

Belongside *Families*

2024 - 2025 Impact Report



Who We Are

Belongside Families is an independent, family-led not-for-profit that walks alongside parents and carers of children with disability, developmental delay, Autism, rare and genetic conditions across New South Wales.

We empower families to feel confident, connected, and supported — because when families thrive, children thrive.



Why Our Work Matters

The challenge families face

Families raising children with disability often describe their experience as both deeply rewarding and incredibly overwhelming. Every day they move between health, early childhood, disability, and education systems that rarely speak to one another. Information changes depending on who they talk to. Pathways are unclear. And many families tell us they are left trying to make sense of the system alone.

Parents carry a significant emotional and practical load—juggling appointments, advocating for their child, managing school or childcare needs, and making complex decisions with limited guidance. Many feel isolated, unsure, and exhausted.

Professionals tell us they see this too. They want families to feel confident and supported, but overstretched services rarely have the time to offer ongoing connection, reassurance, or practical, everyday guidance.

The gap families continue to face

Families are often expected to advocate for their child in situations that are complex, unfamiliar, and emotionally demanding. Parents juggle differing opinions, limited information, and the pressure to “get it right,” all while supporting their child day to day. Even the most capable and resourceful parents can feel stretched thin without a trusted community to help them make sense of what’s ahead. What many want is a place where they can feel understood, supported, and confident in the choices they’re making for their child.

How Belongside helps to fill this gap

This is where Belongside Families makes a difference. As a family-led organisation, we provide trusted, evidence-informed support grounded in lived experience. Families tell us that what they value most is access to people who understand the realities of their lives.

People who can help them make sense of the information they receive, navigate next steps, and feel confident in the decisions they are making for their child.

Peer support is consistently described as one of the most important supports families receive. Many say they “wish they had known about Belongside sooner,” and that earlier access to connection would have reduced isolation and made the pathway ahead feel clearer.

What this means for families

Every family needs support they can trust. Support that guides them when the pathway is unclear, helps them feel confident in everyday decisions, and connects them with others who truly understand.

Belongside Families provides a safe, reliable place for parents to turn. We offer practical guidance they can use straight away, and a community that walks beside them throughout their child’s journey. When families feel supported, confident, and connected, children thrive. And that is why our work matters.

How We Support Families

Every family's journey is different. Our programs combine lived experience and evidence-informed approaches to provide support that's practical, relevant, and grounded in real family life.

All our supports are free and designed to help parents feel less alone, grow skills and confidence, and connect them with others who truly understand.

Online Community

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

Workshops

Interactive sessions that strengthen parents' knowledge and confidence to support their child, navigate systems, and advocate effectively.

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.

One-on-One Support

Personalised navigation support from trained peer navigators who help families find the right information, services, or next steps when they're feeling stuck or overwhelmed.

Resources

Guides, fact sheets, and stories that help families understand systems such as health, education, and the NDIS — created with families, for families.

Partnerships & Advocacy

Collaboration with early childhood, education, and health professionals to strengthen supports across systems and ensure family voice shapes service design and policy.





“ While therapies focus on my child, as the mother, I’m the one tasked with implementing and executing them, alongside a million other responsibilities!

Belongside is the first service that has put me at the forefront. This not only impacted me but also my disabled children. I can now better care for them and I feel empowered to advocate for their needs.

A Message From Our Chair

This year marks a turning point in our shared story. As we embrace our new name Belongside Families we affirm what has always been true about us – that our purpose lives in walking beside families, not ahead of them. The name reflects us: an organisation defined by connection, courage and compassion.

I step into the role of Chair with deep gratitude for the path laid before me. Kate McNamara, our founding Chair, leaves a legacy of integrity and warmth that will always guide our way. To our esteemed Board, I also welcome Liam Brennan, whose experience in government and policy brings insight and steadiness as we expand our influence across systems and communities. Likewise, I am deeply grateful for our board directors - Joanna Allwood, Nerida Bodycote, Debra Jefferis, Paul Pozzobon and Kimberly Rathmanner - whose dedication, wisdom and care strengthen every decision we make. Together with Stacey Touma, our CEO and our exceptional team we carry forward the spirit of belonging that sits at the heart of everything we do.

This has been a year of extraordinary growth. Our revenue more than doubled, supported by an extension of our Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant, a new NDIA Peer Support & Capacity Building grant and the Stockland Foundation. We have been able to strengthen family-led peer support, build inclusion in local communities and reach families who previously had little access to trusted guidance. Our work now extends across Western Sydney and the Central Coast, where

belonging is not an idea, but a feeling shared through every conversation, workshop and moment of connection between parents who no longer feel alone.

Our new Strategic Plan 2025-2028 charts a bold and grounded course with five priorities:

1. Strengthen families,
2. Champion family-led support,
3. Drive change with family voice,
4. Invest in our organisation,
5. Secure sustainability and reach.

This plan is not only a guide but a promise that our growth will remain purposeful, evidence-informed and true to our values. It ensures Belongside Families continues to be a trusted family-led voice shaping a more connected and inclusive future.

To our families, partners and supporters thank you for your trust and belief. To our team and volunteers thank you for leading with heart. Together we are shaping something rare and enduring; a community that truly belongs to those who need it most.

Basim Alansari
Chair



A Message From Our CEO

Belongside Families exists to walk beside parents as they navigate the everyday realities of raising a child with disability or developmental delay. Families need support that they can rely on. Support that is practical, consistent and grounded in lived experience. This purpose has guided every part of our work across 2024–25.

This year, we strengthened our impact across New South Wales and nationally. We saw significant growth in program participation and deeper engagement from CALD families and families in regional and rural communities. We refined our online workshops, peer groups, and resources; expanded our personalised one-on-one support service, including accepting self-referrals; and continued adapting our delivery model so families can access support easily, wherever they live.

We also launched our place-based peer support in Western Sydney and the Central Coast, partnering with local community organisations, councils, and early childhood services. These pilots helped us understand what makes support meaningful close to home and how lived-experience support can complement and enhance the work of local providers.

Our partnerships continued to grow. Together with Monash University, Australian Catholic University, the Parenting Research Centre, and leaders across health, education, and community sectors, we delivered evidence-based programs and learning that strengthened family wellbeing, confidence, and capability.

Through ACAfSA, CaFDA and CaFSA NSW, we continued our national leadership role to ensure family voice shapes the design of foundational supports, early childhood intervention, and system navigation. Elevating the experiences of families remains central to the reforms now underway across Australia.

I want to acknowledge Kate McNamara, our outgoing Chair, who has been part of Belongside Families from the very beginning. Her leadership, integrity, and deep belief in families have shaped who we are today. I am grateful to now work alongside our new Chair, Basim Alansari, and our dedicated Board as we continue strengthening family-led support across Australia.

To our extraordinary team — thank you. Your lived experience as parents, and the compassion and care you bring to this work, is at the heart of Belongside Families. You help parents feel understood, supported, and less alone. Our impact exists because of you.

And to the families — thank you for trusting us to be part of your journey. You shape our work in every way, and it is a privilege to walk beside you.

Stacey Touma
CEO



Our Year in *Numbers*

213

Panels, Webinars, Peer
Groups & Workshops

5,682

Attendances
at our Events

52%

Of families from regional,
rural, remote areas

18%

Of families identify
as CALD

82%

Increase in
revenue

60%

Increase in
workforce

34

Resources, tips &
stories published

42

People contributed
or volunteered

36,120

Visits to
the Website

1,137,481

People reached through
Social Media



“ *My daughter has an Intellectual Disability and ADHD, as well as being Autistic. Being connected to other families through peer support means that I’m now so much less afraid for her future. Because I know there are parents that are further along that I can seek advice from. I know I have a safe, supportive place to come for help. I honestly don’t want to ever imagine my life without Belongside Families.*



Our Impact

Feedback from families shows the impact of Belongside Families programs in strengthening confidence, connection and capability.

Better Able to Navigate
Systems & Services



95%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Less Alone



94%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Improved
Knowledge & Skills



96%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Increased Confidence
To Advocate



96%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

More Confident Making
Informed Decisions



94%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Would Recommend
Belongside Families



100%

AGREE / STRONGLY AGREE

Parent Story *Olivia*

Olivia is a mum to two Autistic children. She lives in a regional town in New South Wales where support is hard to access and even harder to fit around her caring responsibilities as a solo parent.

Another parent first introduced Olivia to Belongside Families, and over the past year alone she's attended more than fifty peer groups, webinars and workshops.

What began as a way to seek support has become a lifeline of connection and community.

“ Belongside has given me a sense of connection that can be hard to find when parenting on my own.

Olivia shares that being part of Belongside has helped her feel less isolated. Living regionally, online support has been essential. Being able to join from home means she can take part without worrying about travelling long distances or arranging someone to look after her children.

“ Having free, online peer groups I can access from home has made a big difference. I can ask for advice, share wins and challenges, or just chat when things feel heavy, all without needing to travel or arrange childcare. I can connect with other parents who really 'get it' even though they live hundreds of miles away.

“ Being part of Belongside has made a huge difference for me as a parent. It's helped me feel less isolated and more confident in my parenting. Even on the tough days, it's comforting to know there's a community I can reach out to. People who listen, encourage, and remind me I'm not doing this alone.

One of the things that matters most is that Belongside is built by families for families like hers.

“ It's comforting to know that the people at Belongside have faced the same challenges and are sharing what's helped them. Support feels different when it comes from other parents who've been through similar situations. It's real and reassuring.

Parent peer groups are a safe space for Olivia and over time, she has become a regular voice, offering understanding and encouragement to other families finding their way.

“ There is unspoken understanding. No one has to explain or justify their experiences. We can talk openly about the highs and lows, and support each other through challenges without fear of judgment.

Belongside has become a steady source of support in her life. A place where she has not only built her knowledge to support her children but that she feels understood, connected and part of a community.



Key Achievements

Scaled statewide delivery

Delivered 213 online programs with 5,682 attendances. Providing flexible and accessible support for families at key stages of their child's development.

Strengthened one-on-one navigation support

Refined our navigation model to include self-referrals and streamlined processes so families can reach the right information and next steps more quickly.

Revenue growth and diversification

Increased revenue by 82% and diversified income across government, philanthropy and donations, strengthening our financial sustainability and enabling us to scale family-led support.

Contributed to evidence-base for parent wellbeing

A collaborative research project with Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor and Monash University produced internationally published evidence demonstrating the significant benefits and positive impact of Belongside Families-facilitated HMHF workshops.

Expanded reach in regional and rural NSW

Achieved our highest participation from regional, rural and remote families (52%), demonstrating the value of flexible online delivery and lived-experience support.

Influenced national and state reforms

Represented family voice in major reform processes shaping foundational supports, early childhood intervention and system navigation through CAFDA, ACaFSA and CaFSA NSW.

Organisational growth

Expanded our workforce by 60%, strengthened evaluation and quality systems, and improved IT and security capability to support growing demand.

Launched place-based family support

Implemented in-person peer support pilots in Western Sydney and the Central Coast to complement local services and fill gaps in peer support and family capability-building.

Supporting Families *Locally*

Belongside Families is deepening our impact in communities where families experience higher barriers to connection, inclusion and access to support.

In 2024–25, Belongside Families piloted place-based, family-led approaches to understand how in-person peer support can strengthen what already exists in local communities and complement our statewide online delivery.

While our core programs reach families across New South Wales, we continued to invest in place-based activity where there was clear need, strong referral pathways and aligned partners. This included a focused pilot in Western Sydney.

The Stockland-funded pilot enabled Belongside Families to test a hybrid model of local entry points and online delivery.

2024–25 highlights:

- Delivered 15 in-person catch-ups in Western Sydney.
- Engaged 128 parents and carers, with 435 total attendances, indicating strong repeat participation.
- Delivered a mix of activities, including coffee catch-ups, information sessions, park play and family fun days.
- Built local partnerships with The Parks Community Network, Fairfield Council, Early Ed, and other community organisations.
- Strengthened pathways from local engagement into Belongside’s peer groups, workshops and statewide programs.

Our Impact: *What families told us*

“Realising that I am not alone with my child with disability and there is help from other people and places.”

97%

Felt more connected with other families

96%

Learnt something helpful

98%

Could attend because the event was free

97%

Found the events easy to access

100%

Found the events welcoming and inclusive

9.8/10

Would recommend events to other families

In-Person Programs



Partnerships that *Strengthen Families*

Children and families achieve better outcomes when the systems around them work together. Partnerships are central to how Belongside Families strengthens access to trusted, family-led peer support.

In 2024–25, Belongside Families partnered across research, health, education, disability and community sectors to extend our reach, reduce duplication and support families to navigate and understand complex systems.

Working with trusted sector leaders

We collaborated with several organisations including the Early Childhood Intervention Best Practice Network, Rare Disease NSW, Genetic Alliance Australia, and Siblings Australia to deliver learning opportunities and supports for families.

These partnerships strengthened families' knowledge, confidence and capability, particularly when navigating health, disability and education systems.

National peer support partnership

With support from the Parenting Research Centre, Belongside Families continued its role within the Child and Family Disability Alliance (CAFDA) as a national delivery partner for Virtual MyTime.

This partnership enabled the delivery of inclusive, online peer groups to families across,

Australia, reducing barriers related to distance, transport, scheduling and childcare, and enabling equitable access to peer support.

University and research partnerships

Belongside Families continued its partnership with Monash University and Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor to deliver the evidence-based Healthy Mothers Healthy Families (HMHF) program, supporting the health and wellbeing of mothers of children with disability.

In 2024–25, we also continued our partnership with the Australian Catholic University to deliver ENVISAGE Families, supporting parents to build capacity, resilience and confidence in responding to their child's developmental needs.

A network that strengthens family outcomes

Across New South Wales, hundreds of service providers, practitioners and community organisations shared information about Belongside Families' free programs, peer groups and resources, helping families access support earlier and reducing barriers related to geography, cost and availability.



Family Voice in *System Reform*

Families' lived experience is essential to building systems that respond to children's developmental needs and family realities.

In 2024–25, Belongside Families played a key role in national and state reform processes, ensuring family experiences informed policy and service design through coordinated, family-led advocacy.

This work was grounded in direct engagement with families and strengthened through alliances working collaboratively with a shared reform agenda.

Child and Family Disability Alliance (CAFDA)

The Child and Family Disability Alliance (CAFDA) brings together three independent, family-led organisations - ACD, Kiind and Belongside Families. Through CAFDA, we worked together to advance a unified family voice in national reform.

In 2024–25, CAFDA supported The Social Deck to deliver family consultations across NSW and nationally, informing the Commonwealth's design of Foundational Supports. The alliance also facilitated consultations for the Review of the National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention and met with Commonwealth departments, policymakers to progress family-centred reforms.

Policy and reform submissions

Belongside Families contributed to key NSW and Commonwealth submissions across disability, carer and foundational support reforms, ensuring they reflected what families consistently identify as priorities.

Across all contributions, we translate family lived experience into practical insights for policy and service design.

Australian Child and Family Supports Alliance (ACaFSA)

Belongside Families' CEO co-founded and now co-chairs the Australian Child and Family Supports Alliance (ACaFSA), a national alliance of more than 60 organisations.

During 2024–25, ACaFSA aligned sector priorities across early childhood intervention, navigation and child and family supports, engaging senior officials and Ministers to inform the development of Foundational Supports reforms.

Child and Family Supports Alliance (CaFSA) NSW

As co-chair of CaFSA NSW, Belongside Families strengthened collaboration across more than 25 organisations spanning early childhood, disability, health and community sectors.

In 2024–25, CaFSA NSW progressed aligned advocacy through shared principles and co-design, including a co-hosted Foundational Supports workshop with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and a discussion paper outlining key system gaps and reform opportunities in NSW.

Our Partnerships & Advocacy



With *Thanks & Appreciation*

We acknowledge the many people and partners who make our work possible and strengthen the support families receive across New South Wales.

● Funding Partners

We extend our appreciation to the Department of Social Services, NDIA, Parenting Research Centre, Stockland Foundation, Perpetual and Playgroups NSW. Your financial support enabled us to expand our reach into regional and rural communities, reach more CALD families, and respond to the growing demand from families.

We also thank the Korean Australian Law Association and the individuals who generously contributed donations this year, helping us reach more families in need.

● Board & Team

We are grateful to our dedicated board of directors and Belongsides team. Your leadership, commitment and lived-experience expertise are the foundation of our achievements.

● Volunteers

We acknowledge our volunteers across programs, webinars, peer groups and content development. Your generosity and commitment strengthen our work and make a meaningful difference to families across New South Wales.

● Families

We exist to support families, and everything we achieved this year was made possible by the parents and caregivers in the Belongsides Community. Thank you for sharing your wisdom, insight and experience, and for helping us create a safe, supportive and informative space for others.

● Envisage

We are proud to partner with the Australian Catholic University-led consortium to deliver the evidence-based Envisage program to families across NSW & ACT. As well as our co-delivery partners Lifestart and Noah's Ark.

● Healthy Mothers Healthy Families

We are grateful for our four year partnership with Monash University and Professor Helen Bourke-Taylor to deliver the evidence-based HMHF program.

● Professionals

We thank the organisations, allied health practitioners and medical professionals who collaborated and contributed their expertise. Your partnership has improved coordination across systems and supported better outcomes for children and their 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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