



# Mountains Outreach Community Service Annual Report

2023

MOCS acknowledges and pays respect to the Dharug and Gundungurra traditional owners and custodians of the land (shared Country) on which we work and live. We respect their continuing culture, and the contribution Elders make to the life of all peoples across the Blue Mountains.

Dharug and Gundungurra people understand Ngurra (Country) to encompass all in the physical, cultural and spiritual landscape, including cultural practice, kinship, knowledge, songs, stories and art, as well as spiritual beings, and people: past, present and future.

MOCS acknowledges that this Ngurra is, was and always will be Aboriginal land and that sovereignty has never been ceded.

We acknowledge the injustices of the past and present and honour the role that we play in the invitation from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, to walk and work together to create a better future. We will work, as allies, to support self-determination, truth telling and the need for justice and inclusion of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the Blue Mountains.

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# About MOCS

MOCS is a social-justice-focused community development organisation that works with families, children and individuals across the Blue Mountains. We focus our attention on supporting those facing hardships and those who experience intersections of oppression. We aim to enable stronger families, inclusive communities and improved social cohesion.

- **Social Justice**  
Social justice is at the core of the work we do. We strive to develop programs, practice and policies that improve social participation, increased inclusion and connection within the community, as well as championing human rights for all. Our approach is backed by research, experience and community voice.
- **Communities**  
We work with various communities in the Blue Mountains to co-design community development projects. We are currently working in First Nations people, the LGBTQI+ community, multicultural families, young people, and people who raise and care for children. We are always expanding the scope of our work to grow and reflect the changing social landscape of the Blue Mountains.
- **Families**  
We work with families and kin to build resilient healthy relationships, feel more confidence and feel a stronger sense of belonging. We are committed to providing safe services in a way that meets children's rights and includes children having a voice and being partners in the development, implementation and evaluation of MOCS children's programs.

# Our History

Mountains Outreach Community Service (MOCS) began in August 1980 when Springwood Neighbourhood Centre received a Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme (WSAAS) Grant to set-up the Treehouse Mobile Resource and Information Unit operating from a bus. Treehouse became autonomous in July 1981 and changed its name to Mountains Outreach Community Services in 1992. The service has always had a mountains-wide focus on support and provision of services to the local community, initially focusing on the gaps for families with children and on bringing people together to strengthen community connections and resilience. MOCS is now a diverse and thriving non-profit organisation that is closely connected to the community around it and works from a social justice perspective to support its growth and inclusion, whilst working collaboratively to support those who are systemically and personally disadvantaged. MOCS is community managed and received funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW

Department of Education, and Blue Mountains City Council.

- **Our Values**
  - We respect the knowledge, culture and custodianship of First Nation communities of the Blue Mountains
  - We value diversity, and advocate for social justice, equity and social inclusion
  - We value strengths-based community development practice, personal and community empowerment and justice
- **Our Vision**
  - To build a healthy diverse community where vulnerable and disadvantaged community members are well supported and their resilience and quality of life is improved
  - To build a healthy diverse community where individuals, families and communities participate in opportunities to build a sense of place, community connection and trust through shared experience, knowledge and strong respectful relationships
- **Our Goals**
  1. Reduce the impact of social and economic disadvantage and reduce social isolation by building social inclusion
  2. Enhance the resilience and connectedness of BM communities, families and their children
  3. Be an agile and robust community organisation

## Staff

- **Tatiana Lozano**, Manager
- **Elaine Cameron**, Financial Administrator
- **Liz Smith**, Community Development Worker (Retired, December 2022)
- **Christy Hartlage**, Community Development Worker
- **Claudia Roosen**, Community Development Project Officer
- **Tanya Clark**, Community Development Worker (Child & Family)
- **Samantha Lackey**, Child & Family Worker (Early Childhood Educator)
- **Leslie Lancaster**, Early Childhood Educator (Outgoing, December 2022)
- **Jane Marshall**, Supported Playgroup Facilitator (Outgoing, January 2022)
- **Laura Williams**, Child & Family Worker (Playgroups)
- **Nadia Cameron**, Early Childhood Educator

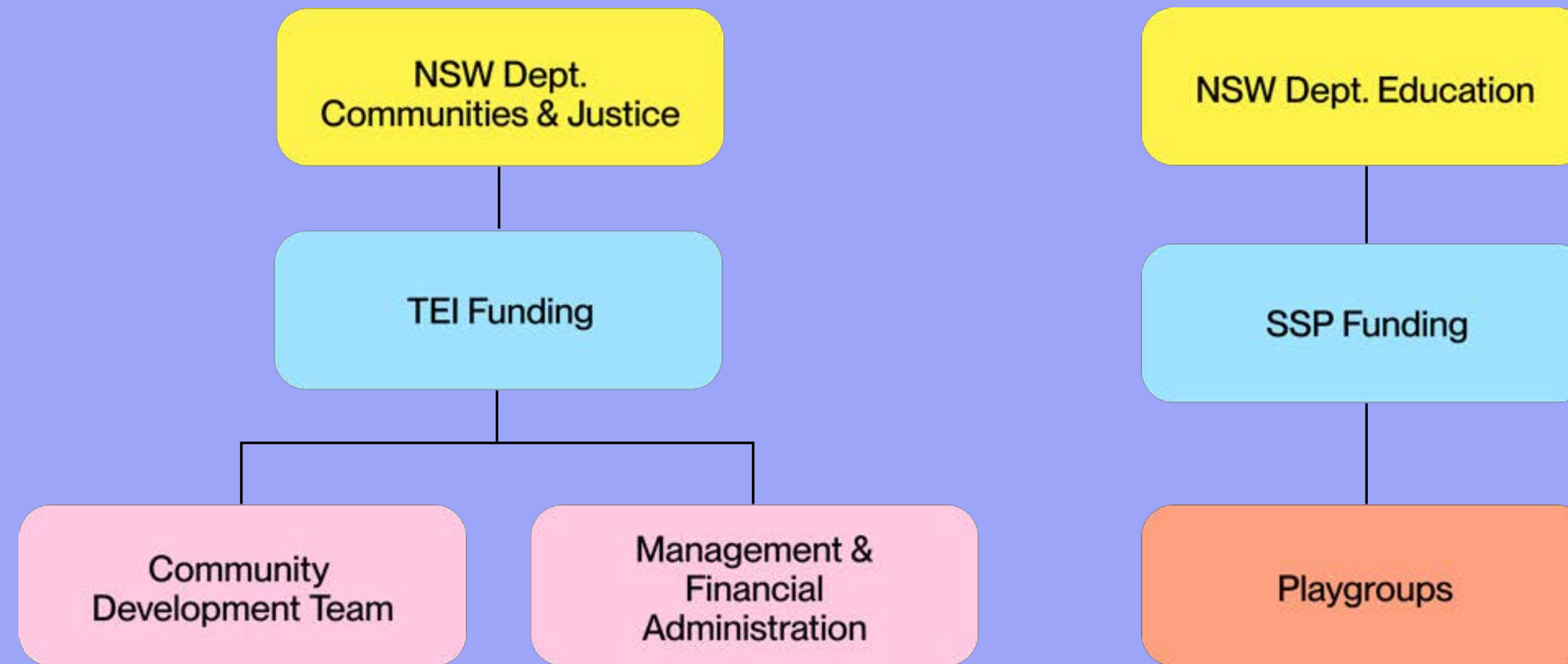
## Management Committee

- **Cheryl Adams**, Chairperson
- **Dee Wilde**, Vice Chairperson
- **Susan Ambler**, Secretary
- **Susan Pearce**, Treasurer and Public Officer
- **Sian Doko**, General Member
- **Cecilia Hung**, General Member
- **Flinn Donovan**, General Member

# Organisational Structure



# Funding Structure





# Chairperson's Report

First to acknowledge that MOCS lives and works on Dharug and Gundungurra land and we pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging.

It's hard to believe that another year has flown by. You will see all the wonderful things that MOCS have achieved in this year in the rest of the Report but I am just going to concentrate on the work of the Management Committee.

Many people will not realize that the structure of MOCS requires a management committee of elected volunteers who are responsible for the grants on which MOCS relies for funding and make the ultimate decisions about how that money is spent. Of course we are guided in those decisions by the Manager. The minimum number of this committee is seven with a maximum of nine which would be wonderful!

This year those heroes have been myself, Susan Ambler, Sue Pierce, Dee Wilde, Flinn Donovan, Sian Doko and Cecilia Hung.

It's a friendly committee and we meet by zoom approximately once a month. I have been involved with MOCS for around 25 years when I brought my children to family fun days which were then as they are now a truly outstanding way to build community. They are particularly valuable to new residents of the Mountains.

I have been involved as a committee member since 2016 when the irresistible Lyn Bevington gently twisted my arm. I have stayed because MOCS is such an amazing organisation. It is truly grass roots and community based. It has vision and flexibility and the most outstanding and dedicated team.

Our mighty leader Tatiana Lozano has brought fabulous ideas and energy to MOCS along with deep knowledge of community and legal issues.

I must commend the long time hard work of our outstanding secretary, Susan Ambler, and treasurer, Sue Pierce. They have both done the hardest jobs for many years and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

My vice chair, Dee Wilde has been a great source of advice and knowledge. More fresh ideas were brought to us by Sian Doko, Flinn Donovan and Cecilia Hung. As I have previously said, MOCS cannot legally function without a committee.

I will be stepping aside as Chair tonight leaving the committee in the very capable hands of Flinn Donovan but I will remain a happy committee member.

If there is anyone out there who would like to join our happy band, it would be much appreciated! If you know anyone else who appreciates the wonderful and varied work that MOCS does for our lovely Mountain community let them know we would love a couple of extra members on our relaxed committee.

With thanks to everyone involved in MOCS for making my time here fulfilling and enjoyable.

Cheryl Adams,  
Chairperson

# Manager's Report

The last year has seen MOCS undergo a range of changes in terms of programs and staff. This was just as we were recovering from the Covid 19 pandemic and natural disasters and so yet again we have seen the amazing resilience of MOCS workers and MC leadership – I am deeply grateful to both.

During the second half of 2022, MOCS adjusted to not running Occasional Care or the Mobile Educators and in their place commenced developing work for targeted families such as those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and those supporting neurodivergent (ND) children. This work was informed by the work that Cecilia Hung (from SydWest) had undertaken with the CALD community across the Blue Mountains and Lithgow area, and we now have a regular multicultural family get together that is growing. Over the past few years, the number of parents talking with us about their children receiving a diagnosis of ND has increased with a very loud and clear need for support. We also commenced running a young parent's group in Lithgow during this time, and whilst it's been a slow introduction into the Lithgow community, MOCS, Thrive and BM Women's Health and Resource Centre have been doing a wonderful job of being there for young parents in the area. We also launched our new website and became more active across a range of social media platforms.

It was also in the second half of 2022 that we were successful in an application for funding to the Office of Regional Youth to work with 8–13-year-olds in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow areas. During MOCS' participation in local youth interagencies it became clear that this cohort of children were in great need for support because of the detrimental impact of natural disasters and Covid 19.

Through consultation with key stakeholders, MOCS decided to consult with this cohort through art-based activities so that MOCS and the sector could be informed about the issues being faced by 8–13-year-olds and their unmet needs. This area of work exemplifies how MOCS works with the community to identify, and where possible address, the needs of groups whose issues require attention. We plan to continue working with 8–13-year-olds to address their needs.

Sadly, it was also during this time that MOCS lost three workers: Jane Marshall, Leslie Lancaster and Liz Smith. It was a sad time for MOCS, but it created the opportunity for new people to come on board and strengthen MOCS with new ideas and approaches. So, we started 2023 with a new community development worker Christy Hartlage, and the big task of recruiting a new playgroup team. Unfortunately, the process of finding a new playgroup team took some time and that was difficult for everyone as the Playgroups are an integral part of MOCS and the community struggled without them. We ran as many as we could with reduced staff and then in March 2023 Sam Lackey and Laura Williams hit the ground running, with Tanya Clark's support, to get the playgroups going as quickly as possible. The sigh of relief was palpable within the team and the community, and I have recently visited all the playgroups and heard that whilst there was a period of adjustment the playgroups are now thriving.

This year has been very busy with the running of a range of new activities (as mentioned above) and running our core programs such as First Time Parents, Parenting Young in Hazelbrook, Family Fun Days, extra school holiday events for families, Art Fun and Feelings in partnership with BANC and Thrive, auspicing Wagana Dancers, as well as supporting ACRC's Koori Playgroup and maintaining our relationships with First Nations Elders.

## Manager's Report

As organisational leader, I have sadly pulled away from doing community development work and have been focusing on organisational matters such as HR and policy needs, IT support, development of a new database and evaluation framework, amending our DCJ contract and Program Logic, DEX reporting and supporting new staff to settle into new roles. This work is going well but it has highlighted the difficulty of small organisations like MOCS to keep up with new area of technology and compliance without any increased funding – something very familiar to the entire community sector in the Blue Mountains.

Most importantly though, is the fact that none of the above could have occurred without the commitment and dedication of the MOCS team: Elaine Cameron (Financial Officer), Tanya Clark (Child and Family Worker – community development), Laura Williams (Child and Family Worker – early childhood education), Sam Lackey (Playgroup Facilitator), Caludia Roosen (Community Development Project Officer, Christy Hartlage (Community Development Worker) and our casuals Nadia Cameron, Jeannie Elliot and Natasha Cesco. I also take this opportunity to thank the management committee: Cheryl Adams, Dee Wilde, Flinn Donovan, Susan Ambler, Sue Pearce, Sian Doko and Cecilia Hung. A special mention also to my external supervisor, Louise Sutcliffe, who has provided immeasurable support to me during these changing times.

Tatiana Lozano  
Organisational Leader



Tatiana Lozano. Photo by Maja Baska 2022

# MOCSS Programs

## First Time Parents (FTP)

The First Time Parents Groups have been steadily growing this year. It is pleasing to me as the facilitator of the groups to see parents growing in confidence and to see groups of parents becoming friends. FTP families have been connecting at other times in the week to go to mums and bub's movie mornings and meeting up at MOCS playgroups or at Heatherbrae or yoga or Pilates sessions. FTP groups are truly providing opportunities to make social connections. FTP families are also making use of services such as CAN. The community health nurse is also at Heatherbrae on Wednesdays, so parents can ask questions or have their babies weighed. Kate, the nurse, often pops in to check on the group and answer questions about starting solids or sleep concerns.

We celebrate with families as their babies reach their first birthdays and look forward to catching up with them at playgroups or Fun Days.

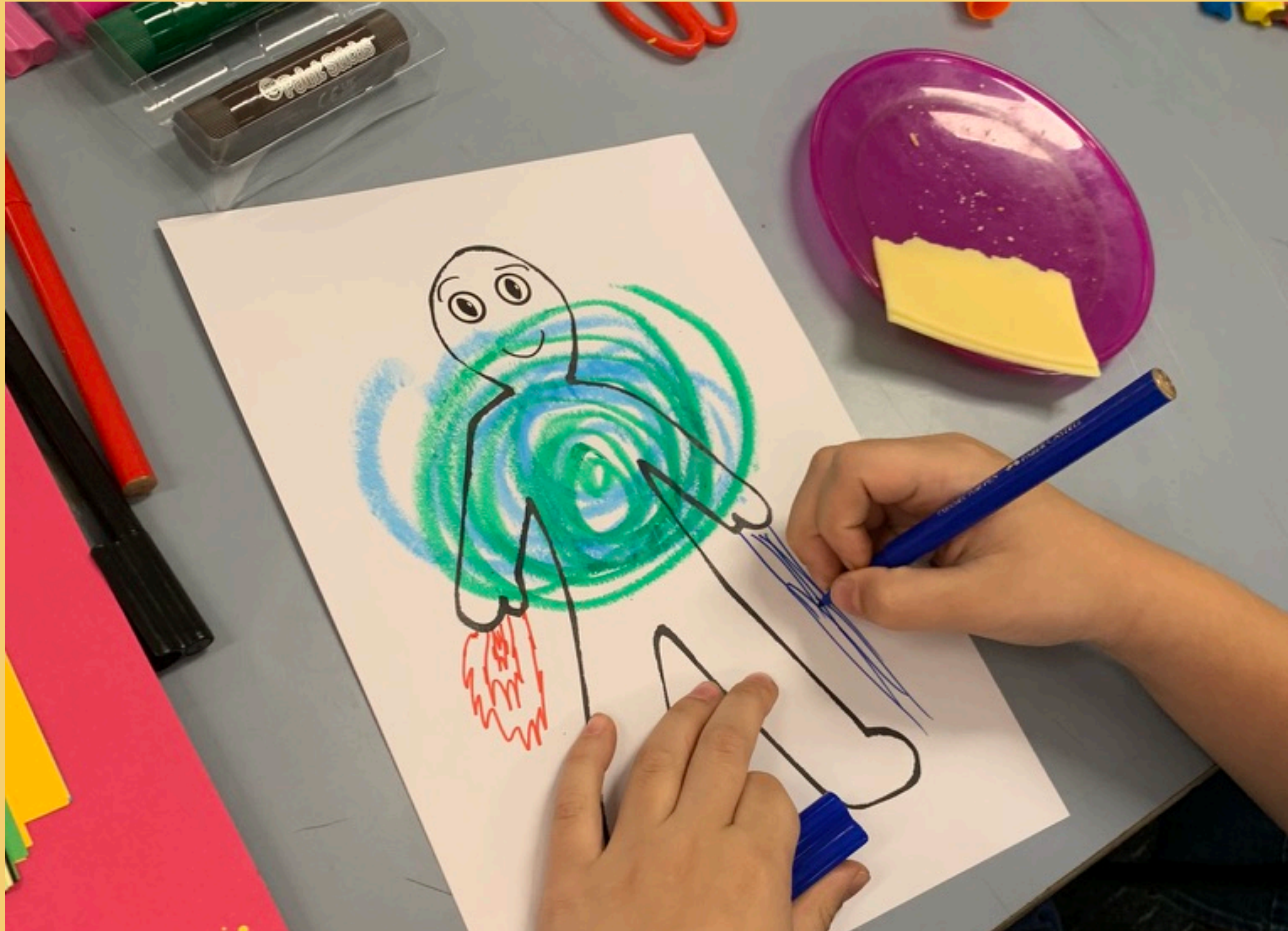
Christy Hartlage,  
Community Development Worker

## Parenting Courses

Interest in Art, Fun and Feelings continues to grow. We held groups in Term 2 in Lawson. We have been impressed by the level of emotional understanding and insight the children have, and the conversations that we have been able to have in the groups. The program is a finalist for a Mental Health Matters award.

We have also offered a session dog trainer Steve Austin about Keeping Children Safe with Dogs. Steve is an experienced dog trainer and has provided families with excellent resources about dog behavior to help families recognize the cues that dogs give before they attack. The session was informative and well attended.

Christy Hartlage,  
Community Development Worker



Art, Fun & Feelings. Christy Hartlage 2023



First Time Parents Babies. Christy Hartlage 2023



Art, Fun & Feelings. Christy Hartlage 2023

# Family Fun Events

Fun Mornings partnering with ACRC and Belong in the school holidays continue to be well attended by the community. In the April Holidays children built an impressive box village. We love seeing families making new friends and having time to play together. Nathan Spies and his team of volunteers from the Lawson Baptist Church have generously provided sausages for the Fun Days – a happy bonus for all of us!

Christy Hartlage  
Community Development Worker



Box Village Fun Day. Christy Hartlage 2023.

## Parenting Young (Hazelbrook)

Parenting Young continues to grow with many new faces. Over the last year we have seen 21 Families come along and on average 8-12 families would attend each session. Each term our working party meets to discuss the following term, how they can contribute to the group and what the group has told us they would like to do. We have a wonderful team, with Sara, Paige and Flinn from MYST, Fiona from Thrive, Ursula from Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre, Arlia from CTBM Community Legal Centre and Liz and Lesley from MOCS. They have all put in so much work to help keep this group growing with all their knowledge and skills. At the end of 2022 we said goodbye to our amazing Lesley, and we also lost Ursula to this group as she now helps with our Young Parents Circle in Lithgow. At the beginning of 2023 our Community Nurses through NSW Health were able to return to groups, so we welcomed Kirsten to our group.

We have acknowledged National PJ Day showing our support for foster children by wearing PJs for the day. Other days included International day of friendship where the parents learnt to make friendship bracelets, Science week where both the adults and children played with vinegar and bi-carb soda making a lovely mess, Wear it Purple Day, National Child Protection week "Every child, in every community, needs a fair go", National Simultaneous Story time reading "The Speedy Sloth" and National Reconciliation week where we made pom poms, talked around the fire pit with Flinn from MYST showing us some aboriginal symbols in the ash from the fire.

At Parenting Young, we have been bringing in activities for both the children and parents to get involved with. Some of these include planting seedlings to either plant in the garden, take home or share with the Plant Library that continues to go by itself with the help from the community. We have also made succulent fairy gardens in cups from the Op shops and succulents donated from Bunnings for Mother's Day. During Term 3 we worked on skills like crocheting, painting, using recycled bottle lids and building to make a scarecrow for the Scarecrow Festival in October where we displayed our fabulous Scarecrow alongside other Community scarecrows.

Tanya Clark,  
Community Development Worker (Child & Family)



## Young Parent Circle (Lithgow)

In late October we started our Young Parents Circle down in Lithgow after we were approached by the midwives at Lithgow Hospital. We worked alongside Thrive Family Services and Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre to get the Young Parents Circle up and running. Tracy from Thrive would attend one week and Ursula from BMWHRC would attend the next, which is great for families to get valuable information from both these fabulous workers.

Early in 2023 Tracy moved on and we were fortunate enough to gain her colleague Sheree, who has been working well with families.

Each week Tanya would bring along toys and activities for both the parents and children and then we would sit down altogether and enjoy a simple lunch supplied by either Thrive or BMWHRC. The group has been running for 23 sessions seeing 7 families overall. We have been working with a family who used to attend our Parenting Young group in Hazelbrook. This family now has 2 gorgeous children and attends on a regular basis and doesn't need to travel as far each week.

Tanya Clark,  
Community Development Worker (Child & Family)



Parenting Young. Photo by Tanya Clark 2022

## Youth Express (Blue Mountains)

2023, MOCS received funding from the Office of Regional Youth's Children and Young People Wellbeing Recovery Initiative to support a pilot project that used creative workshops to engage and consult with 8-13 year old young people in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow.

The Blue Mountains workshops took place in the April school holidays in 2023 in Blaxland, Lawson and Katoomba, partnering with MYST, Belong, ACRC and creative facilitators from Mountains Zine Club, NOFFS and independent artists.

The workshops received attendance of 51 young people across 5 workshops, and concluded with an exhibition of the young people's work titled, "What Makes You Mad? What Makes You Strong?", held in Katoomba. The exhibition served as a community event to meet with the participants families, other services, council and local community members, and share with them the outcomes of our project.

This work was born out of a seen need for support for children and young people who are currently slipping through the gaps in service provision and marks the beginning of our engagement with this demographic moving forward.

Claudia Roosen,  
Community Development Project Officer

## IDAHOBIT Inclusion Work

In late 2022, MOCS took on the role of secretariat organisation for the Blue Mountains IDAHOBIT Committee, and through this work, began consultations with Inclusion Trainer, Max May, to develop a package of LGBTQ+ Inclusion Training for Blue Mountains City Council's Front of House teams.

After stepping back from the role of IDAHOBIT Committee secretariat, MOCS decided to take our inclusion work in a different direction that suits our organisation.

Claudia Roosen,  
Community Development Project Officer

## Elders Lunch Consultation

Elder's Lunch is a program that is hosted in partnership with Belong Blue Mountains. It's an event for Indigenous and non-Indigenous older people to gather for a social lunch with entertainment. It used to run once a year.

In May 2023, Belong Blue Mountains partnered with MOCS and BMCC to host a consultation about the future of the Elder's Lunch program. We will be continuing to partner with Belong to deliver the Elder's Lunch Program in the future.

Claudia Roosen,  
Community Development Project Officer



Participants at Youth Express workshop in Katoomba, 2023. Photo by Claudia Roosen



Artworks from "What Makes You Mad?" 2023. Photo by Sudharmo Kossew



Visitors viewing Zines at "What Makes You Mad?" 2023. Photo by Sudharmo Kossew

## Survival Day

On January 26, 2023, MOCS attended ACRC's Survival Day event in North Katoomba and engaged with the community through creating badges for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their allies.

Claudia Roosen,  
Community Development Project Officer

## Mardi Gras/World Pride

As part of Mardi Gras/World Pride 2023, MYST held a Mardi Gras event with activities and a screening of the parade. MOCS attended with a badge-making activity, engaging with queer young people ages 11-24 years old.

Claudia Roosen,  
Community Development Project Officer

## Plant Library

The Plant Library outside of the MOCS office at Bungarrabee Centre in Hazelbrook was developed during Covid19, in our group we plant seedlings and put them out for the community to grab, swap or share on their walks.

Tanya Clark,  
Community Development Worker (Child & Family)

## Multicultural Social Group

One Multicultural evening with 2 families and one older couple which has now led to a multi-cultural social group that meets every other month on the last Friday evening to share a light meal and stories.

Tanya Clark,  
Community Development Worker (Child & Family)



Parenting Young Group. Photo by Tanya Clark 2022.



PY Scarecrow 2022. Photo by Tanya Clark



Playgroup Set Up 2022. Photo by Tanya Clark

# Supported Playgroups

From the end of March 2023, supported playgroups at MOCS saw 2 new facilitators, Samantha Lackey and Laura Williams came on board after Jane Marshall and Lesley Lancaster left the organisation.

During this time it has been a time of significant change for playgroup in terms of staffing. Families earlier on aired concerns about whether Playgroups would continue and it has taken most of this half of the year to reassure families and the community that Playgroups are an integral part of the MOCS organisation.

During Term 1 2023, there needed to be a suspension and reduction of supported playgroups due to staff shortages, so our numbers dropped during this time for obvious reasons.

Playgroups have been back at 3 days a week during school terms. Tuesdays at Wilson Park, Wentworth Falls, Wednesdays at Hazelbrook Scout Hall and Thursdays at Buttenshaw Park near the aquatic end. We run all these playgroups 10am-12midday.

The word seems to be spreading throughout the community that playgroups are back on a regular basis and we have seen an increase in numbers and regular attendances. Wentworth Falls Playgroup has seen an increase in regular families attending, some families coming from Lithgow, Mt Victoria and Blackheath.

We have been lucky enough this year to have had beautiful weather and only a minimal amount of cancellations due to family illness. Our casual pool has also begun to increase which makes cancellations less likely with more availability.

We continue to have many conversations about the lack of availability of preschools and long days care for children especially the 0-3yrs cohort. We are seeing a huge trend in grandparents attending playgroups due to parents/carers having to return to work (10+ families). We have also seen some increase in friends or other family members taking on the care of the children at times.

We have celebrated reconciliation week, and provided families with experiences that opened up conversations that may have never been addressed before. We also participated in Simultaneous Storytime this year.

We provide regular updates on our facebook page and specifically our facebook playgroup private group, especially to communicate if we are running playgroups on the day and information if cancellation is necessary. There are currently 592 members in our private group with additions happening weekly.

Samantha Lackey,  
Child & Family Worker (Early Childhood Educator)



Playgroup 2023. Photo by Tanya Clark



Hazelbrook Scout Hall Playgroup. Photo by Elaine Cameron 2022.



MOCS Plant Library outside Bungarrabee Centre. Photo by Lesley Lancaster

# Koori Playgroup

Koori Playgroup is a weekly program that is run by ACRC (Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre) in partnership with MOCS.

MOCS worker, Lesley Lancaster supported this program by attending as a child and family worker. At the end of 2022, Lesley left MOCS, and passed on the work she was doing for Koori Playgroup to Christy Hartlage.

The families enjoyed spending time with Aunty Marie and getting to know Christy as the new worker and the program continued to change shape as we moved through the year.

Christy Hartlage,  
Community Development Worker



Koori Playgroup 2021-2. Photos by Lesley Lancaster.



## Networks & Partnerships

- CAVA, Coalition Against Violence & Abuse – We continue to work closely with CAVA on actions against violence in the Mountains.
- MMFN, Mid Mountains Family Network – Arising from these network meetings are concerns about increasing anxiety, neurodivergence, and behavioural and social issues. Schools are struggling to support families with additional needs. Preschools and daycare centers are working at capacity with long waiting lists. We are working to develop programs for Neurodivergent children and families to address some of these needs.
- MMI, Mountains Multicultural Interagency - MOCS is represented in the regular MMI meetings. These meetings form strategies on how to include multicultural communities in service delivery across the mountains.
- SFA, Stronger Families Alliance – MOCS remains involved with the Stronger Families Alliance, and all of our programs are promoted through their networks.
- BMCI, Blue Mountains Community Interagency (BMCI) - is a member-based forum established by Mountains Community Resource Network, the peak body of community organisations within the Blue Mountains. Attended by Tatiana Lozano, Liz Smith, Christy Hartlage or Claudia Roosen
- YMISA – Youth Mental Illness & Substance Abuse is a network of agencies and individuals, both government and non-government, working to improve the mental health outcomes of young people living in the Blue Mountains. MYST is the lead agency in a number of YMISA initiatives including research, staff training, sector networking and a range harm minimization campaigns.
- Blue Mountains Youth Interagency - MOCS continues to be represented in these monthly meetings and it informs the work we are developing with 8-13 year olds.
- Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre (ACRC)
- Belong BM
- Blue Mountains Womens Health and Resource Centre (BMWHR)
- Connect Child and Family Services
- Gateway
- Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST)
- Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District
- Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN)
- Thrive
- Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre (BANC)
- Street University (NOFFS)
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Blue Mountains Zine Club

