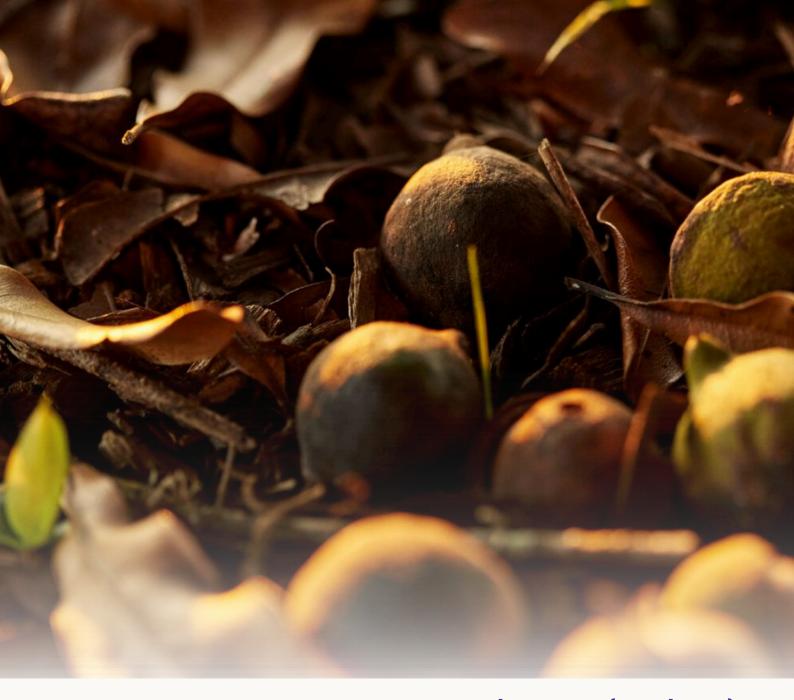
Multicultural Families Organisation

Annual Report

2025





Macadamia nut (Gumburra) Yugambeh totem

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Kombumerri People of the Yugambeh Language Region, and pay our respect to Elders of the past, present and emerging on this land we work and provide services. We extend respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and acknowledge their continuing connection to their culture, community and country.



Our Team













Lillan brings global experience and a strong commitment to cultural inclusion. Originally from Sweden, she moved to Australia in 2001 and joined MFO in 2016. With a background in development programs for businesses and education, she promotes learning and cross-cultural understanding. In 2017, she founded the Leaders of Positive Change initiative to combat violence and promote diversity. Lillan continues to empower multicultural families through respect, collaboration, and meaningful community action.

Julie brings extensive experience in human services, education, and community development. A long-time Gold Coast resident, she has worked across not-for-profit, government, and private sectors, supporting individuals facing complex challenges. Julie has contributed to educational and community wellbeing initiatives and volunteers with schools, playgroups, and local events. Her compassionate leadership and dedication to empowering others align with MFO's mission. She is passionate about building resilient communities and supporting family wellbeing across the Gold Coast.

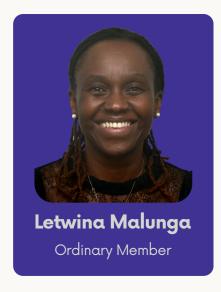




Shane, Treasurer of the Multicultural Families Organisation (MFO), brings over 30 years of experience in human services and public welfare. Currently a Social Work Adjunct Academic at Griffith University, he focuses on supporting international students and has held academic roles at Monash University. Shane's background spans military social work, homelessness, aged care, and policy development across various government and nongovernment sectors. His expertise, combined with a commitment to social justice, supports MFO's mission through strong financial leadership and strategic quidance.

Alexander brings decades of leadership, legal expertise, and public service to MFO. A semi-retired solicitor with a Master of Laws, he served 20 years as a Gold Coast Councillor, including six as Mayor, and three years as a State MP. Awarded the Order of Australia Medal for Community Service, he has held numerous leadership roles in education, health, welfare, and tourism. His lifelong dedication to community wellbeing and governance makes him a valuable asset to MFO's Management Committee and mission.





Letwina brings over 20 years of experience in Human Services, with a focus on child and family welfare, to the MFO Management Committee. Migrating to Australia in 2006, her lived experience inspires her dedication to supporting culturally and linguistically diverse communities. She has worked across early childhood education, health, and community engagement in both private and not-for-profit sectors. Passionate about inclusion, respect, and empowerment, Letwina is committed to advancing MFO's vision and creating meaningful, positive change in the community.

Message From Our President - Lillan Nielson



This past year has brought both significant challenges and great achievements for MFO, highlighting the strength, dedication, and resilience of our team. It is now over a year since we gathered to farewell Cornelia, our much-loved CEO. For most of us Cornelia was a caring friend, always ready to help. She was a leader, who had the confidence to break new ground, and her legacy lies in the culture she built, one of compassion, and going the extra mile. As we will continue to be guided by Cornelia's legacy, her influence remains woven into the fabric of MFO and inspires our daily decisions. We are proud of our culture and committed to share it.

Following Cornelia's passing, the directorship of MFO transitioned to the capable hands of Renata H. Jones (SETS manager) and Sebastian Chadwich (NDIS and SQW manager). Both bring a wealth of experience, skill, and a deep commitment to our mission. Their strong professional partnership and friendship have provided steady leadership through this time of transition.

The past year also saw a significant restructuring of the organisation, and as part of this process, we said goodbye to some valued team members, who moved on to new endeavours. At the same time, we were pleased to welcome new staff, bringing fresh energy, diverse perspectives, and complementary skills that continue to strengthen our team. At its core, MFO remains a collective of passionate individuals committed to making a meaningful impact in the lives of others. This shared commitment enables us to remain a respected and inspirational leader of positive change. Over the past year, we have:

- Strengthened our community engagement and empowered individuals, in all different ways, to feel seen, heard, and supported in achieving what matters most to them.
- Offered quality education through our expanded SQW, Skilling Queenslander for work, and seen many participants finding first time employment.
- Developed our NDIS programs further and this has resulted in growth of our client base.
- Promoted youth development, creating programs focusing on Prevention, Intervention and Guidance to support youth to confidently handle the complexities of today's world, ensuring they have the awareness, knowledge, and tools to thrive.
- Hosted several impactful events, including a successful luncheon in June focused on men and their mental health. This event exposed critical and often not talked about issues affecting very many people. The intention is to continue to foster an open, thoughtful and ongoing community dialogue.

As we look ahead, we are proud of what we have achieved and feel both determined and optimistic for what lies before us. The MFO team remains united in purpose, proud of our progress, and deeply motivated to continue building a stronger, more inclusive future for all.

Lillan Mielson



Co-Directors' Page



This year marked a deeply personal and pivotal chapter in the life of MFO. Following the sudden and heartbreaking passing of our beloved leader, Cornelia Babbage, we found ourselves standing at a crossroads neither of us had anticipated. The loss was not only emotional, but structural. carried so much of the organisation's operations, and heartbeat on her own shoulders. When Cornelia asked us, separately, to continue her legacy, both of us hesitated. We had each grown into our own lanes, managing separate departments, leading different teams, and never imagining ourselves as codirectors. But when the moment came, we could not say no. Who could say no to her? We knew we would only be able to honour her legacy if we committed 100%, and if we did it together.

From the outset, many questioned whether a shared leadership model could work. After all, who has ever heard of two directors? But what began as a necessity has grown into one of MFO's greatest strengths. Our partnership is built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared understanding that we bring different, complementary skills to the table. We split our duties with integrity, lean into each other's strengths, and honour each other's values, all while keeping our focus firmly on the communities we serve.

It has not been easy. The beginning was difficult, marked by grief, transition, and some very tough decisions. But those decisions, though hard, were necessary. They laid a stronger, more stable foundation for MFO's future. Together with our leadership team, we have worked to realign systems, improve sustainability, and ensure that MFO is thriving.

Our managers have shown extraordinary leadership through this transition. They have reminded us time and again that different challenges call for different approaches, and our joint leadership gives us the flexibility and insight to respond in ways that are thoughtful, agile, and inclusive. We are continually learning from each other and from our team. What has become clear is this: the workload Cornelia carried on her own was simply too much for one person. And in carrying it together, we honour her, not by trying to replicate her path, but by building on it, with care, collaboration, and community at the heart of everything we do.

We are proud of what MFO has achieved this past year across all programs, NDIS, SETS, Youth Development, Women's Services, SQW, and more, and even prouder of how we have achieved it: Together. We are looking forward to the years to come, to continuing this unique partnership, and to showing that shared leadership, when built on trust and a shared vision, can be a powerful way forward.

Renata It Jones & Sebastian Chadwick





Introduction

Since 1996, Multicultural Families Organisation Inc. (MFO) has proudly supported newly arrived migrants, refugees, humanitarian entrants, and family stream migrants as they begin their lives in Australia. Funded by the Australian Department of Home Affairs, MFO continues to deliver a range of culturally responsive services that empower individuals and families to settle, grow, and thrive on the Gold Coast.

This past year, we remained grounded in our core belief that migration brings both opportunity and challenge, not just for individuals, but for the communities that welcome them. We recognise that for many, particularly those fleeing conflict or persecution, resettlement can be a time of immense hardship. That is why we continue to offer a safe and inclusive space where the past is honoured, the present is met with compassion and practical support, and the future is embraced with strength and hope.

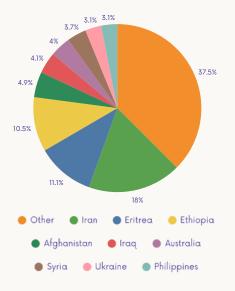
MFO is built on the conviction that multiculturalism enriches Australian society and strengthens our shared future. Through education, advocacy, and tailored support, we walk alongside individuals and families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to help them become confident, connected, and self-reliant members of the community.

This annual report shares the highlights, challenges, and achievements of 2024–25. It reflects the strength of our programs, the passion of our team, and the resilience of the communities we serve. We are proud of the year we have had, and even more excited about what lies ahead.



Our Demographics

In 2025, MFO supported a total of 1,451 clients, including 44 individuals experiencing homelessness. Our services reached people across a wide range of ages, from infants aged 0–4 years to seniors aged 85–89 years, reflecting our commitment to supporting the needs of the entire community.

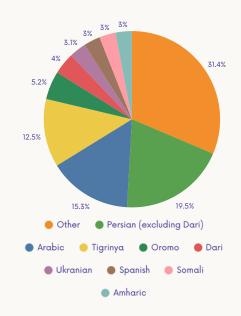


Individual Clients Background Origin

This chart shows the cultural background of individual clients supported by MFO. The largest proportion, 37.5%, come from other countries not listed separately. The next largest groups are from Iran (18.0%), Eritrea (11.1%), and Ethiopia (10.5%). Smaller proportions include clients from Afghanistan (4.9%), Iraq (4.1%), Australia (4.0%), Syria (3.7%), Ukraine (3.1%), and the Philippines (3.1%).

Individual Clients Spoken Languages

This chart shows the main languages spoken by individual clients supported by MFO. The largest proportion, 31.4%, speak languages other than those listed separately. This is followed by Persian (excluding Dari) at 19.5%, Arabic at 15.3%, and Tigrinya at 12.5%. Smaller groups include speakers of Oromo (5.2%), Dari (4.0%), Ukrainian (3.1%), Somali (3.0%), Spanish (2.8%), and Amharic (2.2%).





What Do We Do

At MFO how we go about delivering our services is just as important as the outcomes we achieve.

Our Mission

To influence Positive Change by empowering individuals and our diverse communities.

Our Vision

A society where all individuals regardless of background, have support, opportunities and resources to thrive and contribute meaningfully.

Our Programs



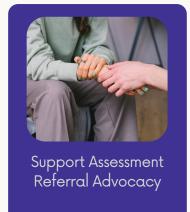
Settlement Engagement & Transition Support



NDIS Disability
Services





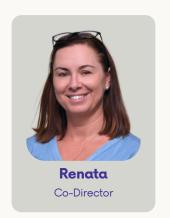




Community Capacity







Settlement Engagement and Transition Support (SETS) By Renata

MFO's SETS (Settlement Engagement and Transition Support) program continued to play a pivotal role in the lives of refugees and migrants on the Gold Coast. Through personalised support, group engagement, and tireless advocacy, the SETS team worked to ensure every individual felt empowered, heard, and connected. This year, 481 individual clients and 458 group clients accessed our services, with 5,265 attendances recorded by demonstrating the ongoing demand for culturally responsive support despite significant changes in client intake. While the national housing crisis has limited the arrival of newly settled families to the Gold Coast, particularly through formal humanitarian pathways, our commitment has never wavered. The numbers speak clearly: our community work continues to be essential, and our support to people from refugee and migrant backgrounds has not slowed.

One of the most pressing issues this year has been the situation of the Ukrainian community. Many families who arrived after the government's humanitarian cut-off date are ineligible for pathways to permanency. MFO has tirelessly advocated on their behalf, pushing for fairer visa policies and access to permanent residency for those who are currently left in limbo. This advocacy remains ongoing and critical. In parallel, our team responded to growing health and wellbeing concerns in newly arrived communities. A series of health-focused workshops was delivered specifically for our Afghan community, covering topics from navigating the healthcare system to women's health and mental wellbeing. These sessions provided not just information, but also comfort, connection, and culturally safe spaces to ask questions and share experiences.

A notable development this year has been the increasing collaboration between our Women's Office and Youth Development Program. As our young clients mature, they are bridging programs and contributing to both spaces. This intergenerational flow has strengthened the way we support CALD women within SETS, allowing us to broaden our reach and provide more tailored services to women navigating settlement, parenting, and independence in a new cultural context. We were also proud to host key community-building events throughout the year. Our Refugee Week celebration at TAFE gave clients a platform to share their stories and celebrate their cultures, while our Citizenship workshops supported participants through one of the most meaningful milestones in their settlement journey. And in a spirit of joy and inclusion, we delivered a heartfelt Christmas party, offering food, entertainment, and community connection for families who may otherwise feel isolated during the holiday season.

Despite the challenges, our SETS team remains deeply grounded in its mission: to provide holistic, dignified, and culturally safe support for all individuals seeking to rebuild their lives. With fewer newly arrived clients but a steady stream of ongoing need, we continue to adapt and evolve by proving that even in times of constraint, community care and connection will always find a way forward.









Homework Program

By Wai Yin

MFO's Youth Development Program continued to provide a nurturing and culturally safe space for young people and their families to grow, connect, and thrive. Designed to meet the unique needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, the program focused on building academic confidence, emotional resilience, and strong family relationships through a range of tailored initiatives delivered in schools and community settings across the Gold Coast.

Throughout the year, the Homework and Academic Wellbeing Program was delivered for both primary and high school students in library and school-based environments. These sessions provided more than just academic support. They became safe spaces where young people could express themselves, build social skills, and develop greater self-awareness. Primary school students showed a growing ability to listen, empathise, and engage with others, while Year 6 students preparing for the transition to high school were given space to talk openly about their worries and hopes in our conversation circles. With the dedicated support of MFO staff and volunteers, students were guided through structured learning sessions that balanced study with emotional wellbeing, always responsive to their individual needs and stages of development. Ongoing collaboration with families and schools was essential in ensuring continuity of support, monitoring progress, and addressing challenges as they arose.

At the same time, our high school-based Mentoring Program offered one-on-one support to young people aged 12 to 18, creating confidential and non-judgemental spaces where they could safely share their concerns. Many of the issues raised were complex and deeply personal, ranging from anger and anxiety to self-harm, depression, grief, PTSD, and experiences of domestic violence. Cultural disconnection, low school attendance, and behavioural challenges were also common themes. Language barriers and varying levels of school engagement posed ongoing challenges, yet our team remained committed to being a stable and trusted presence in the lives of these young people, listening, supporting, and advocating for their wellbeing.

The Parents Hub, held within school settings, was another important pillar of the program. This unique initiative brought CALD parents together in a safe and welcoming environment, allowing them to share experiences, build community, and explore their own settlement journeys. Through conversation and activities, parents were supported to better understand their children's development, schooling systems, and available supports by empowering them to play an active role in their children's educational and emotional wellbeing.

While the program achieved meaningful outcomes, it was not without its challenges. Volunteer availability remained inconsistent at times, impacting our capacity to maintain session delivery. The diversity of academic levels and the complexity of learning needs, particularly in English literacy, meant that our team continually adapted and refined their approach to ensure every young person received the support they required.

As the program looks ahead to the coming year, MFO remains deeply committed to strengthening youth resilience, academic success, and family empowerment. Through early intervention, culturally responsive support, and close collaboration with schools and communities, we continue to build brighter, more connected futures for young people and families from all walks of life.









Economic Participation SQW Employment and Training By Nicole

In 2024–25, the Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) initiative continued to be a transformative force at MFO, opening doors to education and employment for over 130 culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals.

Behind the classroom doors, our participants were not just gaining certificates, but they were rebuilding confidence, rediscovering purpose, and taking bold steps toward economic independence. From Individual Support and Workplace Skills to Drivers Operation and Pathology, each of the 11 programs were carefully chosen and delivered to meet real-world workforce needs. Two paid construction traineeships offered participants hands-on experience and wages, breaking down barriers that often stand between learning and earning.



Nicole SQW Manager

What makes MFO's SQW model stand out is its deep commitment to wraparound support. With bilingual mentors by their side and practical, culturally responsive guidance at every stage, participants were empowered not only to complete their training, but to imagine, and pursue a better future. Many graduates have since transitioned into employment, further study, or apprenticeships, marking a proud milestone for themselves and their communities.

With demand rising, MFO has submitted applications to deliver seven more certificate programs and a new construction traineeship in partnership with Youth Justice. Our vision remains clear: to build inclusive pathways where everyone, regardless of their background, can thrive through opportunity, support, and skills.

Nicole Jacob







Removing Barriers NDIS Program By Sebastian



In 2024–25, MFO remained a vital touchpoint for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals navigating the NDIS on the Gold Coast. Behind the more than 2,400 services delivered is a story of dedication, cultural understanding, and meaningful outcomes.

This year marked a turning point for our NDIS team. As we farewelled our longstanding Lead Support Coordinator, a new chapter began with the arrival of a dedicated Support Coordinator who not only stepped seamlessly into her caseload but also brought fresh energy to the team. Working closely with the NDIS Manager, Catherine helped refine our internal systems, strengthening both

efficiency and communication. Equally vital to our success has been the contribution of our other Support Coordinator Monica. She continues to be the heart of the program, ensuring that every NDIS service is delivered with compassion, integrity, and cultural respect. Her ability to connect with participants goes beyond professional support; she brings joy and warmth that uplift not only our clients but also the entire MFO team.

Financially, the growth told its own story. With a 50% increase in Plan Management revenue and a 6% rise in overall NDIS service delivery, more participants are trusting MFO to walk alongside them in their NDIS journey. Whether through daily living support, community participation, or capacity-building, every service was delivered with cultural sensitivity and respect for individual needs.

As reforms loom in the year ahead, MFO remains focused on ensuring no one is left behind. Whatever changes the NDIS may bring, our commitment holds firm: to deliver person-centred, culturally safe support so that all participants, no matter their background, can lead empowered and connected lives.

Sebastian Chadwick



Women's Office

In 2025, the Multicultural Women's Office continued to deliver specialised, person-centred case management to support women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, many of whom have experienced domestic and family violence, displacement, or systemic barriers and disadvantage. We provided tailored support to help women identify their strengths, set meaningful goals, and build pathways towards independence. Women were supported to access employment and training opportunities, connect with relevant services, and participate in community life, all within a safe and culturally responsive environment.

By Rana



A key highlight of the year was the ongoing success of our Multicultural Women's Friendship Group which offered a welcoming and inclusive space for women to build friendships, learn new skills, and reconnect with their creative nature. Some of our activities included walks and picnics in the park, health, and wellbeing workshops, engaging talks from guest speakers such as police officers and technology safety experts, as well as hands-on creative workshops such as sewing, knitting, drawing, painting, and jewellery making.

In partnership with The Women's Space at Labrador, we also ran for the second year in a row our monthly interactive cooking program, where women shared recipes and stories from their countries, celebrating cultural pride through food and storytelling. These programs not only enhanced social connection and emotional wellbeing but also empowered women to reclaim their voice, build their confidence and feel like a valued part of our community.

Rana Al-Mekarry





SARA Program Report





This year brought a transition in our team leadership. We warmly acknowledge Marica's outstanding leadership and over eight years of dedicated service to the SARA Program. Her compassion and commitment have left a lasting impact. Following her departure, I have rejoined the SARA Team after having been engaged in domestic violence work at a national level, and I'm grateful to bring those learnings and insights back to this space.

The SARA Team acknowledges the strength and courage of the women we have had the privilege to support this year. Each story reflects a woman navigating complex barriers including language, visa status, and cultural pressures, with remarkable resilience.

We focused on deepening community connections and creating spaces where clients can share and support one another. At a recent conference, our team presented "Echoes of Strength," a visual storytelling exhibition that honoured the voices of CALD women. Through personal objects chosen by victim-survivors, the exhibition powerfully conveyed their journeys of strength, courage, and survival.

None of this would be possible without the unwavering dedication of the SARA Team. Their commitment to one another and to the women we support continues to be the foundation of our work, driving advocacy, care, and empowerment for CALD women every day.







Community Development and Events

When it comes to writing this section each year, we always find ourselves pausing. Not because we cannot remember what happened, but because we are already buzzing with excitement for what is ahead. The events space at MFO never stands still, and it is this forward momentum that keeps us energised. Yet, it is just as important to look back, even briefly, and acknowledge the moments that brought us together.

Our events in 2024–25 were many, joyful, challenging, moving, and deeply rewarding. While many are annual occasions, we pride ourselves on never doing the same thing twice. Each event is an opportunity to think outside the box, to innovate, and most importantly, to invite communities to participate, lead, and connect in meaningful ways.

The Iconic Multicultural Festival was one of our biggest highlights. With a record-breaking crowd, perfect weather, and incredible performances, it was a vibrant celebration of diversity and unity. Yet, it carried a tone of reflection, to held in memory of our beloved Queen, whose presence and popcorn machine had become a fixture at our events. Her absence was felt, but her spirit reminded us why we continue to show up for our communities. We march on, because that is what she would have wanted, and what our communities deserve.

Across the year, we hosted a number of deeply impactful events such as International Senior Day, Annual Client Christmas Party, International Women's Day and Harmony Day at TAFE, and Refugee Week.

One standout event was also the Break the Patterns Conference, delivered through our SARA program. It drew service providers, community leaders, and individuals together to explore the urgent issue of domestic and family violence. A topic that affects all communities, often in silence. The overwhelming response reaffirmed the need for more conversations, more learning, and more action.





One of the most transformative events of the year was our Leaders of Positive Change Luncheon. Held in a completely new venue, the event marked a bold shift in tone and focus. The 2025 theme, "Bridging Generations, Strengthening Families, Supporting Change," brought together an intergenerational and cross-cultural audience to reflect on how leadership within families and communities can foster connection, resilience, and wellbeing.

This year's luncheon went beyond celebration. It became a space for real, vulnerable, and necessary conversations. At the heart of the discussion was men's mental health, a topic often overlooked in community forums. Through the voices of powerful speakers and panellists, we explored the challenges men face in expressing emotions, seeking support, and navigating their roles in families and society. The honesty in the room was palpable. It was a moment of collective pause, reflection, and healing. One that we hope planted seeds for lasting change across our communities.

We are proud that this event did not shy away from difficult topics but instead embraced them with compassion and strength. It reminded us that leadership is not just about recognition. It is about courage, vulnerability, and the willingness to change.

Looking ahead to 2025–26, we are filled with anticipation. Our upcoming calendar promises new collaborations, deeper community engagement, and exciting ways to share knowledge and culture. With each event, we hope to empower people not only to attend, but to lead, speak, perform, and shape the future with us.

Events at MFO are more than dates on a calendar. They are moments of connection, belonging, and hope. And no matter how busy we get, we are always grateful to be part of something so special.



Annual Financial Brief

The 2024–25 financial year was one of strong performance and strategic growth for Multicultural Families Organisation Inc. (MFO). In response to rising community demand and the continued expansion of our services, MFO recorded its most financially stable year to date.

Total income reached \$6.17 million, reflecting a 37% increase from the previous year. This growth was driven by both program funding and an increase in service-based income. Expenditure was managed with discipline, rising by 21%, which enabled the organisation to achieve a healthy operating surplus. This marks a full financial recovery from the previous year's deficit and has strengthened MFO's financial reserves heading into 2025–26. This positive trajectory ensures MFO is well positioned to pursue new opportunities, respond effectively to community needs, and invest confidently in long-term sustainability.

Income Highlights:

- Grants income was 43% of total revenue, with major funding received for SETS, SARA, and Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) programs.
- NDIS revenue from direct services increased by 9%, reflecting steady participant and service growth.
- One-off grants for cyber security and IT infrastructure enabled the delivery of community workshops and significant upgrades to internal systems.
- Donations and Other Income supported flexible, gap-filling initiatives across programs.

Expenditure Overview

MFO's major expenditure areas aligned with strategic investments in service capacity and infrastructure:

- Wages and Salaries accounted for 32% of total expenses supporting the organisation's expanding workforce
- Marketing, Promotion & Events was 3% of total expenses increasing community engagement and program visibility
- Leasing Costs (property): 4% of overall expenses

Despite increased service demand and associated costs, MFO maintained a conservative and sustainability-focused financial strategy, resulting in its first surplus in two years and a significant improvement in financial stability and security.



Looking Ahead

MFO has been selected as a recipient of the Preventing Tech-Based Abuse grant, to be delivered over an 18-month period beginning in early 2025–26. This funding will enable MFO to provide awareness and education to vulnerable women, community organisations, and potential perpetrators around technology-facilitated abuse.

Our priorities for the upcoming financial year include:

- Securing new funding opportunities across youth development, digital safety, CALD men's mental health, and domestic and family violence services
- Expanding our NDIS participant base, supported by increased outreach and targeted promotional campaigns
- Upgrading our vehicle fleet, ensuring service accessibility and safety across regions
- Strengthening organisational leadership, with a focus on building internal capacity to support sustainable program delivery and reduce executive workload

Acknowledgements

On behalf of MFO, I extend my sincere thanks to our staff, Board, funding partners, community leaders, and service users. Your continued support and belief in our mission have been instrumental in achieving this year's successes. We look forward to building on this momentum and deepening our impact in 2025 and beyond.



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