Belongside *Families*

2025 - 2026 Impact Report



Who we are

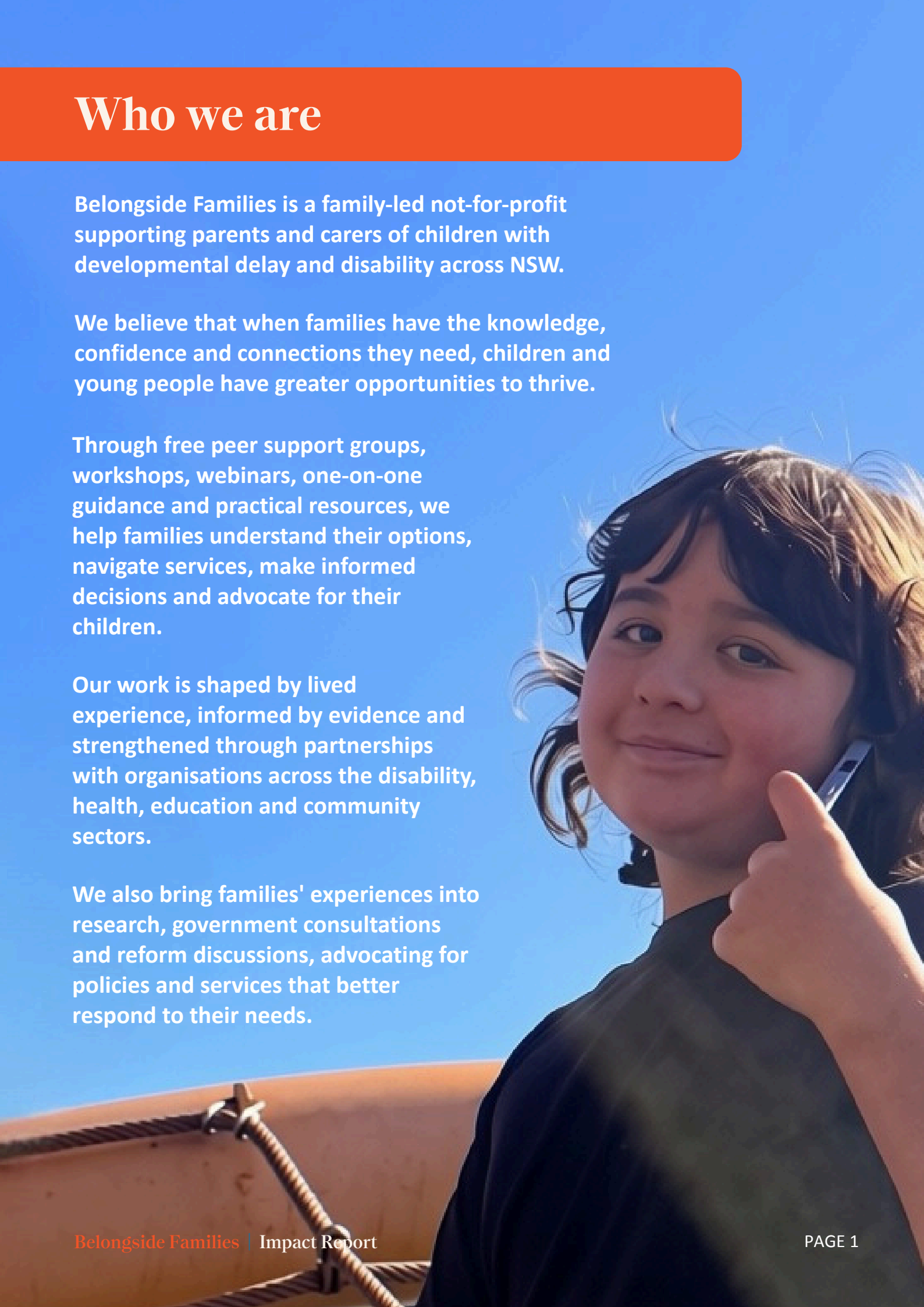
Belongside Families is a family-led not-for-profit supporting parents and carers of children with developmental delay and disability across NSW.

We believe that when families have the knowledge, confidence and connections they need, children and young people have greater opportunities to thrive.

Through free peer support groups, workshops, webinars, one-on-one guidance and practical resources, we help families understand their options, navigate services, make informed decisions and advocate for their children.

Our work is shaped by lived experience, informed by evidence and strengthened through partnerships with organisations across the disability, health, education and community sectors.

We also bring families' experiences into research, government consultations and reform discussions, advocating for policies and services that better respond to their needs.



Our year in numbers

249
Panels, Webinars, Peer Groups & Workshops

8,457
Program attendances

9,875
Social media followers

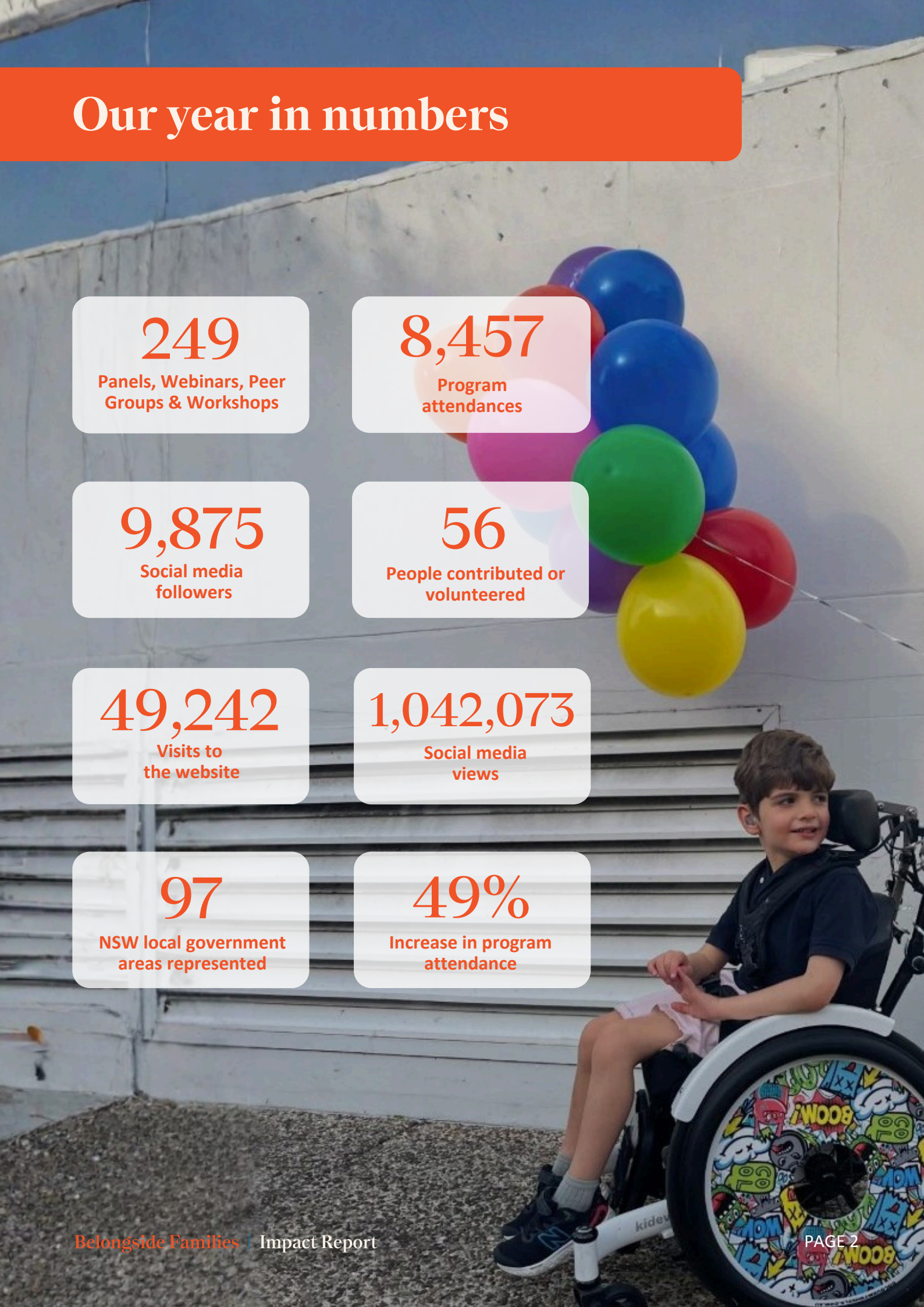
56
People contributed or volunteered

49,242
Visits to the website

1,042,073
Social media views

97
NSW local government areas represented

49%
Increase in program attendance



Our impact

Beyond the number of families we reach, our impact is measured by the difference our support makes in their lives. These results show what parents and carers reported gaining from participating in our programs.

Better Able to Navigate Systems & Services



92%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Less Alone



95%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Improved Knowledge & Skills



97%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Increased Confidence To Advocate



94%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

More Confident Making Informed Decisions



95%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Would Recommend Belongside Families



99.8%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

I'm an Autistic solo parent raising two children with disability and one with complex medical needs. I was in a really rough spot and honestly felt like I had nothing left to give.

Then I found Belongside Families.

There's something different about talking to people who have lived it too. You don't have to explain so much. I can let my guard down and be honest about the hard days, the okay days and the really good ones.

Being around people who understand has also helped me be kinder to myself. I've learned to give myself more grace when things don't go perfectly, instead of feeling like I've failed.

Belongside doesn't take away the hard stuff but it has given me a community I didn't have before. I feel understood. I feel less alone. When you're carrying as much as I am, having people beside you who genuinely get it makes a bigger difference than I can put into words.

Parent from Belongside Community



A message from our Chair



On behalf of the Belongside Families Board, I am pleased to present our Impact Report for the 2025–26 financial year.

During Carers Week this year, I sat in a room full of parents and carers in Sydney, the first time some of our community had come together in person. Some families had travelled a long way to be there. I watched people find each other across the room and just exhale. That particular exhale that comes when you realise you do not have to explain yourself, because someone already knows.

That moment has stayed with me, because it is what Belongside Families is for.

This has not been an easy year for families. Reforms to the NDIS and the announcement of Thriving Kids brought change that often felt fast and unclear. Many parents told us they were being asked to plan their child's future without a map. We set out to stay close and stay steady, and to make sure no family carried those questions alone.

In this first full year of our 2025 to 2028 Strategic Plan, we offered clear and trusted information when it mattered most. We grew our peer support, where parents learn from others who have walked the same road. We carried family voices into advocacy, research and partnerships. And the Board worked to keep Belongside strong and sustainable for the long term.

Thank you to my fellow directors Joanna Allwood, Nerida Bodycote, Debra Jefferis, Paul Pozzobon, Kimberly Rathmanner and Kelly Roberts, who joined us this year, for the wisdom and care you bring. I also thank Liam Brennan for his service on the Board.

To our CEO Stacey Touma and every member of our team, thank you. You are the heart of Belongside Families. You bring lived experience of your own, and families feel that the moment they connect with you. This year you guided families through so much change with warmth and clarity, often while carrying the same uncertainty in your own lives.

Thank you to our funders and partners, whose trust and generous support make our work possible.

And to every parent and carer in our community: thank you for making the room feel the way it did. If you have not yet found your people, I want you to know they exist. You are welcome here.

Basim Alansari | Chair

A message from our CEO



Parents often tell us they wish they had found Belongside sooner. Some have spent years raising a child with disability before meeting another parent who understands. That connection can be life-changing.

This year we expanded our reach, supporting families across 97 NSW LGAs through almost 8,500 attendances. Most programs were delivered online. Families' stories reinforced how important that access is. We heard from parents experiencing burnout, caring for children unable to attend school and managing without family support. For some, an online group was a lifeline and their only connection with other parents that week.

Online delivery also made learning possible around work, caring and family life. Parents joined workshops on their lunch breaks or watched webinar recordings in their own time. For these families, online access was not simply a convenience. It meant the difference between accessing support and going without.

Connections also grew beyond our programs. Parents who met in our online peer groups developed friendships, kept in touch, and even travelled across the state to meet up. I know how valuable it is to have people you can turn to without needing to explain everything first. Seeing parents from our community find that kind of support in one another is one of the things I'm most proud of.

What families shared with us informed the resources we created, the events we ran and the issues we advocated for. Our new Navigating School Guide and digital toolkit helped parents understand processes and speak up for their child.

We brought families' perspectives into state and national reform discussions through alliances, consultations, and forums. And we provided accessible information about NDIS and Thriving Kids changes in plain English.

We invested in our people and program quality, establishing two new Communities of Practice for facilitators and commencing an independent evaluation of Belongside and our workshops with the Parenting Research Centre. We improved accessibility through plain English and flexible participation options, while strengthening internal systems and processes.

To our team: what we have achieved is because of you. Thank you for the care you take in drawing on your lived experience to support other families. To our Board, thank you for your guidance and belief in our purpose. And to our partners and funders, we are deeply grateful for your continued support.

Above all, thank you to every parent and carer who has been part of our community this year. By sharing your experiences, questions and hopes for your children, you help other families feel understood and find their own way forward.

As we look ahead, our priority is to keep listening to families, make our support easier to find, access and use, and ensure families' experiences remain at the centre of our work.

Stacey Touma | CEO

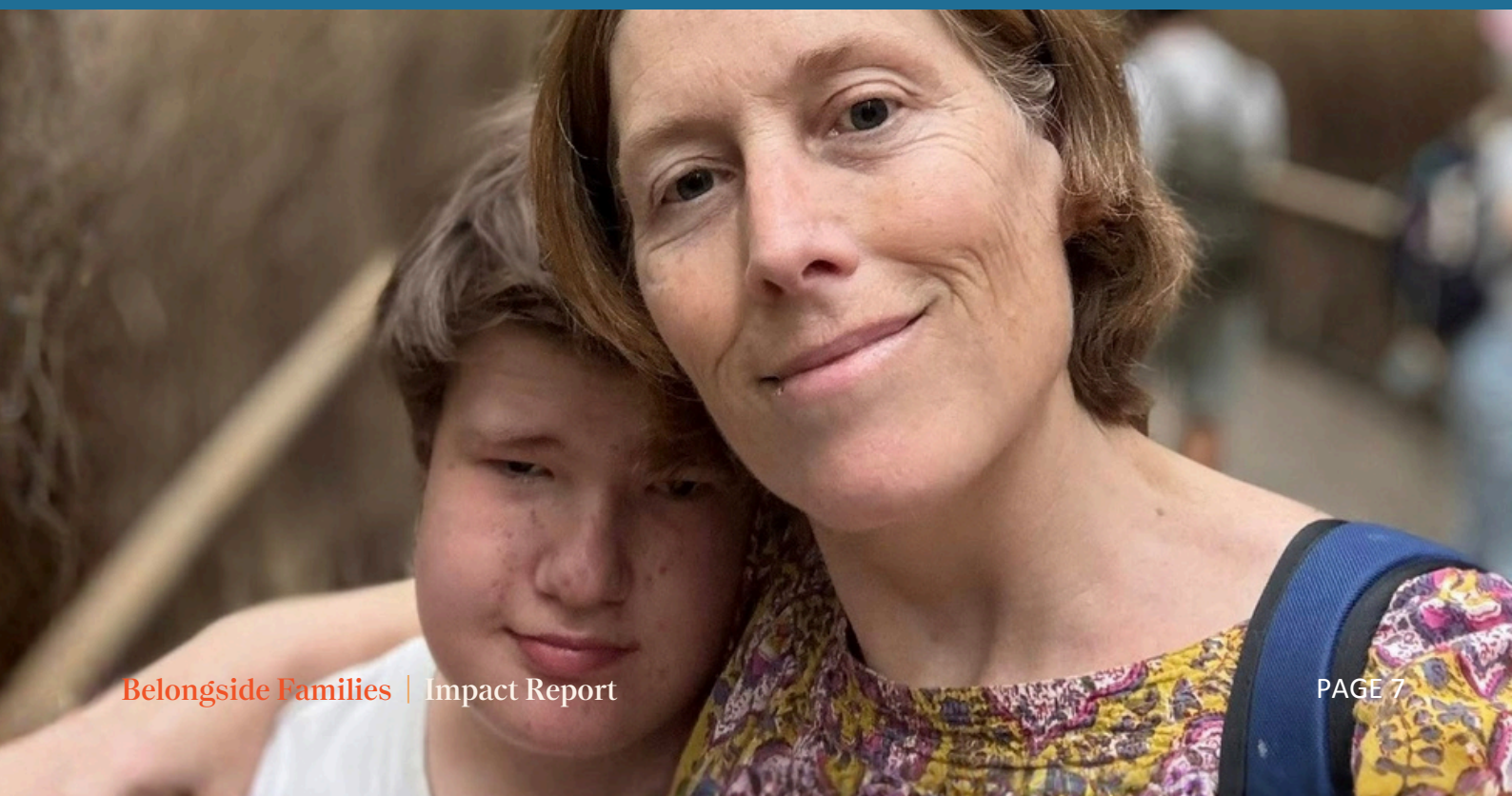
I feel like there's so much out there for little kids, but not much once they get older. Different challenges and questions have come up, and Belongside helps fill that gap.

What I really value is hearing from people with lived experience. It's different from sitting with a professional who might understand disability broadly, but not all the intricacies of living it. You hear what other families have tried, what worked for them, and you can work out what might fit your own family.

So much of disability can focus on deficits and what isn't working. Belongside helps you see what your child is good at and feel more positive about their future.

Because it's free, you can access information you might otherwise miss out on. For me, that includes knowing how to advocate at school, maintain the relationship and understand the next steps. It gives me more confidence to work things out and know when I need professional help.

Jen Williamson



Key achievements

Made webinars easier for families to access

Introduced recording-only registration and trialled phone dial-in access, giving parents more ways to access webinars around caring responsibilities, work and internet connectivity.

Connected families with specialist expertise

Delivered free webinars with clinicians, educators, allied health professionals and people with disability, helping parents access specialist information on topics including communication, sensory processing, burnout, wellbeing and school.

Launched the Navigating School Guide and digital toolkit

Published a 52-page guide with 16 practical tools, including editable templates, scripts and planning resources, to help parents understand school processes, prepare for meetings and advocate for their children.

Helped families understand NDIS and Thriving Kids reforms

Produced plain-English summaries explaining proposed changes, what was known and what remained uncertain. They generated more than 50,000 social media views.

Made our workshop content more accessible

Partnered with the Plain English Foundation to review workshop presentations and facilitator scripts. Staff completed Plain English training and began revising materials to make information clearer and more accessible.

Shared more perspectives from people with disability

Published first-person stories and articles from people with disability on topics including communication, intellectual disability, screen use and family-led support, giving parents opportunities to learn directly from their experiences.

Expanded in-person support across NSW

Worked with local organisations to deliver workshops and family gatherings across Western Sydney, the Central Coast and Central West NSW, including Coonamble, Dubbo and Orange.

Brought family perspectives into disability reform

Contributed to government consultations, reform discussions and collective advocacy through state and national early years and family-led alliances, including engagement on Thriving Kids and NDIS changes.

How we support families

Every family's circumstances are different. Our free programs combine lived experience with evidence-informed approaches. They help parents feel less alone, grow their knowledge and confidence, and make informed decisions.

Parent Peer Groups

Online and in-person groups led by trained parent peer facilitators who understand the realities of parenting a child with disability. A safe space for families to share experiences, learn from each other and feel supported.

Workshops

Peer-led workshops that make complex topics easier to understand. Each workshop guides parents through practical frameworks they can apply to their own family's circumstances.

Resources

Plain-English guides, fact sheets and stories that help parents understand systems, prepare for important conversations and make informed decisions.

Online Community

A welcoming and supportive online space where parents connect, share experiences, and access trusted information whenever they need it.

One-on-One Support

Personalised guidance from trained peer navigators who help families understand their options, find relevant information and services, and identify practical next steps when they're feeling stuck or overwhelmed.

Webinars

Our webinars bring together people with lived experience and professionals to share knowledge on topics identified by families. Parents can join live, ask questions or watch the recording at a time that works for them.

Healthy Mothers Healthy Families

An evidence-based health education and empowerment program for mothers of children with disability, developed by Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor from Monash University. Belongside is proud to deliver the program to mothers across Australia.



Partnerships that strengthen families

Children and families benefit when organisations bring together their knowledge, experience and strengths. During 2025–26, our partners brought specialist expertise, research and local connections, while Belongside contributed lived experience and family-led practice.

Delivering evidence-based programs

We continued delivering Virtual MyTime with the Parenting Research Centre, Healthy Mothers Healthy Families with Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor and Monash University, and ENVISAGE Families through the Australian Catholic University-led consortium.

These partnerships give families access to evidence-based programs, delivered by facilitators who understand their experiences.

Supporting families with rare and genetic conditions

Together with Genetic Alliance Australia, we delivered a webinar series combining clinical expertise and family perspectives on rare and genetic conditions.

We partnered with Rare Disease NSW for its Rare Disease Day event, sharing the role of peer support with families and health professionals. At the 22q family conference at Sydney Children's Hospital, we presented practical strategies for navigating school and advocating for children.

Connecting with families locally

We co-hosted a family conference with Plumtree Children's Services, bringing over 60 families together in Sydney's Inner West.

In Western Sydney, we presented at a special Carers Week event hosted by The Parks Community Centre. Through the Fairfield Referral Working Group, we delivered information sessions on the NDIS and Thriving Kids, helping families understand changes to disability supports.

Taking support to regional NSW

Kristy and Bree travelled to Central West NSW to deliver free workshops and family gatherings in Coonamble, Dubbo, Bathurst and Orange.

A highlight was participating in the Eleanor Bryant Memorial Fund Bush Summit in Coonamble, presenting a session on supporting children between appointments. The event brought families, educators and professionals to share approaches to supporting children in rural communities.





Connecting with families locally











Family voice in system reform

Through our work with state and Commonwealth alliances, we worked alongside organisations across sectors to strengthen the collective voice of families. During 2025–26, we brought families' experiences into parliamentary inquiries and reform discussions, ensuring that decisions about supports and services were informed by the realities of family life.

Bringing family experience to Parliament

Commonwealth Thriving Kids Inquiry: Our CEO, Stacey Touma, gave evidence on behalf of the Child and Family Disability Alliance (CaFDA), calling for earlier support, stronger support for parents and carers, and clear pathways between mainstream services, Thriving Kids and the NDIS.

ACaFSA Thriving Kids Parliamentary Forum: Belongside facilitator Eliza Hoare shared her experience raising three Autistic children at Parliament House in Canberra. She challenged the traditional "wait and see" approach, calling instead for systems to "act and see" by supporting children and families earlier.

Contributing to national reform

Working through CaFDA and the Australian Child and Family Supports Alliance (ACaFSA), we contributed to:

Two national Thriving Kids Inquiry submissions: Calling for early, coordinated support, practical assistance for parents and carers, quality early childhood intervention and stronger connections between services.

NDIS Amendment Bill submission: Advocated for fairer eligibility rules, recognition of family circumstances and safeguards for children with lifelong support needs.

Thriving Kids Insights Paper: Through ACaFSA, helped bring together five priorities for reform: equitable access, empowered families, sustainable services, a skilled workforce and inclusive communities.

Strengthening family support in NSW

Belongside continued to co-chair the Child and Family Supports Alliance NSW (CaFSA NSW), a collaboration of organisations working across family support, early childhood, disability, health and community services.

The Alliance met regularly to bring together different perspectives, respond to emerging issues and work towards a more connected child and family support system.

Helping families understand reform

Following major NDIS and Thriving Kids announcements, we published plain-English summaries explaining what was known and what remained uncertain.

We partnered with members of the Thriving Kids National Advisory Group to help families understand the group's report and its recommendations.

We presented to parents, carers and local workers in Western Sydney about the proposed changes, what they could mean for families and what was still to be decided.

Partnerships & advocacy



















With thanks & appreciation

We acknowledge the many people and organisations whose funding, expertise, time and lived experience made our work possible.

Funding Partners

We thank the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and the National Disability Insurance Agency for funding that enabled us to provide free, accessible support to parents and carers across New South Wales.

We also acknowledge the Parenting Research Centre and Playgroup NSW for their support, which enables us to deliver Virtual MyTime peer groups.

Healthy Mothers Healthy Families

We thank Monash University and Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor for our continued partnership to deliver the evidence-based Healthy Mothers Healthy Families program.

Together, we supported mothers of children with disability to prioritise their health and wellbeing.

Professionals

We acknowledge the organisations, allied health practitioners, medical professionals, researchers and community partners who shared their expertise and connected families with our programs.

By working together, we strengthened referral pathways, extended the reach of family support and contributed to better-connected services for children and families.

Team

We are grateful to our staff for the care, knowledge and lived experience they bring to their work. Their commitment to families, shared learning and continuous improvement is central to the quality of our programs.

Board

We thank our volunteer Board for their leadership, expertise and commitment to Belongside. Their guidance and oversight have helped strengthen our organisation and keep families at the centre of our decisions.

Families

Most importantly, we thank the parents and carers at the heart of Belongside.

We are grateful to everyone who joined our programs, and to the family contributors who shared their experiences and practical tips, helped develop resources, presented at webinars and supported other families.





We look forward to continuing our work to make a positive impact on the lives of families of children with disability in the year to come.

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