

ANNUAL REPORT

2022 - 2023



Family Spirit Prayer

Heavenly Father

As we begin this meeting, we ask you for guidance and wisdom.

Help us to engage in meaningful discussion, and to grow closer as a group.

Fill our hearts with hope, courage, and compassion so that we may be the face of Christ to all we meet.

Inspire us to recognise the opportunity we have before us to enact change and a better future for the children of God within our communities.

Guide us to support families to make their own decisions about their lives and provide safe, stable family environments for their children.

Let us, as your faithful, bring hope and encouragement to vulnerable families, children and young people who are disheartened, lonely or in need.

Help us to promote the family spirit and support acceptance, belonging, and care.

We ask these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

Acknowledgement of Country

Family Spirit acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we have gathered on today. We pay our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation. A better understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia's cultural heritage and can lead to reconciliation. This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation, and fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.

About This Report

This report shows our activities and performance for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. It has been prepared to comply with legal obligations and to support the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission (ACNC) objective to build greater accountability and trust in the Australian Not-For-Profit sector.

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Charitable Status

Family Spirit Ltd is a registered charity with the ACNC.

Legal Name

Family Spirit Limited
2-14 Meredith St, Bankstown NSW 2200
ABN 35 623 563 422

“...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”

Matthew 25:40

For almost 30 years, I have had the great privilege and honour of working with vulnerable children, young people, and their families. I feel truly blessed to have been given the opportunity to lead Family Spirit as we celebrated five years of service and am incredibly proud of the extraordinary achievements of our team over the past twelve months.

We at Family Spirit believe our local adoption program to be one of our greatest legacies. We honour the history of Catholic social welfare upon which this program is based through our continued support of parents, adoptees, and their families and dedication to the provision of the highest level of specialist, trauma-informed care. As such, we were elated to be awarded 5-year accreditation for the program and have dedicated ourselves to using this opportunity to further strengthen our position as subject matter experts in the adoption space.

Since its commencement in October 2017, the sector has been navigating the Permanency Support Program, and the significantly associated reforms to the child protection and out-of-home care systems. Family Spirit was in the unique position of launching as an agency alongside these reforms and has had the opportunity to grow with the program. It was a superb testament to the skill, teamwork, and commitment of our staff, foster carers, and partners when we achieved 5-year accreditation in this space, and this has provided assurance and stability to all involved. Family Spirit will continue to deliver PSP services from a best practice model and looks forward to continuing to work with the Office of the Children’s Guardian to support children, young people, and their families.

Our Intensive Family Preservation team has continued to work tirelessly, and their dedication and skills have supported children and families

to remain together. Family Spirit is committed to continuing to achieve these outcomes, as reflected by our principle of ‘Solidarity,’ and our dedication to walking alongside children and families, supporting them through their challenges. This commitment is mirrored by our Aftercare Program. Our team continues to work with young people as they exit care and walk alongside them as they enter the next phase of their lives, providing essential support, mentorship, and guidance during what can so often be a challenging time of change and growth.

Leaving Care has been delivering high quality work to ensure that young people can transition into adulthood feeling supported. It has been an immense pleasure to receive positive feedback from across the sector regarding the quality of work that this team has delivered. We anticipate the Leaving Care program will change over due to recommissioning.

As I reflect over the last five years and all Family Spirit has achieved, it is clear to me that we have not lost sight of our guiding purpose. I am dedicated to strengthening our commitment to a world in which all children and young people experience ‘the family spirit’ through the development of our new Strategic Plan, which will guide us in our efforts over the next five years. The plan reinforces our commitment to wholistically supporting children, young people, and their families with a particular focus on the provision of child-safe services, positive change through new initiatives such as in-house positive behaviour supports, and financial sustainability.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Board for the support they have shown me as incoming CEO. Times of change can often be challenging for an organisation, but the steadfast governance of Marist180 and CatholicCare Sydney

has ensured the continued success of Family Spirit. Our achievements over the past five years would not have been possible without your guidance and direction, and the leadership team and I look forward to continuing to work together to provide support and services in a manner that is grounded in faith and promotes the mission of the Catholic Church.

Sheree James

Chief Executive Officer
Family Spirit



Board Chair Report

When I reflect on the past twelve months, what stands out for me and the board is all that has been achieved in such a short period of time. Family Spirit is now celebrating five years of service provision. Many of you may recall Family Spirit was formed from the partnership of Catholic Care Sydney and Marist180. The purpose of Family Spirit was, and still is, to ensure the delivery of a high-quality service that reflects the Catholic Social Values of Human Dignity, Participation, Solidarity and Common Good. We are proud to say that Family Spirit has achieved this purpose, and we believe that this will continue under the leadership of Ms. Sheree James who commenced as our new CEO in January 2023.

My fellow board members and I wish to express our sincere thanks to Mr. Jason Oldridge during his tenure as CEO. Jason’s steadfast leadership was a source of inspiration to our carers and staff, his impact continues to be felt by all who worked with him.

Over the past few years, we have experienced many challenges and we are proud to say that we have weathered the storm and Family Spirit has emerged stronger than ever. This year we successfully navigated a return to the office and settled into a post Covid way of working. We recognise that the experiences of Covid were impactful for many children, young people, and their families, we pray that with the continued support of Family Spirit staff, and carers, those impacted will find healing and peace.

On behalf of the board, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Sheree, the Senior Leadership team, and the staff on successfully receiving five-year re-accreditation from the Office of Children Guardian across the permanency support and adoptions programs. We acknowledge the journey which Family Spirit travelled to obtain this impressive outcome. For those who are not acquainted with the accreditation process it is by no means a small feat.

We are acutely aware of the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to be governed through the mechanisms of self-determination. We are working collaboratively with the Department of Communities and Justice and Aboriginal Community Controlled Agencies (ACCO) to ensure children and young people, and households receive culturally informed supports through stronger partnerships. Our commitment to closing the gap walks alongside our acknowledgement and respect of the faith held by some carers who have chosen to work with Family Spirit.

As we look to the future, we will continue to be inspired by the dedication and resilience of staff and carers under the guardianship of the Family Spirit leadership team.



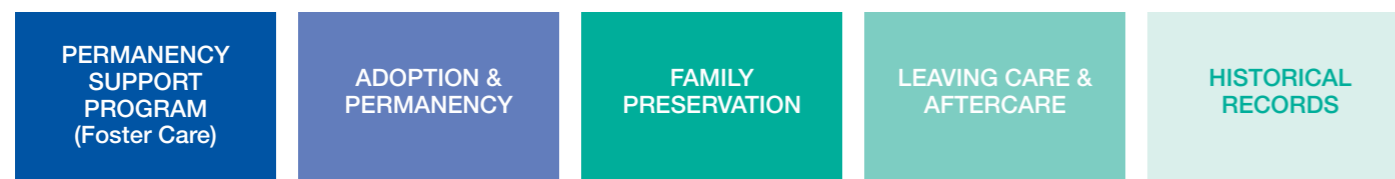
Who We Are

Our Story

Family Spirit Ltd launched on 1 July 2018, formed from a partnership between two Catholic social service agencies, Marist180 and CatholicCare Sydney, who believed that by working together they could achieve more to improve the lives of children, young people, families in need and individuals impacted by adoption.

Family Spirit was founded on the tenants of catholic social welfare and is proud to continue the legacies of our member agencies. We are the custodians of historical adoption and catholic children's home records and are guided by the stories of those impacted by past practices in our daily work.

Operating services across New South Wales, Family Spirit has an annual revenue of approximately \$13 million and supports children, young people, their families, and individuals affected by adoption in the areas of:



Our Vision

Our vision is to be the leading provider of trauma-informed, child-led and family focused services to clients in statutory care, at risk of entering, or who have exited care.



Our Mission

Our mission is to support children, young people, and adults in statutory care, at risk of entering, or who have exited care.

Our Principles

We follow in the footsteps of Christ and come together as a Catholic community, in partnership with our valued stakeholders, to promote the following principles:

The Family Spirit - We undertake to build community, belonging, and promote the family spirit for all. We believe in the innate goodness of everyone and foster acceptance and unconditional care of families, children and young people in need. We aim to support those in need and their cultural, religious or other beliefs and needs with respect and dignity.

Human Dignity – We believe everyone is created in the image of God. As such, we treat everyone with love, respect, compassion, and the utmost care and safety.

Participation – We aim to ensure the child's voice and view is taken into consideration by putting the best interests of the child at the core of all decision making and practice. We value the views and needs of our families and carers and aim to ensure that these are heard and understood in the work that we do.

Solidarity – We walk alongside children and families, helping them through their challenges.

Common Good – We encourage networks of support for each and every child, building and strengthening the families and communities that support these children and promoting them to grow into active participants of the community as adults.



Our People

Board of Directors

Jonathan Raja
Chairman and Director

David Stefanoff
Secretary and Director

Megan Sprague
Director

Leadership Team

Sheree James
Chief Executive Officer

Patricia Maher
Executive Manager
– Pre & Post Care

Lauren Ficarra
Executive Manager
– Operations

Joseph Clarke
Cultural Practice &
Inclusion Lead

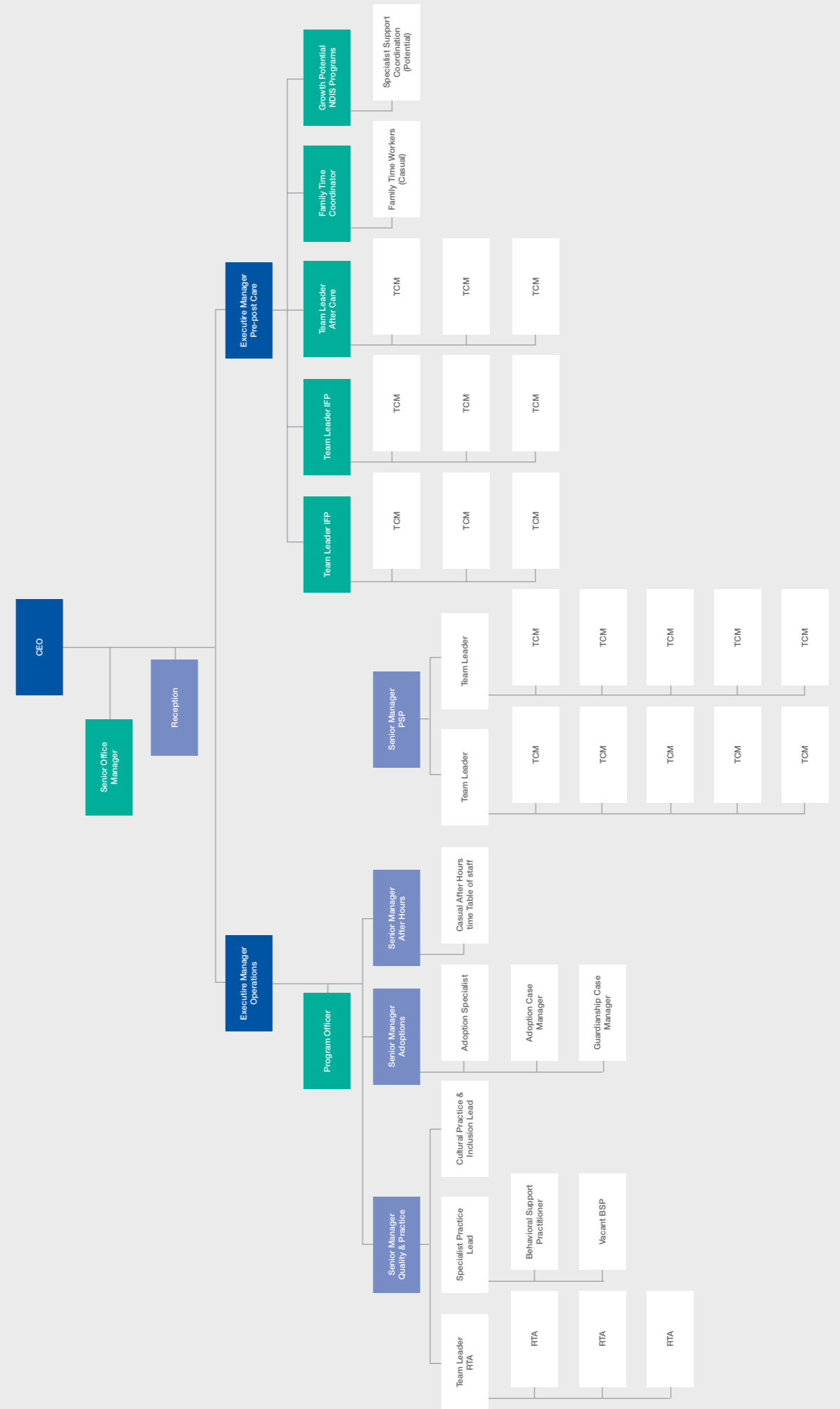
Nicola Ross
Senior Manager
– Permanency Support
Program

Emma Healy
Senior Manager – Adoptions
& Permanency

Taylor Sullivan
Senior Manager
– Quality & Practice

Glenys Gaddy
Senior Manager
– After Hours

Organisation Structure





To ensure our PSP team can maintain momentum and provide high quality support, Family Spirit has implemented reflective practice as the primary process to analysing our actions and informing our practice. We recognise the importance of considering our ways of working so that we can continue to be curious and open. Critical thinking also assists our team to look beyond past experiences and ensure the mitigation of unconscious or attributional bias.

The PSP program currently has two operational teams that are led by a Senior Manager and overseen by the Executive Manager of Operations. The teams take their responsibilities with the openness and respect required to ensure that we meet our contractual obligations, whilst remaining child focused. Through comprehensive case planning our PSP teams safeguard stability, permanency, connection and wellbeing for the children and young people we support. Every child or young person receives expert one on one support from our therapeutically trained case managers.

Our principle of Solidary speaks to walking alongside children and families through their challenges. For parents who are no longer able to maintain day to day care of their children we respectfully support them to maintain connection through our family time program, and regular updates on their children. In 2023 we commenced a dedicated family time stream to our PSP service delivery; this program has a full-time coordinator and a new team of skilled support workers. The family time program allows us to deliver specialised and consistent services that ensure continuity of practice and quality of connections.

Another new initiative for our PSP program in 2023 was the development and implementation of a dedicated after-hours program headed up by a senior leader with experience in crisis management. The program has provided the opportunity for children, young people, families, and carers to enhance their relationship with the agency and receive meaningful around the clock supports. The after hours manager also assists with new potential carer enquires and intake at times that may be more convenient for some and extends our capacity to respond to the needs of the sector.

Our Services

Our services include supporting families to stay together and young people to transition from care to living independently, foster care including respite, emergency, kinship, short-term and long-term care, guardianship, adoption and post adoption support, and historical record access and counselling.

Permanency Support Program (PSP)

Family Spirit is contracted by the Department of Communities & Justice to provide specialist trauma informed services to vulnerable children and young people through the Permanency Support Program, formally referred to as OOHC.

Our team are trained to understand trauma as a psychological, emotion and/or physical response to a difficult event or experience in a child or young person's history. Working in a trauma informed way means that our team use their knowledge about trauma in all aspects of case work practice. Simultaneously the care team also support foster carers to understand the impacts of trauma, and how to respond in a therapeutic manner. Some of our children and young people also required individualised Positive Behaviour Support Plans that address behaviours that can be perceived as challenging.

Highlights

- It is always with a warm heart to share that the PSP team successful achieved a restoration for a child back to his family. The team are also currently supporting another seven other children to be restored back to family.
- We achieved five years accreditation with the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) for the PSP,, ensuring we can continue the great work of supporting children and young people through the program.
- Our PSP team are currently supporting approx. 115 children and young people with case management through long-term care, guardianship, adoptions, and restorations goals.
- The PSP team undertook approx. 1000 home visits.



Adoption, Permanency & Historical Records

The legacy of Catholic Social Welfare in NSW is founded in the support for parents to make informed parenting decisions. This includes adoptions. Family Spirit are proud to be the caretakers of this legacy and value the impact these decisions have on peoples lives.

At Family Spirit we support parents who are considering voluntarily placing their child in the local adoptions program. We walk alongside them as they are provided adoption focused counselling with experienced and qualified specialists. We also ensure that we provide parents with alternatives to adoption and when necessary, assist with connections are referral to external providers and support services.

Family Spirit is committed to the principle of openness in adoptions. When adoption is a decision that has been made, our team work diligently to go through the legal processes in a respectful and professional manner. The remits of work associated with adoptions can be complex and time consuming, however our team of specialist remain focused and dedicated to achieving an open adoption plan that meets the needs of all involved.

When responding to expressions of interest from potential adoptive parents (PAPS) Family Spirit works to educate, support, and assess applicants to ensure that appropriate couples are accepted. This rigorous process is undertaken with the understanding that there is a limited number of entries into the program, so we ensure that our applicants are also provided with the opportunities to consider dual authorisation with a foster care pathway.

As an accredited adoption provider Family Spirit are also funded by the Department of Communities and Justice to provide services to children and young people with a case plan goal of adoption. Whilst the nature of adoption differs slightly, the complexity remains significant and requires a different methodology to achieving a similar outcome. Often this requires our team of specialist to undertake detailed family finding inclusive of outreach and mediation, this can be confronting for the parties involved but necessary component of the process.

We are honoured to be the custodians of historical adoption and Catholic Children's Home records, walk alongside applicants as they seek answers to lifelong questions. Despite the complexities and emotions associated with accessing historical records, our team finds having the opportunity to connect and rebuild families to be some of the most rewarding parts of the role.

Family Spirit's specialist adoption team work diligently to support the PSP to educate caseworkers, carers and families around the permanency pathway options that can be achieved through a case plan goal change. The team provide expert advice internally and in the wider sector around adoption, guardianship, and historical records spaces.

Highlights

- We received five years accreditation as an Adoption Service Provider from the OCG.
- We received confirmation of ongoing funding for our adoption program by the Department of Communities and Justice.
- We helped more than 75 people access their adoption records and reconnect with family members.
- We helped 90 people access records from the time they, or a relative, spent in Catholic Children's Homes.
- We supported children and young people achieve permanency through adoption, including the adoption of a 17-year-old girl by her long-term foster carers, the adoption of a 20-month-old boy by his pre-adoptive parents, and the placement of a 2-year-old boy with his pre-adoptive parents.
- Our Adoptions Principal Officer is actively engaged with the adoptions working party, this ensures that Family Spirit maintains currency within the permanency domain and that our practice is contemporaneous.
- The team completed VANISH Professional Training, making them eligible for entry onto the register of adoption focused counsellors.
- Interagency relationships have returned to a pre-COVID standard, and Family Spirit has participated in committees and conferences across the state.



Intensive Family Preservation (IFP)

Even though there are many joys to parenthood, it does require a vast amount of endurance, emotional understanding and ability to respond to financial pressures, all whilst balancing multiple relationships. This dynamic can be a challenge for many parents, especially those who have a lack support or a trauma history themselves. Family Spirit believes in the philosophy that it takes a village to raise a child, it is because of this belief that we are committed to preserving families to remain strong and connected. We do this through our IFP program.

The IFP program is a voluntary family support service, focusing on the safety and wellbeing of children between 0-17 years by providing specialised support to vulnerable families who may have been identified as being at significant risk. The overall aim of the service is to reduce the number of children and young people entering out-of-home care.

Partnering with families over 6 months, the program works to minimise and address any child protection concerns by offering support and resources to build family resilience, strength, and capacity.

Family Spirit works from the lens of understanding families in relation to their cultural context. Our agency endeavours to live this fundamental principle by undertaking to build community and belonging by promoting the family spirit for all. Family is fundamental to both personal and collective identity, therefore we attempt to ensure that we can provide a service that meets the needs of the culturally diverse communities that we support across western and southwestern Sydney.

Highlights

- Our case managers made 1840 home visits.
- We achieved successful intervention for more than 40 families.
- We received 62 complex family referrals.
- We provided support to 46 families with Safety and Risk Assessments rated high or very high.
- We completed a combined total of 50 Risk of Significant Harm and Immediate Risk of Significant Harm reports to advocate child protection concerns and safety within the home.

Leaving Care & After Care for Young People

All young people in out of home care legally exit the NSW care system at the age of 18 years. Leaving care can be an emotional time, some young people look forward to the independence and freedom, for others it can be anxiety provoking. Young people leaving care need to know they have someone to turn to for supports and advice after they have left care. At Family Spirit our dedicated team of case managers are committed to ensuring that young people have the supports that they need on their journey to adulthood.

Continuing to support at young person post care can also assist and divert them away from homelessness and provide opportunities to reconnect with their families in a safe and sustainable way. Relationships are quintessential to achieving positive outcomes around physical and mental health.

Family Spirit is committed to always being there for the young people that are referred to our agency, even if we did not have direct involvement in their previous case management whilst in out of home care. Many of our young people are referred once they have moved to Sydney, some from regional and rural NSW.

Cultural Safety for Aboriginal young people is a priority for Family Spirit. We are committed to having collaborative partnerships with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, often known as ACCO's. Family Spirit has a partnership with Kari Aboriginal Service, The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry and Narang Bir-rong. We are also a member of ABSEC and are committed to closing the gap.



Highlights

- We supported [] young people with cultural connections through innovative community-based activities
- We provided connections to health and wellbeing programs authentic to the needs of young people.
- We assisted with engagement to training and employment for [] young people
- Aiding connections to legal services when needed.
- We facilitated connections to accommodation for [] young people
- We provided complex case management support to 54 young people
- We expanded our After Care program to include Youth Networks in Eastern Sydney, the Inner West, Sydney City, Sutherland Shire, and St George.
- We developed individual Leaving Care Plans to better support young people transitioning from care to independence and provided skills training and education.

Assessment, Training and Support for Foster Carers & Prospective Adoptive Parents

Family Spirit's Recruitment Training and Assessment team partners with our Adoption and Permanency team to provide expert training and assessment for foster carers, kinship carers and prospective adoptive parents across NSW.

Highlights

- 148 people registered for foster care recruitment information sessions.
- We welcomed and approved 20 carer households through case management transfer and new applications.
- We facilitated four Shared Lives training sessions.
- We hosted three Foster Carer morning tea events to support peer learning and relationship building.
- We developed a new Carers Guide to support families and provide clear guidelines and responsibilities.
- We launched a renewed focus on family finding to increase kinship care for children and young people and have provided training for all staff to support skills in this space.



Financial Reports

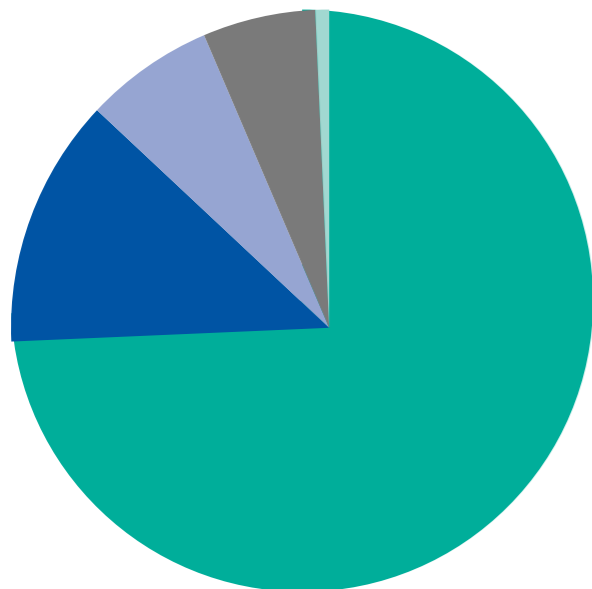
2022 - 2023

	2023	2022
ASSETS	\$	\$
Current		
Cash and cash on hand	312,304	607,512
Trade and other receivables	1,330,844	944,103
Total Current Assets	1,643,148	1,551,615
Non-current		
Property, plant & equipment	118,798	188,645
Right-of-use assets	257,048	471,646
Total Non-current Assets	375,846	660,291
TOTAL ASSETS	2,018,994	2,211,906
LIABILITIES	\$	\$
Current		
Trade and other payables	594,748	704,862
Deferred income	254,679	
Lease liabilities	197,557	190,991
Employee benefits	325,936	323,995
Total Current Liabilities	1,372,920	1,219,848
Non-current		
Lease Liabilities	38,041	226,514
Provisions	97,518	93,695
Employee benefits	85,614	56,222
Total Non-current Liabilities	221,173	376,431
TOTAL LIABILITIES	1,594,093	1,596,279
NET ASSETS	424,901	615,627
EQUITY	\$	\$
Accumulated Funds	424,901	615,627
TOTAL EQUITY	424,901	615,627



Source of Income

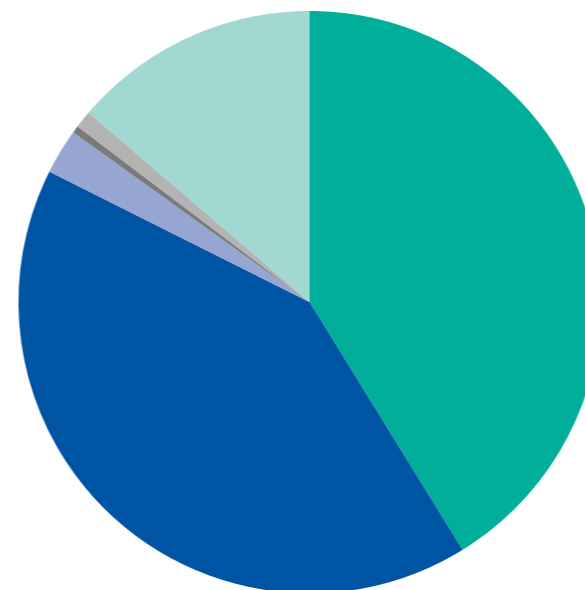
- Permanency Support Program
- Intensive Family Preservation
- Leaving Care After Care
- Adoption Services
- Other Income



2022	
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES & JUSTICE INCOME:	
Permanency Support Program	8,362,765
Intensive Family Preservation	1,426,061
Leaving Care After Care	740,941
Adoption Services	645,450
Other Income	78,462
TOTAL FOR THE YEAR	11,253,679

Expenditure

- Labor costs
- Client direct costs
- Depreciation and amortisation
- Occupancy costs
- Marketing costs
- Administration costs




2022			
	OPERATIONAL	UNEXPENDED FUNDS	TOTAL
Labour costs	4,314,436	200,116	4,514,552
Client direct costs	5,284,509	78,000	5,362,509
Depreciation and amortisation	266,777	8,803	275,580
Occupancy costs	5,478	38,962	44,440
Marketing costs	42,947	62,943	105,890
Administration costs	1,447,368	55,825	1,503,193
TOTAL FOR THE YEAR	11,361,515	444,649	11,806,164



Registered Office:

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Bankstown, NSW, 2148

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