover Reef Cruises
 Symphony Early Learning Centre
 Skybury Farms
 Tablelands Regional Council
 TAFE QLD
 Terry White Calanna Pharmacy, Woree
 Tokunai Hair
 Toucan Electrics
 TPG Architects
 Trinity Auto Group
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 Two Blokes Tiling
 University Southern Queensland
 Urban Habit
 Wadjanbarra Tableland Yidinji Aboriginal Corporation
 Waratah Early Education
 Wellness Embodied
 Wharf ONE Cafe
 Wildrose Hair & Beauty
 Zambrero's Earlville



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

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Cairns

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Mareeba

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