



ANNUAL REPORT

2023/24

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www.emnc.org.au



Introduction

2023-24 has been a vibrant year for EMNC. New staff, new programs and a renewed vision for growth and improvement have given the Centre an exciting buzz of activity.

Alongside the feeling of momentum, our intake data has shown the increase of program attendance and engagement of services across the board.

Our growing focus on Youth Services has brought a new positivity among the board and staff, school partners and the young people themselves.

Staff have welcomed the challenge of development through training, improved procedures, additional promotion and improved volunteer management.

Being well-positioned to service the growing Western corridor of North Lake Macquarie (Cameron Park, Edgeworth, Sugar Valley, West Wallsend) we look forward to an exciting and impactful year ahead.

Young People

Through the efforts of a dedicated Youth Worker and a strong commitment to revitalising local networks, EMNC has made significant development in its youth services over the past year.

With emphasis on partnerships through local schools, TAFE and other local services we have hosted a variety of programs and supported clients and families, with case management, family capacity building, information, advice and referral and peer mentoring and support.

TAFE RESET Program

One stand-out program from the year has been the TAFE RESET program. A small group of students who have struggled somewhat in school attended the Centre on Wednesdays and Thursdays to help them explore pathways to further education and employment as well as develop confidence in a professional setting.

The six students who participated thrived during their time here, actively participating in various Centre activities and seeking guidance and support from our staff and have made a lasting impact.

Love Bites

The LoveBites Respectful Relationships program engaged approximately 100 Year 10 students in practical and thought-provoking conversations about healthy relationships, sex, and consent, as we facilitated the program over 2 days at Warners Bay High School in April.

A popular program for senior High School, two of our staff are now trained facilitators and we look forward to making the program a regular feature in our programming.



Voices for youth

Voices4Youth is a special program, funded by the Department of Regional NSW. The program was a collaborative approach between Edgeworth Memorial Neighbourhood Centre and Mind Blank Ltd to support culturally inclusive workshops tailored to engage young people (aged 15-18) in a 10 session creative arts and mental health program. Its aim is to support young people to build mental health awareness and skills to ask for help.

All 8 planned workshops have been completed in local schools: TAFE NSW Glendale, Cardiff High School, Morisset High School, North Academy, Hunter Sports High School, Warners Bay High School, TAFE NSW Newcastle campus and Toronto High School.



Edgy Youth Space

For some time, members of our community have desired to see a dedicated space or place for local youth. Not knowing what the 'space' would evolve to look like, our staff undertook a process of research, consultation and development to start bringing Edgy Youth Space to life.

Along with ongoing discussions with schools and partners, a 2-day consultation was held at the centre with High School students providing input on what makes a successful, youth-friendly space.

We have introduced the concept to students at Glendale Technology High School (GTHS), providing them with a sample of what would be offered at a weekly youth program at EMNC (Activities include: ping pong tables, chill out space, art & crafts table, board games and podcast equipment) and asking for feedback.

Case Work

We have seen solid increase in case referrals, thanks to Amy's ongoing relationship building, particularly with schools. We can clearly identify effective referral pathways from Glendale Technology High School, ATWEA Argenton, ARISE support service, TAFE RESET and walk-in clients.

We have attended case conferences for young people and families with a higher level of complexity and implemented support tools and strategies for clients within our service scope.

Referral pathways into our Youth Service include Glendale Technology High School, ATWEA Argenton, ARISE support service, TAFE RESET and walk-in clients.

Counselling

We were pleased to recently welcome a new Counsellor to our team who is excited to work with young people after school hours by appointment.

Partners

Notable connections this year have been The Mirabel Foundation, ARISE support service, Lake Macquarie and Newcastle Suicide Prevention Network, The Canopy, Newcastle Family Support Service, ATWEA Argenton, Glendale TAFE and Glendale Technology High School.

Amy and Liam attended GTHS Industry Breakfast in July and Northlakes Youth Service received a positive mention for work with the school.

Other Highlights

- GTHS students enrolled in Well Education wellbeing program organised donations to make up care packages for community members and distributed them during Wednesday Food Pantry.
- Attended the Northlakes Stakeholder Engagement meeting including the local Super Intendent and Clayton Barr MP.
- EMNC is now a partner of the Freedom Condom Project. This initiative led by Family Planning NSW allows us to provide free condoms to people aged under 30 years and opens opportunity to have conversations with young people about safe sex and consent.
- A group of local students are utilising the Centre's audio production equipment to produce a podcast, particularly focussed on LGBTQI+ issues.
- We are also working towards creating a Student Social Worker Placement to support the local university and new workers in the sector.



Families

Playgroup

Our popular Community Playgroup runs every Wednesday morning during the school term. The program is focused on social participation for local children aged 0-5 years and for their parents/carers to create new connections and community networks in a safe and inclusive environment.

A range of activities and play stations including arts and crafts, building blocks, musical instruments, and outdoor play equipment are available inside the main hall and outside in the community garden. Throughout the year, other special activities have included cupcake decorating, pajama days, Easter craft and a bike and scooter day.



Special Events

Regular special events, targeted at local families, continue to be a great introduction to the Centre for many new people. Liam led a great line-up of events this past year:

Gnome Painting: provided many families with a much needed out-of-the-house school holiday activity and was enjoyed by those in attendance.

Petting Zoo: This event was a huge success with 46 families and 108 people in attendance. We had families who travelled from Eastern and Southern parts of Lake Macquarie, and even families from Port Stephens and Maitland LGA's. This event was specifically for children aged 0-5 years and their families.



Messy Play: 10 sensory play stations for children 0-5 years were setup including play-doh activities, slime, and an array of food materials. This activity drew an attendance of 47 people from 21 families.

Insect Hotel Workshop: 37 attendees packed into an alternate location (Holmesville Community Hall) for this school holiday workshop facilitated by Tree Frog Permaculture.

Indigenous Culture

'Nhunda khumba khumba' (thank you) to Uncle Amos Simon from Muurrung Marai for delivering an incredible language and cultural workshop recently, providing an opportunity for local families to learn about Awabakal, Gathang and Wiradjuri languages!

We were excited to see the level of interest from local families, a few travelling some distance to participate.



Community

Our mix of regular activities remains steady and well-attended, including craft group, Playgroup, Book Club and more recently 'Breath & Movement' Gentle Yoga led by local yoga teacher, Sue Simpson.

We have received frequent positive feedback about the presentation of the Centre and the hub of activities that are going on. Community members and service providers who have been visiting for a number of years have mentioned that our service feels warm, welcoming, inviting and busy - providing great opportunity for community involvement and service collaboration.

Community Pantry

The rising cost of living has seen a steady increase in demand for our SecondBite and FoodBank offerings.

We continue to see a wide mix of people in attendance from parents with young families to pensioners and those experiencing homelessness.



No Interest Loan Scheme

We have seen a spike in enquiries and information/advice/referral sessions for HRNILS applications, and at one stage were supporting 7 clients with their applications at the same time.

Care Packages

We have continued to support our clients and the community with clothing and children's gifts from We Care Connect as well as sanitary products and care packages from Share the Dignity.

Special Events

We hosted a number of special events throughout the year targeting health, gardening

- StrokeSafe stroke awareness training
- Safetalk Suicide Prevention Training
- Lake Mac Crop Swap
- Fermentation Workshop
- Lake Mac Seed Library Processing Session



Networks

Efforts to maintain and grow our local networks have been a feature this past year.

We reached out to new and established networks to build partnership and collaboration opportunities including representatives from Lake Macquarie City Council, Home in Place, Habitat for Humanity Australia, and Family Planning NSW for various info-share meetings and phone conferences.

Our board president accompanied staff to the Hunter Volunteer's Expo and our team also attended community engagement events and interagency opportunities including the Multicultural Services Expo, Edgeworth Public School Kindergarten Expo, Lake Macquarie Interagency, Northlakes Stakeholder Group Meeting, Kumaridha AECG meeting, Hunter Central Coast Neighbourhood Centre meeting, Glendale Technology High School Industry Breakfast.

We also maintain active relationships with LCSA, Youth Action, FCAN as well as our referral partners.



Active Referral Partners

Our active referral partners include the following agencies:

- Juvenile Justice
- The Canopy
- ALESCO Senior College- Argenton
- Glendale HS
- Cardiff HS
- West Wallsend HS
- Warners Bay HS
- Lake Macquarie City Council
- At-Work Australia
- Castle Personnel
- TAFE NSW
- Got Your Back Sista
- Mum's Cottage
- Belmont Neighbourhood Centre
- Edgeworth Public School
- DCJ
- Salvation Army
- Service NSW
- Centrelink
- Bungree
- Hunter Primary Care
- The Groundswell Collective
- Home In Place
- Well Education
- Baptist Care
- Fairplay OOSH
- Mirabel Foundation
- Lake Mac Newcastle Suicide Prevention Network
- Sugar Valley Neighbourhood Centre
- Hunter Women's Centre

Development

Staff training this year has included:

- SafeTALK suicide prevention training
- DV Alertness training
- Cultural Competency Training
- Minimising Gambling harms training
- LoveBites facilitation training
- Leading transformation

We have also focussed on working more closely with volunteers on safety and compliance, developing their understanding of the changing sector, and regular communication.

Our Volunteer Information Session/Morning Tea hosted 15 volunteers, discussing the importance and purpose of volunteering, TEI funding, Working with Children Checks, Workplace Healthy and Safety considerations, changes to the Community Food Pantry and much more.

Our volunteers provided really positive feedback about this event, and we will look to do similar sessions 3-4 times per year.

Staff

Management Committee

Judy Mathews, President

Barney Langford, Treasurer

Tracey Campbell, Secretary

Maryanne Withers, Public Officer

Cassandra Ralph, Valued Member

Scott Luschwitz, Valued Member

David, Executive Officer

David has been supporting neighbourhood and community centres in the Hunter for over 25 years. He has postgraduate qualifications in Community Development and Program Evaluation. David has extensive experience in business and leadership in the not-for-profit sector. He is trained in various forms of counselling and is completing a degree in Child and Adolescent Mental Health.

Liam, Community Strengthening Worker

Liam has been working within Neighbourhood Centres and Youth Services in the Lake Macquarie area for 7 years. He has a Bachelor's Degree of Social Work (Honours) and a strong passion for delivering meaningful and engaging community programs, activities and events. Liam's practice is grounded in principles of Community Development, and he has diverse experiences in coordinating and facilitating programs with a child and youth focus, as well as providing effective support and advocacy when working individually with community members.

Amy G, Youth Worker

Amy is currently finishing her final year in a Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) degree at Newcastle University, after which she plans to complete post graduate studies in counselling. In her role Amy provides case management and support, either one on one or within groups to young people and families. Focusing on strengths and trauma-informed principles and practices she works closely with the Northlakes education institutions to deliver targeted support to the young people in the area. Amy is passionate about delivering programs and support to local youth through peer support and mentoring.

Jess, Administration Officer

Passionate about community connection, Jess is excited to put her admin and digital design skills to use in the Centre. She has been able to start re-developing the EMNC website, raise our social media profile and keep all the accounts and payroll in order.

Amy S, Counsellor (Young People)

Amy's practice is founded on strengths and trauma-informed principles to promote the development of resilience and healthy relationships of young people and their families. Working either one on one or within group settings, her central focus is advocating and supporting the people she works with to foster positive wellbeing and mental health.

Gemma, Cost of Living Counsellor (Families and Young People)

Gemma has decades of local experience working in various roles in the employment and social welfare sectors. She is a qualified Financial Counsellor and MoneyMinded Coach with a strong interest in improving financial literacy and wellbeing for adolescents, young people and families in Lake Macquarie.