

ANNUAL REPORT

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About GROW

GROW is a national community-based organisation that has been supporting mental health recovery since 1957. Founded by people with lived experience, GROW offers free, peer-to-peer support groups that empower individuals to take charge of their wellbeing. No referral or diagnosis is needed—just a willingness to connect. Meetings are held weekly, in person or online, and follow a structured format that encourages reflection, connection, and growth.

A Caring Community

Grow groups provide a safe, non-judgmental space where members share experiences, build resilience, and form lasting friendships. Community is central, members often support each other beyond meetings through social events, training, and leadership opportunities.

Peer-Led and Empowering

GROW's model is led by members not professionals. The program is guided by the Blue Book, a living document of recovery tools and wisdoms built over 67 years. As members progress, many take on volunteer leadership roles, helping others and shaping GROW's direction at local and national levels.

GROW continues to be a powerful force for change—offering connection, compassion, and community to those navigating mental health challenges. Through its peer-led model, GROW helps individuals reclaim their lives with dignity, agency, and hope.

GROW Statement of Strategic Intent



Vision
GROW is widely recognised as the premier provider of intentional peer to peer support to promote hope, mutual help and recovery for good mental health for people throughout Australia.



Mission -
We enable people and communities to grow, recover and maintain good mental health.



- Values**
- ▶ **Personal Responsibility**
We act ethically and always take responsibility for our actions.
 - ▶ **Personal Value**
We believe every person has intrinsic value.
 - ▶ **Friendship**
We support each other and act with courage in the best interest of GROW.
 - ▶ **Mutual help**
We collaborate and share knowledge, skills and expertise for the personal development and leadership of all.
 - ▶ **Community**
We create a caring and sharing community to provide a sense of belonging, social connectedness, and purpose to everyday life.



- Top 5 Strategic Objectives**
- ▶ Be the National Leader in Lived Experience co-design and mental health recovery acknowledging everyone can grow.
 - ▶ Be the Leading provider of dual diagnosis rehabilitation and recovery centres across Australia.
 - ▶ Adopt innovative practices to continually transform our systems and processes in an evolving sector.
 - ▶ Be a sustainable workplace of choice committed to lived experience, leadership, employee and volunteer development and diversity with a mentally healthy principles-based culture.
 - ▶ Consistently measure and communicate the positive outcomes of GROW's intentional peer to peer support model to strengthen credibility and influence and solidify Grow's role as a vital component of the mental health continuum.



“ To every Grower, volunteer, staff member, and supporter—thank you. Your courage, commitment, and care are the heartbeat of this movement.”

Chair of the Board - John Della Bosca A.M

This year has truly showcased the strength and resilience of the GROW community. Across Australia, we've seen Growers step into new leadership roles, communities support one another, and our peer-led movement flourish. A key driver of this momentum has been the inspiring leadership of our new CEO, Elaine De Vos.

Elaine's first year has been marked by clarity, energy, and connection. She's engaged with stakeholders nationwide—from funders and government ministers to community partners—bringing renewed focus to our mission.

From Queensland's partnerships in hospitals to South Australia's social spirit, Western Australia's unwavering commitment to continue until new funding commenced, and the Northern Territory's quiet persistence, each Branch has shown what's possible when people support people. Victoria has continued its great track record delivering Get Growing, whilst our staff in Tasmania operate with passion and connection. NSW is expanding its offering to Rainbow Groups and successfully reaching regional communities. Across the country there is a lot to be proud of in the work that GROW does.

At the national level, I've had the privilege of representing GROW in meetings with key government ministers to discuss the vital role GROW plays in delivering cost effective mental health solutions. Importantly this year we met with the NSW Health Minister Ryan Park MP to outline our plans for expansion in AOD facilities both in NSW and elsewhere.

Odd Socks Day 2024 was another great opportunity to spread the word about GROW and my interview for Sky News was a great opportunity to do just that. These conversations helped raise awareness of our work and advocate for the value of lived experience leadership in mental health recovery. It was an honour to support our members and amplify their voices.

The National Office continues to provide the backbone of our operations, ensuring our teams are supported, aligned, and equipped to deliver life-changing support in local communities. To every Grower, volunteer, staff member, and supporter—thank you. Your courage, commitment, and care are the heartbeat of this movement. Together, we've built something extraordinary.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my fellow Board Directors for their unwavering commitment, insight, and stewardship throughout the year. Your collective wisdom continues to guide our organisation with strength and purpose.

This year, we bid farewell to two esteemed colleagues—Colin Seery and Geeta Ranmuthugala—whose contributions and advocacy have enriched our work in countless ways. On behalf of the Board, I thank them both for their service and wish them every success in their future endeavours.

John Della Bosca, Chairman



“ Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive GROW—one that is ready to grow in scale, deepen its impact, and remain true to its founding values. ”

National CEO – Elaine De Vos

As I close out my first year as CEO of GROW, I'm proud to share a year marked by connection, renewal, and strategic momentum. It has been a privilege to travel across the country, meeting with funders, government ministers, industry associations, and community leaders who share our belief in the transformative power of peer-led mental health support. These conversations have not only deepened our partnerships—they've helped shape a bold, unified vision for GROW's future.

We've made significant progress in expanding our footprint, most notably in the Northern Territory, where we've partnered with the government's veterans support initiatives to deliver resilience-based programs. These efforts are part of our response to the 'Shine a Light on Suicide' campaign, aiming to foster mental wellbeing and community connection among those who have served. In Western Australia I'm delighted to announce a partnership with the Western Australian Primary Health Alliance (WAPHA) which in addition to supporting our Grow groups we will be delivering our resilience based program, Growing Resilience and Get Growing our school based program which is a strength based program for seniors preparing to transition from school to university.

A key focus this year has been establishing strong strategic priorities across every state and territory. In close collaboration with our Board and Executive Team, we've aligned our programs with the strategic objectives outlined in both state and federal mental health frameworks. This alignment ensures our programs are inclusive, evidence-informed and responsive to the diverse needs of the communities we serve.

This has led to the launch of new Young Adult and Rainbow Groups, the revitalisation of social engagement activities, and the strengthening of volunteer pathways. We've also commenced our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and have begun a formal partnership with Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation to develop a culturally safe Growing Resilience program for families of the stolen generation.

I've also had the privilege of amplifying our message through the "Sock It to Stigma" campaign—speaking on radio, and appearing in the media, helping Australians challenge perceptions of mental health. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and it's clear that our message is resonating. Behind the scenes, we've begun reconnecting with the rich body of research and program evaluations that have shaped GROW over the years. This strategic work is laying the foundation for a renewed approach to impact measurement—one that honours our legacy while embracing innovation. I'm excited to share more in our first-ever Impact Report, due later this year.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our Growers, our National Program Team, volunteers, staff, and supporters. Your stories, leadership, and unwavering commitment continue to inspire me. Thank you for welcoming me into this role. The journey ahead is bright, and I look forward to walking it with you.

Elaine De Vos, Chief Executive Officer



National Program Team, from left to right – Heath Fereday, Mark Lacey, Darryl Ballestrin, Frank Carsburg

National Program Team (NPT) Report

In 2024, GROW's National Program Team (NPT)—known as the Guardians of authentic Grow—continued its vital work in maintaining and developing the Grow Program. Comprised of seasoned leaders from across Australia, the team welcomed new members Kathryn Ryan (QLD), Greg Indriksons (NSW), and Jo Leslie (VIC), all of whom bring deep experience and ongoing commitment to GROW's mission. Dishni Fernando and Maria Thwaites provided extensive administrative support, contributing countless hours to the work of the team.

Blue Book Review

The NPT led a two-year national co-design process to update the Blue Book, GROW's foundational recovery guide. Involving hundreds of members and volunteers, this rewrite—the first since 2014—will launch in 2025/26 and reflects GROW's grassroots approach to mental health.

Group Method & Leadership

The team also revised the Group Method agenda to support consistent, effective meetings across all formats, including in-person, online, hybrid, and specialised groups. A new framework for Seasoned Grow Leadership was introduced, outlining clear pathways for members to step into leadership roles.

Innovation & Collaboration

Policy updates included the development of audio/visual resources to enhance group meetings and embrace new technologies. Regular review of Branch reports and feedback helped strengthen leadership, training, and connection across the Grow network.

Special thanks to NCEO Elaine DeVos, Board Chair John Della Bosca, and all contributors for supporting this important work. The NPT continues to play a key role in shaping GROW's future through lived experience, collaboration, and care.

Our Services

The Grow Program: A Supportive Path to Personal Recovery

The **Grow Program** is a free, inclusive, and structured **12-step journey** designed to support individuals in their recovery and personal development. Rooted in principles that nurture **mental, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing**, GROW offers a welcoming space for anyone seeking help, connection, and growth—no referral or diagnosis required.

Each week, members come together in **peer-led meetings**, either **face-to-face** or through **online eGrow Groups**, to share their experiences, challenges, and strategies for self-improvement. These meetings follow a consistent format, creating a **safe, caring, and confidential environment** where participants feel supported and understood.

What Makes Grow Unique:

- ▶ **Free to join** with no medical referral or diagnosis needed
- ▶ **Anonymity respected** members can choose to remain anonymous
- ▶ **Structured weekly meetings** guided by GROW's proven 12-step approach
- ▶ **Peer-to-peer support** that fosters mutual understanding and connection
- ▶ **Safe and non-judgmental space** for sharing life's challenges

Newcomers are encouraged to **listen without speaking** during their first meeting, allowing them to settle in without pressure. Hearing others' stories often brings comfort and clarity, helping new members realise their feelings and struggles are shared—and that they're not alone.

GROW is more than a recovery program—it's **a community of hope**. Through shared experience and mutual support, members build resilience, rediscover their strengths, and take meaningful steps toward a healthier, more connected life.

Our Specialist Groups

Young Adults Group – Growing Peer Support Nationwide

In 2024, GROW expanded its Young Adult (YA) program to meet the unique mental health needs of younger Australians. These peer-led groups offer safe, recovery-focused spaces for connection, identity exploration, and personal growth.

This year saw the launch of GROW's first-ever YA group in Queensland, providing a vital entry point for young people seeking structured, mutual support. With strong engagement, plans are underway to establish an in-person group in 2025/26.

In Victoria and South Australia, face-to-face YA groups were relaunched and quickly flourished—especially in Melbourne, where university students attend for both personal wellbeing and volunteer experience. These groups have shown the power of in-person connection in a post-COVID world.

“I always leave feeling better.”

YA group member

GROW's YA initiative offers an empowering alternative to clinical pathways, fostering resilience and leadership. In NSW, new groups are being developed in Burwood and Marrickville in partnership with youth services, ensuring the program reflects real needs.

Looking ahead, GROW is committed to expanding YA groups across urban, regional, and remote communities—online and in person—so every young adult can access hope, connection, and strength through lived experience.

Carers Group – A Space for Support and Strength

In 2024, GROW's Carers Group in Victoria continued to provide a safe, nurturing space for those supporting loved ones with mental ill-health. Grounded in mutual support and lived experience, the group helps carers prioritise their own wellbeing, build connection, and find strength through shared understanding. With support from Carers Victoria, the group hosted a special National Carers Week event featuring art therapy—a creative outlet for reflection and emotional expression. Members also enjoyed a cultural outing to the National Gallery of Victoria, offering moments of joy and relaxation for those who often carry heavy emotional loads.

Led by two experienced peer mentors, the group fosters confidence, leadership, and personal growth. Their guidance helps newer members find their voice and build resilience.

GROW remains committed to expanding initiatives that honour carers and transform their insight into empowerment—ensuring those who support others are supported too.

Prison & Transition Groups – Recovery Behind and Beyond Bars

GROW currently runs three weekly peer-led groups across two correctional facilities in Victoria. In the past year, these in-custody groups held 125 meetings with over 1,000 attendances, offering 2,667 hours of structured mental health support. Participants describe the groups as a lifeline—providing routine, empathy, and hope in an isolating environment.

“It helps with my mental health.”

“The trust and confidentiality in the group allows me to speak honestly and stay on track.”

“I find great value in developing a sense of empathy—that I am not alone in my situation.”

“The Grow program is excellent, and the support is great.”

“I look forward to the weekly meeting—it's a safe space that gives me hope.”

In 2025, GROW celebrated the first anniversary of its Community Transition Group, supporting individuals as they reintegrate into society. With steady membership and the election of its first lived experience leader, the group reflects recovery, reconnection, and personal growth.

Both in-custody and transition groups operate with a strong duty of care, trauma-informed facilitation, and collaboration with Corrections Victoria and clinical supports. GROW remains committed to expanding these programs—honouring lived experience and helping individuals rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

Growing Resilience

In 2024, GROW's Growing Resilience 6-week Program supported 390 participants across 286 sessions and 56 programs—totalling 1,339 attendances. Originally developed during COVID, the program has evolved into a dynamic face-to-face offering in Queensland and Sydney, thanks to committed staff and targeted funding.

Program Highlights:

- ▶ **Queensland:** The hospital ward-based model has become a standout success, with sessions now delivered weekly. Interest is growing, with more hospitals requesting the program.
- ▶ **Sydney:** With support from the Central Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network, the program became a regular feature in community spaces. Despite early challenges with venues and referrals, the team delivered strong outcomes and meaningful engagement.

Tailored Peer Support Initiatives:

- ▶ **LGBTQIA+ Asylum Seekers:** In partnership with the Asylum Seekers Centre, Grow facilitated a safe, affirming group for individuals navigating displacement and identity challenges.
- ▶ **Homelessness:** Collaborations with housing and outreach services provided peer-led support to individuals rebuilding confidence and connection.
- ▶ **Older Adults:** A program at Bupa Ashbury helped aged care residents combat isolation and foster community.
- ▶ **A culturally sensitive version** is being co-designed with Sister Kate's Kids Aboriginal Corporation for WA.
- ▶ **In the Northern Territory,** the program is now part of Operation Resilience, supporting ADF families with structured, peer-led recovery tools.

"Hospitals are now asking for Growing Resilience on the wards—people are talking!"
Program Worker

"Participants are showing up, week after week, ready to connect and build their resilience together."
Program Worker

"The transition from online to face-to-face delivery has been a game-changer."
Program Manager

"Collaborating with Sister Kate's is ensuring we deliver a program that is culturally meaningful and safe."
Program Manager

"Growing Resilience isn't just a program—it's a movement of people learning how to thrive, together."
Program Worker

"I've learnt how to assert boundaries and be a better friend."
Participant

"At first, they wouldn't talk. Now they stay back after the group, laughing and supporting each other."
Program Worker

"It's good to talk to your peers. We can support each other even when we don't have all the answers."
Participant

"The young people are helping us keep the program current—they're co-designing the future of Get Growing."
Program Worker

"The GG program is fun, cool and great!"
Participant

"We don't always have the answers, but we can be there to listen and hold space."
Participant

Get Growing: A Year of Impact

This past financial year, 238 young people across NSW, Victoria, and South Australia took part in Grow's Get Growing Program, engaging in 167 sessions across 23 program deliveries—with a total of 1,228 attendances. These numbers reflect the deep need and value of the program in young lives.

Get Growing isn't just about mental health—it's about connection, confidence, and community. Young people find their voice, support one another, and learn practical strategies to navigate life's ups and downs. Sessions are co-designed with youth input, with participants educating program workers on current trends, social media, and communication styles—ensuring the content stays fresh and relevant.

Program Highlights ('Roses'):

At Crib Point Primary, Year 6 students learned to assert boundaries and express emotions. One student shared, "The GG program is fun, cool, and great!"

At Beaumaris Secondary, Year 8 boys explored masculinity and vulnerability. A participant said, "We are all different, but we relate—we're not alone."

- ▶ In a Year 7 group, a previously disengaged student ended the program by sharing heartfelt reflections on peer support during dark times—showing the transformation of the group into a safe, supportive space.

Following a successful rollout in the Northern Rivers, flood-related funding concluded in June 2025, but the dedicated team continues to support new projects. In the Northern Territory, the pilot program Operation Resilience—funded by the NTG Department of People, Sports and Culture—has sparked high demand, with schools now waitlisted.

GROW is actively advocating across all states and territories to ensure Get Growing continues to reach the communities that need it most.

eGrow – Connection and Recovery, anywhere

In 2024–25, eGrow remained a vital part of GROW’s mental wellbeing programs, offering flexible, online peer support to people across Australia. With 17 groups operating nationally, eGrow delivered 732 meetings and welcomed 376 participants—including 109 first timers.

The program continues to attract a younger demographic and improve access for those in regional areas, with caregiving responsibilities, or balancing work and study. This year saw the launch of our first Young Adult eGrow groups in Queensland and South Australia, both led by passionate lived experience volunteers.

GROW also supported six hybrid groups, blending online and in-person participation across 249 meetings. Hybrid delivery helps members stay connected even when circumstances change.

An independent review confirmed eGrow is just as effective as face-to-face groups, with the same core strengths: shared leadership, mutual support, and a structured, recovery-focused environment. Online socials were also expanded to help members connect beyond their weekly meetings.

By offering choice and accessibility, eGrow ensures Grow’s mission reaches people wherever they are—providing consistent, empowering pathways to recovery in a changing world.

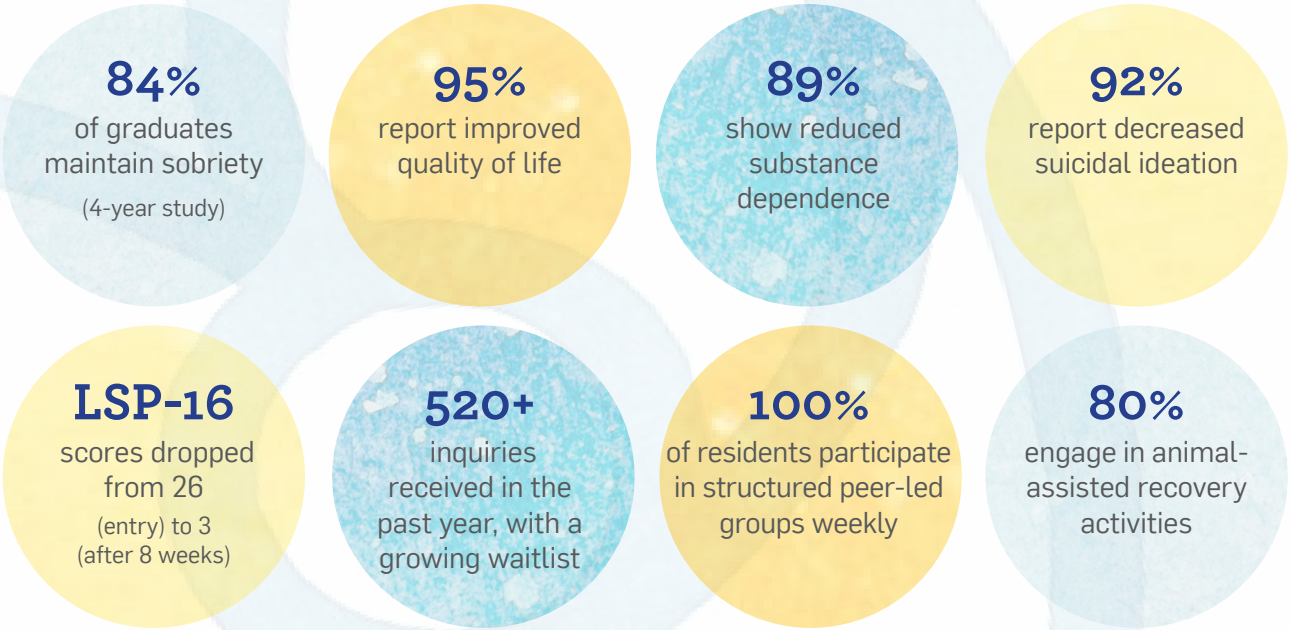
Residential Rehabilitation Program

Grow Residential Rehabilitation – West Hoxton, NSW

Grow’s Residential Rehabilitation Centre in West Hoxton is the only long-term dual diagnosis facility in NSW, supporting adults with co-occurring mental health and substance misuse challenges. Set on 7 acres of farmland, the 18-bed centre offers a therapeutic environment enriched by nature and animals—creating a unique setting for recovery.

Using the Therapeutic Community Model, residents engage in peer-led support, structured routines, and personalised care. Clinical governance is overseen by Clinical Lead Mia Kennedy, ensuring safe, evidence-based treatment including withdrawal support and harm minimisation.

Program Impact (2024–25):



Mums & Bubs Program – Werrington

Grow is developing a 20-bed residential centre for mothers with newborns—addressing a major gap in NSW services. Many detox centres exclude pregnant women or mothers with babies, leaving them without support.

Key Challenges:

- ▶ Wait times of **6–12 months**
- ▶ No childcare in most rehab settings
- ▶ Detox centres exclude women beyond **20 weeks pregnant**
- ▶ High risk of returning to unsafe environments due to lack of support

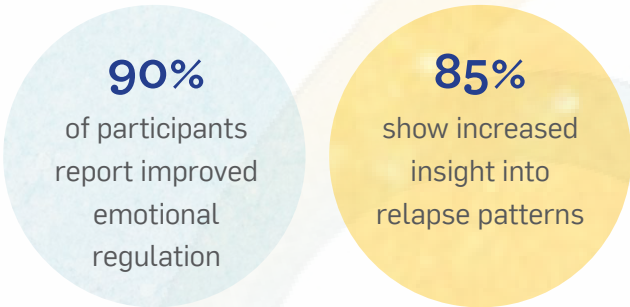
Grow has been endorsed by NADA and is part of its working group advocating for urgent funding. The program has strong stakeholder interest and is ready to launch once funding is secured.

AF-DBT Program

Grow’s Addiction-Focused DBT program, developed with Tranquil Minds, combines psychoeducation with therapeutic tools tailored for dual diagnosis recovery. Running for over 18 months, the 12-week program includes:

- ▶ Core mindfulness
- ▶ Emotion regulation
- ▶ Relapse prevention
- ▶ AOD-specific modules (e.g. stages of change, addiction brain)

Outcomes:



Family Carers & Friends Support

GROW has piloted a 4-week program for families affected by AOD use, recognising that recovery improves when families are involved. The program addresses the emotional, relational, and practical challenges families face and is currently seeking funding to expand.

Tasmania Expansion

Following GROW’s 2025 Road Show, the organisation was accepted into Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council Tasmania (ATDC) and invited to present at its annual conference. Strong interest from stakeholders has led to ongoing discussions about bringing Grow’s dual diagnosis model to Tasmania—including the Mums & Bubs program.

Research/Data Collection – Residential: -

GROW has a strong partnership with Western Sydney University, and in July, both Aaron Beatus and GROW’s clinical lead Mia, embarked on an ambitious project to work with over 30 students on research papers and data collection to support GROW’s residential offering, specifically around new programs that have been developed by GROW.

The students were split up into four working groups, and over a 16-week cycle, will develop a detailed Position Paper on the following subjects: -

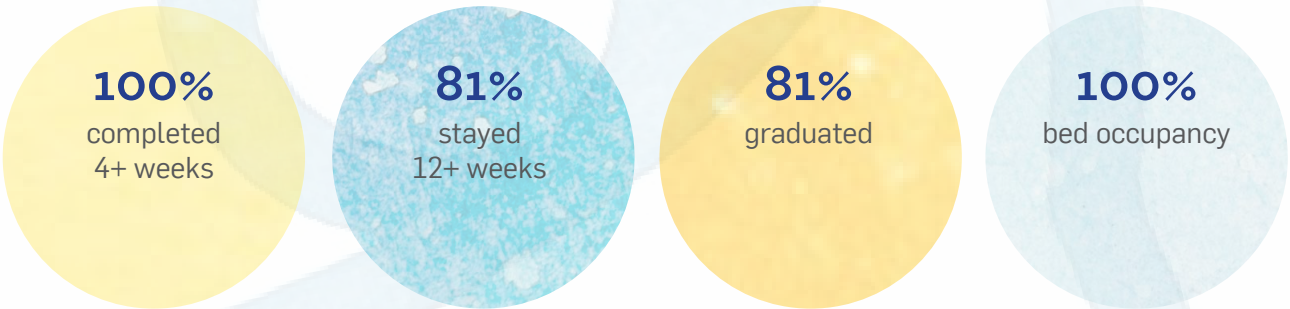
- ▶ Dual Diagnosis – GROW’s Unique Program & the need for more support.
- ▶ Mothers with Newborn Babies; Withdrawal & Support Centre – Gap Analysis and the need for more funding in this area.
- ▶ Addiction Focused DBT – Again another unique program to GROW, developed over two years with our Clinical Lead & myself & trialled at GROW in 2024, reaping amazing results.
- ▶ Family, Carers & Friends support Groups – also a program developed by GROW (4 week duration).

All four groups have gone out to organisations, peak bodies, stakeholders and individuals, and have accumulated survey results and relevant data to support their papers.

ACT Grow House Snapshot

GROW’s ACT House is the only residential rehab in the territory treating mental health and substance misuse together. It’s a key part of the ACT’s support network and aims to expand services for youth with government backing.

Key Stats:



In July 2025, two residents graduated and secured housing and jobs with support from ACT House lead Matthew Loader.

GROW maintains strong partnerships with FDS, Canberra Health Services, and CARE ACT, and runs regular orientations with hospitals and MH services to boost awareness and referrals.

Odd Socks Day 2024 – Sock It to Stigma with Heart

Odd Socks Day 2024 brought thousands of Australians together to “Sock It to Stigma,” sparking conversations, connection, and compassion around mental health. More than just a fundraiser, the campaign is a national moment of solidarity—celebrating the courage of lived experience and the power of peer support.

Across the country, GROW staff, members, and supporters wore their odd socks with pride, hosting walks, morning teas, BBQs, school events, and community gatherings. From Queensland to Victoria, people shared stories, raised awareness of stigma, and championed mental wellbeing. Two internal online events brought staff and board members together, reinforcing the shared mission and culture of care that drives GROW.

The campaign reached over 43,000 people on social media, with 727 click-throughs to the website and a remarkable 9.5% donation conversion rate. Website sales and donations totalled \$7056, with 61% of new donors chose to give monthly. Donations in September and October, totalled \$5173, while sock sales added \$1883 from August to December.

Media coverage amplified the message, reaching over 500,000 people through TV, radio, and online stories featuring the CEO, Chairman, and GROW lived experience spokespeople. With an ad space value of \$286K, the campaign’s visibility matched its impact.

Key wins included a mobile-friendly donation page, strong CEO profiling, and a social strategy that turned awareness into action—all driven by community spirit and a shared commitment to ending stigma.



Branch Reports

GROW Victoria 2024 - 2025 Strengthening Leadership

In 2024, GROW Victoria deepened its commitment to mental health recovery, inclusion, and community connection across the state. Rooted in lived experience and mutual support, GROW’s programs reached hundreds of Victorians through weekly peer-led groups, social activities, leadership development, and outreach in hospitals and education settings.

Reach and Impact:



These activities helped combat loneliness and isolation, offering safe spaces for people to build friendships, rediscover hope, and strengthen emotional wellbeing.

Lived Experience Leadership:

A major focus in 2024 was empowering members to lead.

- ▶ 50 individuals stepped into leadership roles
- ▶ 73 training sessions delivered 1,736 hours of development
- ▶ 11 leaders contributed to governance, peer-reviewed content, and Communities of Practice

“My confidence and maturity have grown immensely as a mentor. Grow has helped me to help others in positive ways.”

Education Partnerships:

GROW partnered with TAFEs and universities to offer students real-world exposure to recovery-oriented care. Students from Mental Health, Peer Work, Social Work, and Psychology programs engaged with GROW’s model, contributing to leadership development and program delivery. Several transitioned into the peer workforce, demonstrating the power of lived experience in shaping future professionals.

Trauma-Informed, Recovery-Oriented Practice:

Every Grow group fosters dignity, safety, and self-agency. Whether through group meetings, hospital outreach, youth education, or leadership pathways, GROW Victoria continues to create spaces where people with lived experience can connect, recover, and thrive.

GROW Tasmania 2024 - 2025 Leading with Trauma Informed Approaches

In 2024, GROW Tasmania delivered 241 group meetings and 54 social activities, supporting 1,275 attendances and over 2,147 hours of connection. These peer-led programs offered safe, structured spaces for recovery and helped reduce isolation across the state.

Partnerships grew with the Peacock Centre and Live Well Tasmania, including the launch of a new Wynyard group. Lived experience members shared their recovery journeys with hospital patients, offering hope and connection in clinical settings.

GROW also played a leadership role in sector advocacy through the Mental Health Council of Tasmania, promoting co-designed, trauma-informed approaches.

Looking ahead, GROW will continue expanding regional support and amplifying lived experience voices statewide.

“After being hospitalised with severe depression, I saw a GROW flyer on the ward wall and decided to give it a try—even though I didn’t think ‘groups’ were for me. The moment I walked in, I felt welcome, supported, and understood. GROW offered me structure, purpose, and a sense of belonging when I had none. I’ve shared my journey with hospital patients, students, and others to show that recovery is possible. GROW gave me hope, and now I’m proud to pass that hope on.”

GROW New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory 2024 - 2025

Supporting Diversity and Delivering into the Regions

GROW continues to deliver impactful peer-to-peer mental health support across New South Wales and the ACT, with over 32 active groups supporting more than 350 members. These groups span online, face-to-face, and hybrid formats, ensuring accessibility and flexibility for diverse communities.

Funding Success

GROW secured a major funding extension with Western Sydney Local Health District through to July 2028, reflecting strong performance and consistent delivery against KPIs. Funding with Southern LHD was also renewed for another year, allowing continued support in key regions.

Targeted Support Initiatives

- ▶ **Women's Group – Mullumbimby:** A dedicated weekly group for women impacted by domestic violence and trauma, offering solidarity, safety, and healing through shared lived experience.
- ▶ **CALD Community Groups:** One group currently supports Greek-background members, with a new Arabic-heritage group launching in late 2025 to meet growing demand for culturally responsive support.
- ▶ **Young Adult Groups:** New groups for ages 18–25 are set to launch in Newtown and Marrickville in September 2025. These are being shaped by a youth-led steering committee, including experienced Growers and young volunteers, in collaboration with partners like YMCA and Inner West Youth Alliance. Outreach and marketing have begun, with the goal of creating safe, inclusive spaces that address social anxiety and psychological distress—affecting 1 in 3 young adults in NSW.

Rainbow Groups – Murrumbidgee Region

In response to the MPHN LGBTIQ+ Health Needs Assessment, GROW developed its new Rainbow Groups initiative to support queer communities facing high rates of mental health challenges and service access barriers. With 74% of respondents reporting mental health struggles and 65% feeling disconnected from their local LGBTIQ+ community, the need was clear.

GROW successfully secured a psychosocial grant and formed a Rainbow Working Group of lived experience leaders to co-design the program. A new Program Worker has been recruited, and the first Rainbow Group is set to launch in September 2025. This initiative is seen as a potential national model for inclusive, peer-led support.

GROW NSW & ACT remains committed to expanding trauma-informed, recovery-focused programs that reflect the lived realities of diverse communities—ensuring everyone has access to safe, empowering support.

GROW Queensland 2024 - 2025

Building Connection and Leadership

This year, GROW Queensland continued to grow a vibrant, self-governed mental health community rooted in connection and lived experience. New Grow leaders stepped into volunteer roles with courage and were warmly welcomed, enriching our Branch Program, Literature, Social, and Leadership Teams. A highlight was the launch of our Young Adults Grow Group (18–35), expanding support for younger members.

Our Growing Resilience program gained momentum, thanks to strong partnerships with Metro North Hospital and Health Service and the Irish Australian Support Association of Queensland. Delivered consistently in person, it's meeting a growing need for peer-to-peer support.

We've also strengthened social connection through region-wide events in Brisbane North, Brisbane South, Gold Coast, and online—creating space for friendships and shared recovery beyond weekly groups.

Community Highlights

- ▶ **Community Weekend:** 35 members gathered on the Sunshine Coast for connection, reflection, and fun.
- ▶ **Odd Socks Day & Walk for Awareness:** Queensland Growers proudly joined national campaigns to "Sock It to Stigma" and raise mental health awareness.
- ▶ **Trivia & Birthday Events:** New social traditions that brought joy and unity.
- ▶ **New Grow Groups:** Young Adults eGrow, Palm Beach, Redcliffe and Nerang.
- ▶ **Welcoming Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work students** into our community.

Thank you to Queensland Health, our supporters, staff, and most of all, our Growers—your courage and commitment are the heartbeat of everything we do.



GROW South Australia 2024–2025
A Year of Connection, Creativity and Community Leadership

This year, GROW South Australia has flourished through the collective energy of our members, volunteers, and staff. Guided by GROW's principle of member-led development, we've seen renewed collaboration across Branch Leadership, Literature, and Social Teams—bringing fresh ideas and deeper engagement to our community.

One of the year's highlights was the Community Weekend at Wirraway, where over 35 Growers came together for nature walks, reflection, and hilarious skits that sparked joy and connection. That same spirit carried into our Christmas Party, with 55 attendees, surprise gifts from Brenton Williams as Secret Santa, and a splash of theatrical fun from our staff team.

Social connection has been a major focus, with a surge in group-led events including:

- ▶ Mini golf and bowling days
- ▶ Botanical Gardens outing
- ▶ Boxing Day social
- ▶ Weekly music group (thanks to Aussie from Monday group)
- ▶ Art journaling workshops (led by Peta H)
- ▶ Odd Socks Day celebrations across the state

We've also seen strong growth in our weekly Grow Groups, with some expanding into multiple meetings due to high attendance. Outreach efforts have led to new groups, hospital orientations, and stronger referral networks.

Special thanks to:

- ▶ **Brenton Williams**, for raising \$35K through the Red Faces Variety Night
- ▶ **Nadia Clancy MP**, our local patron and suicide prevention advocate, for her ongoing support
- ▶ **Seaford Rotary**, for partnering on the Seaside Walk and Odd Socks Day
- ▶ **SA Health**, for their continued belief in our mission and support of our unique peer-to-peer model

To every Grower, volunteer, and staff member—thank you for your courage, creativity, and commitment. We look forward to building on this momentum in 2025–2026.

GROW Western Australia 2024 - 2025
A Testament to Community Strength

Despite losing core funding in 2023 and the departure of beloved State Manager Lynda Diagne, GROW Western Australia has shown extraordinary resilience. The community rallied, maintaining 10 active groups and hosting regular leadership meetings—powered by over 2,800 volunteer hours from 16 lived experience leaders.

With no local staff, members stepped up to manage admin, hospital orientations, and new enquiries, keeping the heart of GROW beating. Mel Hayward, WA Branch and National Team rep, has been a guiding force—fostering leadership and holding hope for the future.

Excitingly, new funding from WAPHA will support existing groups and launch Get Growing and Growing Resilience programs. Former staff have returned to help, and Mel will now join the team in a employed position as Group Program Worker.

WA Voices

“Every meeting held is a small act of defiance and hope.”

“We didn't wait for funding. We kept the groups running because we knew how important they are.”

“Partnering with Sister Kate's will wrap our program in a cultural glove.”

GROW WA's commitment is a shining example of peer-led recovery. Their unity, courage, and care continue to inspire—and we look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

GROW Northern Territory 2024–2025
Quiet Persistence, Powerful Impact

This year, the GROW NT community has shown extraordinary resilience, meeting 50 times across 52 weeks—providing a consistent lifeline of peer support despite ongoing funding uncertainty. Lived experience leaders stepped up, hosting four leadership meetings and contributing to the final review of the Blue Book, reigniting the Territory's unique leadership energy.

Members organised 36 social activities, creating 353 moments of connection—from Odd Socks Day stalls to weekly lunches and outreach events. These gatherings offered vital support and helped raise awareness of GROW's programs.

Program Highlights

- ▶ **Boats and Books:** A creative new leadership initiative encouraging reflection and writing in relaxed oceanfront settings
- ▶ **Operation Resilience:** Secured \$100,000 to deliver Get Growing and Growing Resilience to veterans and their families

The NT Branch has led from within advocating for its survival, supporting one another, and proving that lived experience leadership is the heartbeat of GROW.

Voices from the Territory

“Even without funding, we kept showing up every week.”

“Socials are essential for members not yet ready for formal meetings.”

“Odd Socks Day was a chance to tell our story and feel part of something bigger.”

“Operation Resilience isn't just a contract—it's recognition that what we do matters.”

GROW NT continues to be a masterclass in quiet persistence, showing that people supporting people is what makes this movement thrive.

GROW National Office
Strengthening the Foundation for Community Impact

The National Office plays a central role in guiding and supporting GROW's work across Australia. It provides strategic leadership and operational oversight, ensuring that our programs remain consistent, effective, and aligned with GROW's mission and values.

This team manages core functions including governance, policy development, compliance, IT, finance, human resources, communications, and stakeholder engagement. By coordinating these essential systems, the National Office helps streamline operations and reduce the burden on local teams—allowing staff, volunteers, and members to focus on what matters most: delivering meaningful, peer-led mental health support in their communities.

Collaboration is at the heart of the National Office's approach. It works closely with State and Territory teams to share best practices, support innovation, and respond to emerging needs. Whether it's refining program materials, improving digital tools, or supporting leadership development, the National Office ensures that every part of GROW is connected and supported.

Ultimately, the National Office exists to serve the movement—providing the structure and resources that empower people to lead, grow, and recover together.

GROW Testimonials

"I am so grateful to GROW and its program for allowing me to start to find out who I am again beneath the pain, the trauma and the struggle. I can now see I am just a person among people; I am no more or less important or special than anyone else, I look forward to continuing to grow and working hard on the steps so I can be a man I am proud of, and others can be proud of too."

Simon – Resident AOD Program NSW - Self Worth
[Click here for Simon's full testimony](#)

"One of the most powerful tools I gained from GROW was the understanding that recovery is a shared journey. There were times when my mental health declined significantly, but the support from my Grow group was unwavering. They offered me practical strategies, emotional support, and most importantly, hope".

Mel – WA Grower - Rediscovery
[Click here for Mel's full testimony](#)

"It was a powerful moment to witness her open up—not just to the group, but to herself. It reminded me how easily assumptions can cloud our understanding, and how important it is to create space for every young person to be truly seen."

Reflection from a GROW support officer for Get Growing on a Year 8 student – Seeing beyond the surface
[Click here for more information from the Get Growing participant](#)

"GROW has done more for me than I can write about here. It has built my self-esteem. It has not only let me realise that I have a voice but it has trained me to use it and to speak my truth and not be afraid of confrontation. It has shown me how to face my fear and given me tools to navigate the challenges of day to day life. GROW has fostered in me a resilience that I have never known".

Jason – Resident AOD Program NSW – Personal Value
[Click here for Jason's full testimony](#)

"Over the years in the workplace I have experienced unjust stigma, been unfairly dismissed and have been overlooked for promotions. At GROW its the very first time in my career that my lived experience has been recognized and valued and this is so comforting, heartwarming and validating. I have a deep empathy for those who are struggling with their mental health".

Paul – Program Worker SA - Empathy and Connection
[Click here for Paul's full testimony](#)

"From a childhood marked by trauma, rejection, and isolation, I've fought to reclaim my life with courage and purpose. Through GROW, I found not just a program, but a community that helped me rediscover my strength, rebuild my identity, and believe in a future filled with love, stability, and hope. I'm no longer defined by what I've survived—I'm defined by how I've risen."

Brodie – NSW Central Coast Grower – Resilience
[Click here for Brodie's full testimony](#)

Our Annual Member Survey

Each year GROW reaches out to it's members to get feedback on our GROW programs and how we are supporting the mental health needs of those who attend our meetings. The information we gather provides rich data to help us support our members and look to better ways to help Growers recover and grow on their journey to mental wellness. Importantly our survey data helps inform the future strategy direction for GROW.

Thank you Growers for taking the time to provide us with these valuable insights.

Snapshot of our members

Age ▶ 9% 18 – 35 ▶ 33% 35 – 55 ▶ 57% 55+

Gender ▶ 45% male ▶ 51% female ▶ 4% other

Current work status

- ▶ 29% Employed
- ▶ 21% Retired
- ▶ 49% Not working

Where do you live?

- ▶ 50% Capital City
- ▶ 36% Large Regional City or Town
- ▶ 13% Rural or Remote Area

How did you find out about GROW?
(members could give more than one response)

- ▶ 39% GROW member/family or friend
- ▶ 34% In the media
- ▶ 16% Medical Professional
- ▶ 8% Presentation from a Grower
- ▶ 21% Other

How do you identify?
(members could give more than one response)

- ▶ 9% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- ▶ 11% LGBTQI
- ▶ 20% Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
- ▶ 74% Having a disability

Have you been given a diagnosis of mental illness? ▶ 82% Yes

Are you currently prescribed medication for a mental health condition? ▶ 74% Yes

Have you ever self harmed? ▶ 35% Yes

Map of Australia showing member distribution by state:

- 4% WA
- 3% NT
- 17% QLD
- 14% SA
- 33% NSW
- 23% VIC
- 2% ACT
- 4% TAS

Understanding our members

Do you have a problem with Alcohol? ▶ 25% Yes

Have you been hospitalised for your mental health in the past? ▶ 53% Yes

Number of times

- ▶ 64% 1 – 3 times
- ▶ 19% 4 – 5 times
- ▶ 17% 6+ times

What support do you currently receive?
(members could give more than one response)

- ▶ 63% GP / Doctor
- ▶ 89% Other medical professional (ie psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker)
- ▶ 13% Support from another Grower
- ▶ 18% No Support

What has contributed to your mental health issues?
(members could give more than one response)

- ▶ 77% Relationship and/or Family issues
- ▶ 47% Childhood Trauma
- ▶ 32% Employment related

"I always feel better within myself after the group."

Our Value of Resilience

How often do you come to GROW?

- ▶ 77% attend weekly

How do you attend?

- ▶ 74% Face to Face Group
- ▶ 19% Online (eGrow) Group
- ▶ 6% both

What events did you attend in the last 12 months?

- ▶ 95% Group social
- ▶ 41% Training day or weekend
- ▶ 26% Community weekend
- ▶ 16% Annual Branch Conference

How long have you been coming to GROW?

Pie chart showing duration of membership:

- 32% Under 12 months
- 27% 1 – 5 years
- 23% 15 + years
- 18% 5 – 15 years

"Grow has supported me in realizing the help with which I needed to cooperate to regain my health and to rebuild a better life."

Our Value of Personal Responsibility



The GROW Program has helped...

- ▶ **53%** Co-operate with professional help
- ▶ **31%** Need fewer hospital admissions
- ▶ **29%** Deal with employer
- ▶ **19%** Manage or overcome drug and/or alcohol problems



How has GROW helped support your mental health?

- ▶ **73%** Overcome suicidal thoughts
- ▶ **60%** Stop suicide attempts
- ▶ **56%** Overcome self-harm



Have you been hospitalised for mental illness since joining GROW? ▶ **84% No**



▶ **25%** Have reduced their medication since joining GROW

Satisfaction with the GROW Program



How do you rate the help you have received from GROW?

- ▶ **86%** Excellent / Very good



To what extent has going to Grow meetings contributed to coping with day to day life?

- ▶ **79%** A great deal / A lot

Ways in which GROW has helped you?

"The hope of recovery from mental illness."

"Personal growth."

"Be confident in obtaining good mental health."

"A sense of belonging."

"Problem Solving."

"Friendship."

What keeps you coming back to GROW?

"The hope I get and the friendship."

"The friendship, group to listen and not be judged, help solve and deal with problems."

"Spirit of our group."

"Nice people. A sense of belonging. Assistance with problems. A chance to help other people. Friendship. A safe and understanding place to share."

"The support and encouragement with everyday life. The great friendships."

What did you find the most helpful aspects of the GROW program?

"Peer support."

"Community and social aspect."

"Structured program."

"Practical tasks/ goals."

"Reading material."

"Weekly meetings."

"Learning new skills."



On average, respondents rated

89.43%

on the scale recommending GROW to others



GROW Board Members, top row - Ina Mullin, Heath Fereday, Mark Lacey, Colin Seery (resigned in 2025), Rosemary Hotten.
Bottom row - Steve Ryan, Elaine De Vos, John Della Bosca A.M., Dr Judy Edwards, Geetha Ranmuthugala (resigned in 2025) Jeremy Morse.

GROW Board of Directors

John Della Bosca A.M – Chair

John has extensive experience within the health and mental health sectors, having held such positions as the NSW Minister for Health, Associate Director of the Whitlam Institute (University of Western Sydney), Chairman of Family Drug Support, and served on the boards of Coast and Country Primary Care and Independent Community Living Australia. John also led an important campaign called Every Australian Counts – to increase grassroots support for the introduction of the NDIS – displaying diverse and valuable skills that will be critical to the success of GROW's future strategic plan. John is highly accomplished – having been awarded an Order of Australia in 2020, the PRIA Golden Target Award in 2013 and the Ted Noffs Humanitarian Award in 2001. He completed a PhD in History (2023), after already earning a Masters in Letters with merit in 2010.

Ina Mullin – Deputy Chair

Ina has over 20 years' experience in stakeholder engagement and communication. She is the inaugural Director of Partnerships and Engagement at the National Suicide Prevention Office after serving as Director, Communication and Engagement at the National Mental Health Commission. Prior to this she held business development, brand management and public relations roles at a variety of NFP suicide prevention and mental health service providers, most recently as National Manager Communication and Public Affairs at Lifeline Australia. Ina holds a Master of Arts in Communication Management, an Executive Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts (Hons).

Anusha Campbell – Director

Anusha is a Risk, Governance, and Finance professional, deeply committed to championing enhanced support services within the health sector. As a Director in EY's Enterprise Risk Practice, she collaborates with public, private, and for-purpose organisations to improve performance and decision-making by supporting with identifying and managing key risks vital for successful business outcomes. Anusha is a Chartered Accountant and holds a Bachelor of Business (Accounting) with Honors from RMIT University

Heath Fereday – Director

Heath has over 10 years of experience in working with the Grow Program and more than 7 years of experience in Program and Consumer Leadership Roles within GROW. Heath was the Chair of the South Australian Branch Program Team (elected peer leaders), a member of the National Program Team and is an active member of the Grow Community and was nominated to the Board by his peers.

Jeremy Morse – Director

Jeremy is a CPA, with extensive experience in the for-purpose community sector, primarily centred on aged care, disability and mental health support services such as the NDIS. While his work has covered the breadth of accounting and finance functions, his recent focus has been providing reliable advice to Board and Executive decision makers. Alongside his financial leadership roles, he is also a director of an ethical investment company operating in Pakistan. He is a member of the AICD and holds a Master of Accounting from the University of Tasmania.

Dr Judith (Judy) Edwards – Director

Judy has a strong commitment to community service and lifelong learning and has qualifications in medicine and public health. Her interests have taken her on a stimulating career path through general practice, politics – where she was the West Australian Minister for the Environment and then the not-for-profit sector, leading a small medical research foundation. She was also involved in the implementation of new mental health laws in WA in 2014. Judy currently chairs an advisory board at Curtin University engaging community and industry and promoting digital transformation. She is involved with several local community services and other organisations and kayaks for relaxation in her spare time.

Mark Lacey – Director

Mark is a mental health professional with 26 years' experience and a long-standing advocate for recovery-focused systems. He has been a GROW member for 23 years, serving in leadership roles including Chair of the Vic-Tas Branch Program Team and member of the National Program Team. He is currently part of the sub-committee revising GROW's Blue Book. Mark also chairs the Insights Mental Health Group Ballarat and represents consumers on the Grampians Region Interim Regional Body, established after the 2020 Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health. He brings expertise in recovery facilitation, systems reform, IT and compliance, and is a passionate advocate for Indigenous rights..

Rosemary Hotten – Director

Rosemary is an accomplished strategist with extensive experience unlocking business value and driving implementations that deliver sustainable results across domains, scale and complexity. Her experience spans commercial, not-for-profit and public sector environments, particularly in service delivery and health and wellbeing, helping organisations leverage new ways of working and technologies to increase engagement, address painpoints and improve service levels to optimise effectiveness and impact.

Steve Ryan – Director

Steve has had extensive exposure across the public, superannuation, union and not-for-profit sectors. He has held roles as a secondary school teacher, Queensland Teachers' Union President, a Trustee of the QSuper Board, and a director of QInvest. He is currently the board chair of two Qld Government Statutory Authorities - Health and Wellbeing Qld (HWQ) and the Residential Tenancies Authority of Qld (RTA).

Elaine De Vos – NCEO

Elaine is the National CEO of GROW, working with the Board to lead the organisation's strategic development and performance. With over 20 years in senior leadership across health, community services, and the private sector, she brings deep expertise in organisational transformation and systems reform. Elaine was instrumental in designing the UK Government's 'Positive Futures' program, a nationally recognised initiative using peer support and community engagement to re-engage disaffected youth. In Australia, she was a senior adviser to the NSW Government during the rollout of the NDIS. Elaine holds a BSc in Psychological Sciences and is currently completing a Master of Mental Health.



