

ac.care

opportunities for life ... for country people
est. 1986



Weaving stronger futures together

Our 10-year vision and strategy for
disrupting cycles of disadvantage and
strengthening the fabric of our communities

Phase | 1
2023-2028
Strategic Plan

Our strategy at a glance

ac.care is committed to working with communities to support children, young people and adults facing disadvantage, trauma and crisis.

We aim to prevent family breakdown and provide early support to disrupt cycles of disadvantage and help people thrive in their communities.

We believe in taking a whole-of-community, collaborative approach that is evidence-informed and driven by the needs and experiences of those who require support.

By working together with our communities and building trust and cooperation over the next 10 years, we aim to create stronger futures for everyone.

We want all country people to feel safe, supported and a sense of belonging.

A message from our CEO and board convenor

We want our communities to be fairer, safer and more inclusive and invite you to join us in ensuring there are opportunities for all to thrive in country South Australia. This long-term vision and strategy not only provides direction for the future of ac.care, but also our communities, working together to build on our strengths and create a better future. It is informed by decades of experience supporting vulnerable children, families and individuals. We have witnessed the increasing demand on services and know we need to do more, as part of our communities, to break cycles of disadvantage that prevent people reaching their potential.

Our strategy is guided by many voices. These have come from within our organisation, along with people we support, partner organisations, our communities, government agencies and the growing evidence within the sector that points to a future of working together on big issues within our communities to generate lasting change. In essence, our strategy takes us back to the basics of working together to address seemingly unbreakable cycles of disadvantage.

We will continue to deliver our diverse services, from crisis support through to early intervention and community development, but with increased focus on preventing issues before they arise and getting in earlier to support people who are struggling. But we can only achieve these goals by collaborating with our community, particularly when we all want to achieve a common goal – we urge you to join us in delivering our strategy and weaving a stronger fabric of support to allow all people to thrive in your community.



Shane Maddocks
Chief executive officer



Rick Fisher GAICD
Board convenor

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise we live and work on land that always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We respect the Traditional Custodians of these lands and their ancestors and acknowledge their deep and ongoing connection to the land and continuation of cultural practices. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.

A snapshot of ac.care in 2021/22

At the end of 2022, our teams supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness had already helped almost as many families and individuals in 6 months as we were funded to work with for an entire year. Many more people were supported with emergency relief and other services at our sites as the rising cost of living and lack of affordable housing added pressure on household budgets.

Meanwhile, the number of children entering care due to neglect and other family issues continued to outstrip the number of foster carers volunteering to partner with ac.care to open their hearts and homes to young people in need.

The Productivity Commission’s Report on Government Services 2022 (ROGS 2022) showed as of June 30, 2021, 4,366 children and young people were in out of home care in South Australia – sadly, this figure continues to grow.

A greater focus on earlier support for vulnerable families is needed to allow children to remain with their families, have strong aspirations for a bright future and thrive.

We achieved significant outcomes for vulnerable people in country South Australia in 2021/22, but the growing demand on services and need in our communities shows we need to do more to break cycles of disadvantage before people experience a crisis. We can increase our impact by working together!



171

families opened their homes and hearts as foster carers with ac.care



1042

parents and children were supported by Communities for Children Murraylands programs and activities



419

people managed a difficult financial situation by seeking financial counselling



216

people improved their family relationships through counselling and group programs



350

children found homes with local foster carers



38

children and young people were cared for in residential care homes



704

people moved from homelessness to stable accommodation



192

clients were supported by our Aboriginal support services

NOTE: Data from ac.care 2021/22 annual report

The Need for Change

ac.care exists to ensure that all country people have safe homes, enough money to live on and strong, positive relationships. We work to reduce homelessness, poverty, and isolation and we support families and children to be safe and strong in the communities we serve. Over more than 30 years ac.care has grown to provide diverse services across eastern regional South Australia. Guided by our values of **compassion, adaptability, relationships and excellence**, our team of 250 employees and 300 volunteers work tirelessly to support families and individuals to achieve stability and independence in their lives and can be depended upon to provide vital services when a crisis occurs. But sadly, we’re seeing an increasing number of families and individuals in our communities who are experiencing trauma and are in need of support as the challenges they’re facing continue to grow.

In recent years, we’ve seen growing demand across our services as inter-generational poverty remains entrenched, the cost of living has increased, and the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the pressures and exclusion being experienced by vulnerable people. As natural disasters, a lack of affordable housing and other challenges have continued to impact, it has become clear that cycles of disadvantage must be disrupted to lift people out of poverty and build resilience and independence to secure a brighter and fairer future for all.

Over the next decade, we know that ac.care must continue building on our strengths and growing our services to meet additional needs and demand in our communities. But it’s clear that we’ll also need to find new ways of disrupting the cycles of disadvantage that impact families and individuals from one generation to the next. As the effectiveness of existing approaches for addressing complex challenges such as homelessness and intergenerational poverty are being questioned around the world and new approaches are being explored, ac.care is determined to lead the way by responding to the need for change in South Australian regional communities.

Our vision

At ac.care we are passionate about creating longer-term, sustainable social change for the country people and communities we serve. Over the next 10 years, we will lead a bold new collaborative approach, guided by our long-term vision of **disrupting cycles of disadvantage and strengthening the fabric of our communities**.

We want to see **stronger futures for everyone**, which will mean:

- ✓ less children being removed from their birth families and taken into care
- ✓ all five-year-olds starting school ready to learn and flourish
- ✓ the next generation of young people have a strong foundation for launching into adult life, feeling supported by their community and set up for success
- ✓ all country people have a safe, stable and harmonious home
- ✓ all people feel a sense of belonging in their communities and are supported to thrive

A New Approach

In the coming decade, ac.care will continue building on our strengths and growing our services while taking a leading role in **weaving together a whole-of-community, collaborative approach** with the aim of creating long-term social change in our communities. We're committed to working with partners across all sectors with the aim of transforming the systems and structures that keep people in cycles of disadvantage to achieve **stronger futures for everyone** including:

A STRONG START

for all country kids

STRONG ASPIRATIONS

for young people to reach their full potential

STRONG CONNECTIONS

for adults to have the support and essentials they need and communities they can depend on

Increasing our focus on prevention and early support for children, young people and adults will create a solid foundation for delivering long-term social change and strengthening the fabric of our communities. We will encourage a whole-of-community approach providing a strong start for all country kids in their early years to start school ready to learn in the hope this sets children up for success. But if challenges do arise later in the lives of young people, we will be there, with the community, to help ensure they aspire to a more positive future and are able to reach their full potential. This approach will help disrupt cycles of disadvantage for the most vulnerable in our community, but we recognise it will take long-term support to help people overcome intergenerational challenges.

Our services for adults must continue to ensure they are strongly connected to their communities and have the support essential for their wellbeing. But an increased focus on early support over the long-term will result in a reduction in the need for crisis services later in life.

We'll apply this new approach in two stages, by building on the strong connections and trust that already exists within our communities to invite new ways of thinking and working together to disrupt cycles of disadvantage in our communities by finding evidence-informed solutions for achieving sustainable change.

Stage 1 - Weaving Together

Building on our strengths and piloting a new approach (2023-2028)

Between 2023 and 2028, in addition to growing our services to meet additional demand, we'll also focus on piloting a new collaborative approach within one regional community. During this time, ac.care will work on strengthening existing connections and building new ones with the aim of bringing together partners representing a range of services, agencies, stakeholders and individuals from government, non-government, community and business sectors with the following objectives:

1. **Agree on a common agenda and shared goals,**
2. **Build a framework for improved collaboration between partners and identify opportunities to test and trial new ways of working to achieve our common agenda and goals,**
3. **Consider evidence together, listen to service users as well as those who do not access support, identify and share information between partners that can be used to measure collective success,**
4. **Coordinate services to achieve shared goals of seeing that no child is left behind and all adults feel they belong and have the support they need.**

Stage 2 - Strengthening the Fabric of Our Communities

Scaling a collaborative approach (2028-2033)

As we consider lessons learned and gather evidence on the success of a collaborative approach, we'll explore opportunities for scaling the approach across other regional communities while seeking to establish sustainable funding models and advocating for broader changes to break cycles of disadvantage across South Australia.

Stage 1 - Weaving Together

2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Between 2023 and 2028, ac.care will continue **building** on our strengths and **growing** our services while **transforming** how we think, work, and connect as an organisation to lead strong collaboration within our communities. We will be brave and bold in leading partner organisations across all sectors to weave together and co-design new approaches for disrupting cycles of disadvantage which can otherwise endure for generations.

We will continue growing our services and capacity to strengthen the independence and stability of families and individuals and help people overcome or avoid personal crises. We will also prioritise a greater focus on primary prevention and early support to disrupt the cycles that result in intergenerational poverty, homelessness, and entrenched disadvantage.

We will continue building relationships with First Nations communities acknowledging their ongoing strength and resilience and recognising that better life outcomes are achieved when First Nations people are connected to culture and have a genuine say in decisions that affect them.

In addition to developing our dedicated team and building foundations within our organisation for leading sustainable change, we will also work with government and other decision-makers on resetting priorities, providing early support, and further enhancing community partnerships and services to develop community building approaches that weave broad support around vulnerable people.

Our Goals

1. Develop a dedicated team leading change

A team of passionate, dedicated people who are well-equipped and ready to lead change in their communities will empower ac.care to work differently. Our people will know their community well, understand the stakeholders they work with and truly listen to service users and communities. We will create a structure that supports our 10-year vision and ensure that our people feel confident and capable of leading transformational change in alignment with our purpose and core values. Our people will thoroughly understand community development, effective engagement, the power of true collaboration and the vital importance of listening to client voice.

2. Lead strong community collaboration

Connecting to a broader range of organisations and stakeholders across all sectors within our communities and building a collaborative approach with a focus on addressing complex issues together will strengthen our communities over the long-term. We will take a leading role in building strong local (place-based) collaboration, achieving agreement on common goals and clarity about how success will be measured. We will work together to find the best evidence to develop new ways of supporting people. We will create greater capacity for volunteers and broaden our relationships with other supporters, including businesses, government, community organisations and individuals.

3. Support First Nations people to determine their own futures

First Nations people should have equal health and wellbeing outcomes to all other Australians. We will do more to be allies of Aboriginal communities and work with First Nations people to develop their own solutions and move to service models that are created by and with First Nations people.

4. Prioritise prevention and early support

Disrupting inter-generational disadvantage by getting in early in people's lives to support change. This means working with young children and their families, but also getting in earlier in the life of problems so they don't become overwhelming crises. Prevention of issues before they arise will be our preference and we will advocate for systemic change to reduce the impacts of poverty, discrimination, racism, and victim blaming.

5. Build foundations for sustainable change

As a catalyst for change and an initiator of transformational conversations, we know we cannot achieve our vision alone. We will manage our resources diligently so we can be agile and innovative to adapt to new directions and ways of working to increase our impact. Effective processes and data management will be crucial to helping us better understand local needs and deliver the best solutions for our communities.

Stage 1 - Weaving Together 2023-2028 Strategic Plan

Key priorities

1. Develop a dedicated team leading change

- 1.1. Provide professional development opportunities to support brave and resilient staff to deliver effective services now and lead our transformation for the future
- 1.2. Enhance workforce wellbeing, safety and agility to deliver better client and community outcomes
- 1.3. Recruit, develop, reward and retain exceptional people who thrive on having a positive impact on the community
- 1.4. Build opportunities for volunteers to increase their contribution and impact in their community

2. Lead strong community collaboration

- 2.1. Facilitate action through leadership to co-design a pilot place-based collaborative approach to disrupting cycles of disadvantage
- 2.2. Invest in strengthening existing relationships and actively build partnerships with new stakeholders throughout our communities to achieve shared goals
- 2.3. Empower people who depend on our services to influence decisions that affect them
- 2.4. Build our capacity to scale our approach from 2028

3. Partner with First Nations people to determine their own futures

- 3.1. Deliver ac.care's Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan commitments to increase opportunities for First Nations people, with a focus on respect, opportunities and relationships
- 3.2. Enhance career pathways for First Nations staff within ac.care and partner organisations
- 3.3. Strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to increase self-determination and support achievement of Closing the Gap targets
- 3.4. Work together with Aboriginal communities to ensure services align with need and develop culturally appropriate early support approaches to break cycles of disadvantage

4. Prioritise prevention and early support

- 4.1. Facilitate increased opportunities across all services for early support and prevention
- 4.2. Analyse existing community needs, identifying barriers, strengths, duplication and gaps
- 4.3. Work with communities to develop culturally inclusive best-practice place-based approaches for prioritising early support
- 4.4. Advocate for broader transformation of funding and reshaping service structures to prioritise early support across our regions

5. Build foundations for sustainable change

- 5.1. Provide efficient and environmentally sustainable infrastructure and dynamic and innovative operating systems
- 5.2. Build increased financial flexibility, sustainability and capacity to increase our impact
- 5.3. Effectively measure our social impact and client outcomes to inform evidence-based decision-making
- 5.4. Improve the effectiveness of our approach to quality and safeguarding

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