

NURTURING COMMUNITIES FROM THE GROUND UP

HIGHLIGHTING THE STORIES OF
PLACE-BASED ORGANISATIONS
AND THOSE WHO USE THEM



Acknowledgement of Country

Western Sydney Community Forum acknowledges First Nations peoples as the sovereign Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands and waters on which we work and live.

We pay respect to Elders past and present. We respectfully recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and their heritage.

We acknowledge past and present injustices and commit to walking alongside First Nations peoples.

Acknowledgements



Thank you to the local community members, leaders, groups and organisations who graciously shared their lived experience with us.

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Western Sydney is home to around 2.6 million people. One in ten Australians live in Western Sydney. Nationally, it is one of the fastest growing regions, with an estimated population of 3.2 million by 2036.

The region encompasses the 13 local government areas of Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly.

It is the Australian urban area with the highest proportion of First Nations people. Almost half the population speaks a language other than English at home. There are concentrated areas where people experience disproportionate levels of systemic socio-economic barriers to access, when compared to the metropolitan.

Western Sydney Community Forum is the regional peak social development council. It has led and shaped social policy and service delivery in the region for almost 50 years, representing a vast population and a community services industry that annually invests billions in the Western Sydney community and economy. We have over 4,000 members, subscribers and service users and a reach of about 400,000 each year.

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Introduction

As the demand facing the human services sector continues to grow, the critical role of local place-based organisations is becoming increasingly clear (Cortis & Blaxland, 2023). This role was brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic, which showed that local trusted place-based organisations were pivotal in assisting and supporting the residents of greater Western Sydney (Western Sydney Community Forum & Western Sydney MRC). In this context, place-based organisations provide targeted services to the specific circumstances of a defined place, ensuring that local community members are actively involved in development and implementation (Victoria State Government, 2023). This means that local place-based community organisations utilise bottom-up, collaborative and community-led principles to address the specific needs of the local geographic area they exist within. Often, these organisations arise through grassroots initiatives to meet the unique needs of a particular geographic community.

Local place-based organisations have been identified as effective in both reaching and supporting communities, providing an important source of information and the key soft entry point into the services system for the

community (Local Community Services Association, 2022).

Place-based organisations have rapport and trust within a community, promoting the participation of community members and creating opportunities for their inclusion and belonging using local resources, strengths and knowledge. Despite this, these place-based organisations are rarely recognised for their contributions to community wellbeing or their role as essential social infrastructure.

Bodies such as the Local Community Services Association (2022) and the Australian Council of Social Service argue that this has led to short term and inflexible funding that does not always meet demands for staffing, infrastructure and operational requirements (Cortis & Blaxland, 2023). They further highlight that this does not facilitate community development work, meet the needs of the community, or enable new organisations to be established in areas requiring more service (Cortis & Blaxland, 2023; Local Community Services Association, 2022). This viewpoint is reflected by many place-based organisations, which consistently identify funding as one of the greatest limitations that prevents the provision of necessary services.

Western Sydney Community Forum has partnered with several integrated service and place-based organisations in Western Sydney to develop this publication that conveys the impact of these organisations across our region, by sharing the lived experiences of service users and the perspectives of the organisations that provide these services.

This publication includes a collection of practice examples from five local place-based community service organisations to demonstrate how these organisations make a difference in the lives of people living in Western Sydney. These organisations are the Canterbury City Community Centre, CORE Community Services, Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections, Richmond Community Services Inc and The Parks Community Network.



Canterbury City Community Centre

ABOUT

Located in the heart of Lakemba, the Canterbury City Community Centre (4Cs) provides community services in Western Sydney, ranging from community engagement to learning and development (4Cs, 2025). Their motto is community building community.

“We have lots of doors, people might come to a picnic in the park, enrol in an English conversation class, then sign up for an accredited course, or volunteer.”

Louisa*, the manager of community and sector capacity building at 4Cs has been working there for over a decade. Louisa believes that 4Cs has demonstrated its ability to build trust and work collaboratively with the region’s diverse community. Drawing on experiences throughout her time at the organisation, she highlights the significance of working in partnership with local schools and NSW Health to deliver programs when community demand overtakes the space restrictions at 4Cs sites.

“I think being located in the community you work with enables a lot of incidental opportunities and initiatives to occur.”

“We have a solid reputation and are based here, while we see other programs come and go because they are not.”

As a place-based organisation, 4Cs regularly checks in with their service users and aims to facilitate program ideas requested by specific groups. They demonstrate a bottom-up approach to community development and use this collaboration to respond to what the community wants and needs, such as improving community access to outreach services like legal aid, a women’s health nurse, and the development of a Ladies Lounge program to reduce social isolation.

“We are here, we can build trust, connect with community over time and collaboratively work with other organisations as required.”

Canterbury City Community Centre

IN PRACTICE

Aisha* is a mother and wife living in Roselands. She moved to Australia from Yemen last year. When she first came to Australia, Aisha did not speak much English. Her friend and neighbour, Farah*, told Aisha about English classes being held at the Canterbury City Community Centre. The small classes gave Aisha the opportunity to learn the basics of conversational English, as well as find out more about living in Australia. For Aisha, one of the most valuable parts of the classes was being able to make new friends and expand her social network in a new country. “I make friends, I learned more rules about life in Australia. I learned the basics of the English language.” She is keen to continue attending classes in English and would like to take another course to learn computer skills.

*all names have been changed



“We have lots of doors, people might come to a picnic in the park, enrol in an English conversation class, then sign up for an accredited course, or volunteer.”

CORE Community Services

ABOUT

CORE Community Services works across a range of key service areas to provide local communities with crucial services, activities, and programs (CORE Community Services, 2025). This includes aged and disability care, children and youth services, a registered training organisation and multicultural services.

CORE operates across South Western Sydney, including Fairfield, Liverpool, Campbelltown, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee. Their frontline youth services respond to the complex challenges experienced by many young people, including the breakdown of family relationships, and support them with housing insecurity, domestic and family violence, financial hardship and social isolation. One of the residential youth workers at the CORE crisis refuge, which provides crisis accommodation to young people between the ages of 12 and 19, highlights the way CORE tailors

its service delivery by working closely with multiple external organisations to support and best meet the needs of young people in their local community.

“[It is important to be local and place-based] to support our local community and give others a chance to relocate if their current placement or area is unsafe.”

They acknowledge that while room availability remains limited and demand continues to exceed supply, CORE is dedicated to supporting young people and strengthening its services to better respond to community needs. As part of this commitment, CORE plans to redevelop an underutilised property into self-contained studios. Once completed, this project will expand CORE's capacity to deliver safe, supported medium-term accommodation. The project, which is aligned with key youth homelessness priorities, is grounded in a local and place-based approach.

CORE Community Services

IN PRACTICE

Jessie* is a 15 year-old who came to CORE after it became too dangerous for them to remain living with their family and they had to leave their previous refuge. Jessie was referred to the crisis refuge by the Department of Communities and Justice, where they were given accommodation and supported by staff to learn daily life skills like cooking and how to do laundry. Jessie describes finding it difficult to trust people but says they are safe and comfortable at CORE, noting, “I feel like I trust [the staff] more every day, they help us. I had nowhere else to go and they helped me.”

Another young person with a similar story spoke of the difference CORE has made in their life, commenting, “They gave me a safe home that I never had.”

*all names have been changed

Working in partnership with local communities to support them to thrive

Delivering a range of community and individual support services

Embedded within community and establishing powerful networks of social capital

Honouring local knowledge, facilitating communities to support themselves

LOCAL TRUSTED PLACE-BASED ORGANISATIONS.

Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections

ABOUT

Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections (LNC) is a local, grassroots organisation that aims to provide accessible information, community development, capacity building, and advocacy services (Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections, 2025). Every year, over 22,000 people access the programs at LNC. These include social enterprise initiatives, youth programs, accessible childcare, subsidised training courses, and social inclusion and support. LNC is based in Warwick Farm, with staff outreach spanning the Liverpool local government area.

The Community Development Coordinator at LNC, Sara*, has worked there for over ten years, delivering a range of services including playgroups, women's groups, a girls' youth group, and after school and school holiday programs. Through this role, she has seen the enormous impact of these programs.

“Most of the women who attend are [born overseas], often newly arrived. They have no networks, no friends, feel isolated, may not speak English well and don't know how to access services to help themselves or their families.”

“The women's group not only creates long standing friendships but gives these women access to the information they need for to access services and understand what is available. As we run courses...they learn about safety, their rights, and a range of other activities and courses like swimming and first aid. The women are incredibly supportive of each other.”

After being part of the community for over 30 years, LNC has both familiarity and trust with the community while remaining sensitive to changing needs.

“LNC has always been at the forefront in providing community support in different ways. We have staff who have been here for 20 years so have seen the parents, the children and in some cases the grandchildren attend the centre.”

Being a trusted service provider, LNC has rapport with the community and is able to reach out to people who are having issues or whose needs are not being met. Sara notes that this trust is also an important factor in the success of LNC's programs, such as their in-house TAFE courses. She believes that women who are familiar with the centre and feel comfortable accessing the childcare LNC provides while the women

Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections

learn are more likely to attend courses. Through her role as a Coordinator, Sara has seen this initiative create a meaningful and effective pathway to education, employment, and empowerment for women experiencing disadvantage.

IN PRACTICE

Farida* is a mother of two young children who arrived in Australia in 2015. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Farida felt very isolated without any friends or support network in Australia. Initially attending some of LNC's playgroups, the friendly staff meant that Farida began to feel at home at LNC. She then joined the women's group and developed close friendships with the other women. This led Farida to attend a TAFE course at the centre, eventually obtaining a Certificate I in hospitality and finding employment at some of LNC's social enterprises. Farida now works on reception at LNC one day a week. Because LNC is located within the community, Farida is able to walk to the centre from home or catch public transport if she needs to drop in to attend a group or speak with a staff member.

For Farida, her experience at LNC has been life-changing. She says that she trusts the staff and their advice completely.

"I am a different woman now to the woman I was when I first attended the centre. I am confident, know my rights and I know what services I can access and how to access them for support for me and my family. I have learnt so many skills and made some wonderful friends. I know I can get help if I need it without feeling judged. I know I am strong and can look after myself. Before I felt alone and didn't feel like I could stand up. I feel like LNC helped me find my voice."

*all names have been changed

The Parks Community Network

ABOUT

The Parks Community Network (Parks) is a community centre that works to provide direct relief to people who experience disadvantage (The Parks Community Network Inc, 2025). Parks aims to provide services for communities in South Western Sydney, as well as support and practical help through the initiation, coordination, and development of community programs. Its wide range of services and initiatives include carer support, day care, social inclusion, family support services, parenting programs, resilience programs, community and family events, and school holiday activities to name a few.

Something the staff at The Parks Community Network take particular pride in is the number of community events the organisation is involved in. These events include free and inclusive events for children with special needs, which is something they have found to be particularly impactful in the community.

Like many of the other local place-based organisations above, Parks tailors its service delivery through collaborative discussions with different parts of the community to identify what support is wanted, doing their best to respond to the needs raised. This is reflected in the planning, organisation, and facilitation of community events that are meaningful for the people they aim to support.

“[We] are able to tailor the support offered for the community at their doorstep.”

Trust and community reputation is an important aspect of providing community services, with many attendees of The Parks Community Network reporting that they first heard about the organisation through word of mouth.

The Parks Community Network

IN PRACTICE

Busaba* is a service user whose three children started attending school holiday activities at The Parks Community Network in 2022. One of their daughters has a serious medical condition, and attending the activities and events at Parks has played a critical role in developing their children's social and communication skills between visits with medical professionals. The free activities and events give Busaba an opportunity to get out of the house and have some time to relax while the children are engaged. Busaba's family moved to Australia ten years ago, and although they have attended other organisations, they have a lot of trust in the team at Parks after seeing how the team interacts with their children and themselves. Busaba emphasises the significance of having genuine, friendly and professional staff who understand the needs of individual families.

*all names have been changed



Richmond Community Services Inc

ABOUT

Richmond Community Services Inc (RCSI) is a non-profit organisation providing a range of services to the Hawkesbury community, including early intervention and individual family support, parenting and skills programs, activities for children, home visits and outings for seniors, programs to reduce gambling harm and the Hawkesbury Family Support Service (Richmond Community Services Inc, 2025).

Belinda*, the Community and Family Coordinator at RCSI, manages the Family Support service and organises family referrals to provide comprehensive case management for families facing diverse challenges. Belinda also coordinates the Child, Youth and Family Interagency, community development programs and group programs at RCSI.

Having previously worked within the out-of-home-care sector, Belinda feels that RCSI has several key strengths, including a stable team with a strong commitment to their mission and a passion for building strong community connections to understand and meet local needs.

Another key strength Belinda highlighted is their established

networks and partnerships within the community with other organisations, local businesses and government agencies. She further noted RCSI's range of complimentary services which address multiple aspects of community wellbeing, and their underlying commitment to empowering individuals and families by supporting them to build skills, knowledge, and confidence.

“In my view, some of the most impactful programs and services at our organisation include the after-school activities, school holiday programs, parenting skill workshops, and the community pantry. The parenting workshops offer valuable insights on topics like autism, ADHD, and emotional intelligence, empowering parents to better support their children.”

The organisation tailors its service delivery through regular evaluation and community feedback processes, aiming to be responsive to the needs of the community. For instance, RCSI's parenting workshops are designed using input from parents. Following requests from participants in one ADHD workshop, the organisation established a support group to help children with ADHD connect with peers, build confidence, and approach their ADHD positively.

Richmond Community Services Inc

Belinda underscores the importance of being local and place-based, noting that a one-size fits all approach does not work, as communities are diverse with unique characteristics and needs.

She believes that being able to deeply understand and address the specific needs of a community is crucial, and having strong relationships with the community facilitates collaboration and trust.

“Proximity allows us to respond quickly to emerging issues, making a targeted impact on community wellbeing. A significant challenge is the lack of recognition that the Hawkesbury region receives. We are often not acknowledged as a distinct region in the Hawkesbury, despite being very diverse and geographically large. The limited physical presence of a wide range of services within the Hawkesbury—many of which are based in Penrith—creates difficulties for community members who struggle to access these services.”

IN PRACTICE

One of the RCSI service users, John*, is a young man who started attending RCSI with his wife following the birth of their second child a few years ago. Their family came into contact with the organisation after asking the drop-in nurses at Hawkesbury Community Centre if there was anyone who could offer assistance. Predominantly through home visits, RCSI provided food hampers, behavioural support for their daughter, supported them with daycare enrolments, and helped advocate for the family with other services. This included support in accessing care for their son, who suffers with a neurological birth defect.

When asked about the difference that RCSI has made in his family’s life, John described how their life has become smoother, noting that they now have more time to be a family and enjoy family activities together. He mentioned that he trusts the staff completely, due to their directness and transparency in the way they share information.

“Belinda has been a huge influence on our lives. She has helped us get our daughter’s behaviour on track and has even managed to help us get a solid routine in place when it comes to sleep and feed times.”

*all names have been changed

Key Themes

These practice examples highlight the significance of local trusted place-based organisations, demonstrating the breadth of their impact on real people in different circumstances and coming from a diverse range of backgrounds. They provide a range of services and social capital which ensures communities can support themselves.

Despite the differences between these five organisations and the people who utilise their services, several key themes emerge.

1

Trust

Each organisation is defined by the trust between themselves and the people in their communities. This trust is demonstrably earned over time, with staff and the organisation's consistent presence in the local community building an organisational reputation that facilitates ongoing collaborative relationships. Holding trust is critical to reaching vulnerable populations, who may otherwise be deterred from engaging with community and human services. It is key for the success of community-led initiatives (Rong et al., 2023).

2

Community Engagement

All five examples emphasise the importance of services that encourage community engagement and participation, demonstrating how they can lead to increased levels of self-determination and empowerment. They provide citizen participation opportunities, which develop the social fabric of a community. This is supported by their comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the unique needs and wants of the communities they service, with meaningful insight into their complexities and nuances.

3

Responding to Need

Because they are embedded in place, these community organisations are able to connect with their respective communities, build trust and strong relationships over time, and ensure that they operate with person-centred principles to best address the most pressing needs of the people who access their services. This supports communities to thrive.

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Western Sydney Community Forum is the regional peak not for profit social development council. We work with the community, business and government sectors towards inclusive and sustainable communities, now and for future generations.

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