



Breaking down barriers

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



OUR ASPIRATION

The home of comprehensive support for neurological conditions

OUR PURPOSE

Together on the journey to break down barriers, achieve goals and live well

OUR VALUES

Empowerment, Community,
Expertise, Creativity, Spirited



Contents

Message from the Chair	3
Message from the CEO	4
MS Plus in numbers	5
Delivering on our <i>Strategic Directions 2020–2025</i>	7
Our Wellbeing Centres	8
Breaking down barriers with tailored, innovated service delivery	9
Care for you at home	12
Breaking down barriers through comprehensive education and support	13
Supporting targeted education for our clients	14
Breaking down barriers to better treatments...and a cure	17
Annemarie Watson: Transforming adversity into hope	23
Celebrating our staff	24
Concise financials	25
Our Board Committees, Executive Team and Senior Management Team	29
Special thanks	31
From uncertain to empowered: How Kellie found her support system	33

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



...the home of comprehensive support for neurological conditions

As we conclude another successful year, I am proud to reflect on the tremendous progress our organisation has made. This year has been marked by resilience, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to our mission, all of which would not have been possible without the dedication of our exceptional team and the unwavering support of our Board.

In a rapidly changing landscape, we have continued to embrace opportunities to adapt and grow. Our focus on diversity and inclusion has not only enriched our workplace culture but has also led to more creative solutions for the challenges we face.

Over the past year, MS Plus has made significant advancements in applying the MS Plus Outcomes Framework to better understand and enhance the impact of our services. A key achievement has been the integration of the NEURO-QoL (Quality of Life in Neurological Disorders) tool into both the registration and re-engagement processes, with annual retesting. Data from the 12-month re-testing is supporting program improvements and enhances credibility of reporting

for our clients, staff, donors, and funding bodies.

During the year the Board endorsed a new Fundraising Strategy, core to this will be commencing investment in developing a portfolio of major donors, which we believe is our most significant opportunity to build fundraising value over the next decade to support both MS services and MS research.

Ron Brent retired from the Board this year, having served as a Director and member of the Risk, Audit & Finance Committee since 2017. Ron was also the MS Plus nominee on the MS Australia Board, bringing to these roles a strong passion and commitment to improving the lives of people living with multiple sclerosis and other neurological conditions and we thank him for his contribution to our work.

The Board was very pleased to welcome, Jennifer Bennett, a seasoned executive advisor in major reform programs, including the NDIS. Also welcomed were three new Independent members: Ian Blair an Aged Care Specialist to the Program Policy & Practice Committee; Fern Cargill a Philanthropy Specialist to the Marketing and Fundraising Committee and Lance Willie, who

brings substantial experience in property matters, to the Infrastructure Committee.

In this my final report as Chair, I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to my fellow Board members. Your expertise and strategic insights have been invaluable in guiding our organisation. Together, we have navigated complexities with a shared vision, ensuring our values remain at the forefront of our decision-making processes. Your commitment to governance and oversight has laid a solid foundation for our continued success.

To our staff, thank you for your hard work and dedication. Each of you plays a crucial role in delivering on our promises to the communities we serve.

I am confident that with our shared commitment and passion, the best is yet to come.

Garry Whatley
Chairman

...together on the journey to break down barriers, achieve goals and live well.

At MS Plus, our focus remains on fostering a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and resilience - empowering people living with multiple sclerosis, to reach their full potential not just overcoming challenges, but by transforming them into opportunities for personal growth.

This year's Annual Report features a range operational achievements which highlight this commitment including:

- The strong interest from the MS community in our Peer Support Program, MS Family Camps and Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme.
- The introduction of Navigate Series and NDIS Upskill providing multi-week sessions delivered by MS Nurses, to support our clients and carers with education increasing understanding of the service system and strategies to empower wellbeing.
- The Employment Support Program has experienced continued growth with over 700 clients benefiting from the program, MS Plus Plan Management Service is proudly supporting over 400 clients, reflecting our growing impact.
- We are offering expanded Allied Health programs through the opening of wellbeing centres.
- Our Support Coordination Service has, again, skilfully navigated numerous challenges within the NDIS, particularly inconsistent decision-making and individual plan funding cuts, to deliver outstanding outcomes for 1,400+ clients.
- Our Quality Framework has continued to evolve delivering a new Supported Decision-Making Framework, maintenance of rigorous compliance with NDIS, Aged Care, and CoAct standards and gaining qualification as a Child Safe Organisation.
- Successful change of management at Care For you at Home (Healthy Ageing) has seen the recruitment of an Operations Manager to support continued growth and expansion, along with the recruitment of a dedicated MS Plus Physiotherapist delivering inhouse services to the Aged care, Veterans, DVA and NDIS clients.
- Enhancing our fall's prevention programs utilising NeuRA smart step mats, to boost fitness and significantly reduce someone's risk of having a fall and support client's overall wellbeing.

- Our fundraising Appeals, Gifts in Wills, Shops and Trust and Foundations programs were well supported throughout the year. Similarly, the Walk Run Roll events were very successful, however the events program was significantly impacted by the forced cancellation of the Gong Ride due to an extreme weather event on the day.

As we reflect on the achievements of the past year, I extend my thanks to our Board. The support and strategic guidance from our Directors have been instrumental in achievement of our vision and purpose and in fostering an environment that encourages innovation and excellence. A particular thanks to our Chair, Garry Whatley, who is retiring this year after twelve years of outstanding leadership – we will miss his strong support and commitment.

Thank you also to our team for your hard work and passion. Together with our donors, volunteers and supporters, each of you plays a vital role in bringing our vision to life, and is what drives us forward in creating a powerful impact.

John Blewonski
Chief Executive Officer



**MESSAGE
FROM THE CEO**

MS Plus in numbers

Plus exercise physiologists provided **10,097** hours of support

Plus Continence support provided by Clinical Nurses: **866** hours

1,448 people generously volunteer their time to support MS Plus

510 event volunteers donated **3,631** hours of their time to MS Plus

210,240 hours of care provided through Plus Residential and Plus Respite services at Beverly Hills in New South Wales, and Watsonia and Williamstown in Victoria

MS Plus Community Shops' **281** volunteers, welcomed **470,000** items.

31,655 followers across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

948 people provided with employment support

197,492 NDIS services delivered (across all services)



53,498 hours
of Plus Support
Coordination provided

MS Plus employs **297**
full time, part time and
casual staff

Plus Peer Support volunteers providing approximately
2,700 hours of monthly support

Total event and
community fundraising:
\$3,386,620

Plus Advisor nurses and
social workers provided
support to **1,525** clients

18,676 connections
through Plus Connect

2,131 registrations for
an educational webinar

MS Virtual Art Show 2023
received submissions from
58 artists

7,882 people
participated in an
MS Plus event



Delivering on our *Strategic Directions 2020–2025*

YEAR FOUR

About *Strategic Directions 2020–2025*

MS Plus Strategic Directions 2020–2025 is about meeting the evolving needs of people living with MS and other neurological conditions, now and in the future. In the past year we continued to reshape our service delivery to empower neuro wellbeing and connections, all within our changing environment. The strategy remains underpinned by our four Strategic Pillars: Person-centred, Virtual and Physical Hubs, Partnerships and Growth.

Achievements in FY 2023–2024

Person-centred

- launching of Plus Connect: the new ‘front-end’ for access to MS Plus services, supported by plans for our new ‘Key Worker’ roles
- integration of the NEURO-QoL (Quality of Life in Neurological Disorders) tool into the Outcomes Framework
- implementation of our Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- delivery of women’s health resources, including checklists, podcasts, and webinars.

Virtual and Physical Hubs

- opening of our wellbeing centres in Footscray, Hobart and Blackburn
- advancing construction of Specialist Disability Accommodation units at Lidcombe
- implementation of a new Peer Support Program delivery model.

Partnerships

- delivering the Navigate Series

involves multi-week sessions delivered by MS Nurses to support our clients with education, an increased understanding of the service system and strategies to empower them to live well

- engagement with clinic partners, resulting in nearly double the number of health professional referrals
- establishment of partnerships with Alfred Health and Royal Melbourne Hospital
- facilitation of clinic-based self-referrals, via desktop client self-referral QR card.

Carers

- implementing the Navigate Family & Friends was introduced as an extension to our Carers strategy and has allowed us to expand our reach to more people supporting someone with MS.

Growth

- continued expansion of our existing Allied Health, NDIS and Employment Program to support people living with neurological conditions other than MS

- expansion of service delivery to people over 65 across all MS Plus jurisdictions; and delivery of Allied Health to Nursing Port Stephens
- implementation of the new Clinical Governance, and Investment Strategies.

Year Five: What’s next?

FY 2024–2025 will be another significant year for MS Plus, with lots happening including:

- implementation of the proposed New Specialist Disability Employment Program to meet the support needs of the multiple sclerosis and acquired neurological conditions
- further expansion of services to support people living with other neurological conditions
- opening of the Lidcombe Specialist Disability Accommodation
- delivery of the new data management framework
- implementation of the Major Donor fundraising strategy
- implementation of new Clinical Governance Framework.

Our wellbeing centres

Over the past 12 months, MS Plus has launched three wellbeing centres — a key component of our Strategic Directions 2020–2025.

We launched a redeveloped centre located in our existing site in Blackburn, Victoria together with wellbeing centres located at new sites in Footscray, Victoria and Hobart, Tasmania. We have also made significant progress towards the opening of our Wellbeing Centre and Specialist Disability Accommodation development in Lidcombe, New South Wales. The project, funded in conjunction with the NSW Government, is expected to be delivered in November 2024.



Our wellbeing centres enable MS Plus to deliver a range of tailored services to clients in a single location, including:

- Physiotherapy
- Exercise physiology
- Dietetic support
- Occupational therapy
- NDIS support (support coordination and plan management)
- Employment support
- Continence nurse support





Breaking down barriers with tailored, innovative service delivery



WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICE DELIVERY AND TO PROVIDE NEW, TAILORED SERVICES TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR MS COMMUNITY. THIS WORK IS DRIVEN BY OUR DESIRE TO HELP THOSE LIVING WITH MS TO BREAK THROUGH ANY BARRIERS CURRENTLY IMPACTING THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE AND BE ABLE TO LIVE WELL WITH MS.



Plus Employment Support Services

948 clients were supported to stay at work or find new employment.

Our Plus Employment Support team supported almost 1,000 people living with MS, with:

- **36** individuals assisted in gaining employment
- **888** individuals were assisted to maintain their employment
- **33,654** hours of direct service were provided

MS Plus also provided **\$1,653,484** financial assistance to clients with Employment Assistance Funding and Revenue Allocation, including:

- **1173** individual items of equipment purchased for participants with a total value off **\$733,645**.
- **\$919,839** of services purchased for participants in the maintenance of their employment.

Feel good moment

Brad reached out to MS Plus early on, through Plus Connect. He was given information about the Employment Support Service (ESS) and put in touch with an Employment Development Manager who helped Brad to find a new role. He also works with an Occupational Therapist to help manage his symptoms and make sure they don't impact his performance at work.

'My OT helped by assessing and organising funding for specialised ergonomic equipment and now my set up at both my home and office are perfect for what I need. This helps me to manage my fatigue and my spasticity.

'Having that weekly support with an OT, to run through any challenges during your week at work — I don't think anyone can understand just how much that helps you.'



Allied Health

723 clients were provided with more than **17,070** hours of support.

We grew our team this year at our Hobart Wellbeing Centre — offering physiotherapy and exercise physiology on site, by telehealth and direct to the home. We also now offer on site exercise support at our Blackburn Wellbeing Centre from our physiotherapy team and our new allied health assistants. This year we introduced the Plus Boxing program at our Footscray, VIC and Lidcombe, NSW sites, led by our exercise physiologists.

- Plus Exercise Physiology total hours: **10,097**
- Plus Physiotherapy total hours: **2,893**
- Plus Occupational therapy total hours: **2,919**
- Plus Diet and Nutrition total hours: **294**
- Plus Continence total hours: **866**

Our allied health staff provided **767** clients with a total of **2,450** home visits.



Plus Support Coordination

A total of **53,498** hours of support provided to clients.

Our Support Coordination team has skilfully navigated numerous challenges within the NDIS to deliver outstanding outcomes for our clients. This year, the team has adapted to the increase in billable target, required to support the sustainability of the service. The support coordination team responded admirably and collectively reached the target each month — a fantastic team and individual achievement, to ensure the needs of our more than **1,400** clients continued to be met.

‘Santi’s meticulous handling of invoice payments, reimbursements, and periodic spending checks has truly simplified my life. I am reassured knowing my finances are in capable, responsible hands. Thank you, Santi, for your prompt and impeccable service.’



Plus Plan Management

45,294 invoices processed

This year, our Plan Management service has made significant strides, highlighted by our commitment to service excellence. We proudly supported more than **400** clients throughout the year, with the number of invoices processed for our clients increasing **41.7 per cent** in FY 2023–2024. To accommodate this growth and enhance our operations, we introduced a full-time plan manager and a dedicated service team leader. We also enhanced the customer experience by introducing a third payment day, ensuring greater convenience for clients and respective providers.



Plus Residential and Plus Respite

210,720 hours of residential and respite care provided across **3** sites.

The MS Plus Residential and Respite service provides Supported Independent Living (SIL) options in Specialised Disability Accommodation (SDA) for people living with MS and other neurological conditions.

MS Plus provides long-term residential care for a small number of people in our purpose-built facilities in Williamstown and Watsonia in Victoria and Beverly Hills in NSW. Our site in Watsonia also offers respite care.

MS PLUS **MS Plus Healthy Ageing**

Empowering wellbeing and connection, with options and choices

Plus Healthy Ageing partners with clients to help to protect their independence, enabling them to continue to live well as they get older. Our allied health service provides tailored physiotherapy, exercise physiology, occupational therapy, nutrition and continence support to those 65 and over.

Care For You at Home (CFYAH), part of our Plus Healthy Ageing service, provides professional in-home care services to clients within the Port Stephens, NSW community.



Our team is dedicated to keeping clients safe, well and independent in their own home whether they are in their senior years, have a disability or need a bit of extra help around your home. Our team offers a range of personalised services — from domestic assistance and home maintenance, to registered nursing treatments such as palliative care or wound dressing management.

Supported **245** clients with approximately **2,433** hours of care each month

During FY 2023–2024, CFYAH achieved significant milestones, including:

- Accreditation for NDIS & Aged Care with support from the MS Plus Quality & Risk team
- Improved internal processes with support from the MS Plus People & Culture team
- Introduced Office HQ as the live back up overflow intake service, to take messages and direct calls to the appropriate person for action
- Falls prevention and balance programs made available to CFYAH clients, via the MS Plus allied health team
- Currently recruiting for a dedicated exercise physiologist or physiotherapist for ongoing client falls prevention
- Recruitment of Operations Manager, Natalie Matthews to support the growth of the business.
- Participated in the Tomaree Community connect day, an opportunity to highlight our services and meet and greet the community and other health care professionals.



Left to right: **Indus Woodward** - Business Support Partner, **Chloe Kader** - Care Coordinator, **Natalie Matthews** - Operations Manager.

'I'd like to say a big thank you to all the staff who provide excellent care and look after my mum so well. We have a master chef community worker who cooks fresh veggies, which mum loves and which keep her healthy. As you would realise, you are the only people a client may see for the day so your visit is special. Thank you and keep up the good work.'

Client's daughter



Breaking down barriers through comprehensive education and support



WE ARE HELPING INDIVIDUALS TO IDENTIFY AND OVERCOME ANY BARRIERS THEY MAY BE FACING BY PROVIDING ONGOING, COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION RESOURCES, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT. WE ARE BOTH THE FIRST PORT OF CALL FOR NEWLY DIAGNOSED AND THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN LIVING WITH MS FOR MANY YEARS.

Plus Connect

16,328 connections made through Plus Connect

Our Plus Connect team is a vital source of information and support for our clients, who reach out in various formats including phone calls, emails, face-to-face meetings and online.

Plus Advisor

MS nurse advisors and MS social work advisors provided support to 1,525 clients.

Our MS nurse and social work advisors provided tailored support to our clients, together with education and information sessions to groups via our Peer Links, webinars and Peer Groups.

Health promotion & Education

2,131 people registered for a webinar

Podcasts: 14,718 downloads, **14,366** unique listeners

Client and health professional views of our on-demand YouTube webinars: 14,421

Our Health Promotion & Wellbeing team provide regular, free webinars, podcasts, short courses and other resources for people with MS and other neurological conditions, family, friends and carers.

‘The webinars and podcasts available through MS Plus are vital to my understanding and management of my MS and I am extremely grateful for the effort and thinking that goes into putting them on... Thank you so much.’

MS Plus Client



‘MS nurse advisors have been crucial in helping me to build my knowledge, to understand MS and the things that I could do to manage symptoms.

An MS nurse advisor can explain complex information very easily and clearly – which was crucial to reducing my anxiety. They’re like angels, they’re amazing. They are always there when I need them. They are so important for people with MS.

Your support is helping people living with MS to access the support they need to better understand and treat their symptoms, ultimately improving their quality of life. Your donation is a vital contribution.’

Cara

Supporting targeted education for our clients

This year, MS Plus launched the Plus Navigate series together with Upskill NDIS, the MS Masterclass for Allied Health and the Fatigue: Applying Cognitive behavioural and Energy effectiveness Techniques to lifestyle (FACETS) program.

A grant from the Moorabbin Rotary Club enabled us to deliver our **Plus Navigate series: Plus Navigate Family & Friends** and **Plus Navigate Newly Diagnosed**. The family and friends component was launched in September 2023, and to date we have completed 6 programs, with 81 registrations. The newly diagnosed component was piloted in April with 12 participants attending the new 4-week program.

The **FACETS** program helps people living with MS to navigate the common fatigue symptom in their daily lives. This year we delivered **3** programs to **35** attendees.

Upskill NDIS is a 40-minute online lunchtime session designed to answer clients and potential clients' common questions around the NDIS application process. This year we delivered **3** programs to **39** individuals.

MS Masterclass for Allied Health was delivered in partnership with the Royal Melbourne Hospital and recorded **35** registrations.

Family Camps

In 2024, **106** people living with MS and their families attended camps at Phillip Island in Victoria and Collaroy Beach in NSW collectively — for **3** days of education, support and fun group activities.



MS Virtual Art Show

This year's art show featured **88** skilful works, including paintings, illustrations, sculptures, craft, digital artwork and photography, were submitted by **58** artists living with MS or another neurological condition and their carers.

Following our 18-year tradition, one of the artists participating in the 2024 MS Virtual Art Show won the prestigious Barry Allen Art Award. The late Barry Allen was a man who loved painting and received great comfort from his interest in art and music. The virtual award ceremony took place on Tuesday 30 May in recognition of World MS Day.



MS Go for Gold Scholarships

We once again had an overwhelming response to the program, which is funded by our MS Mega Challenge. We received **94** applications this year, all for a variety of inspiring goals. The scholarships provide **\$2,000** to **25** recipients, to help them to pursue a dream or goal that has been impeded by their MS diagnosis.

'Realising my dream will be transformative, not only for my own life but also for those around me. Reconnecting with my passion for music will provide me with a sense of purpose and fulfillment that goes beyond the limitations imposed by my MS. It would reignite a spark within me, reminding me of my resilience and capacity for joy despite the challenges I face.'

Chris, Go for Gold Scholarship winner 2023



Plus Peer Support

104 active groups, attended by approximately **1,000** people, supported by **2,700** monthly volunteer hours from Peer Support Facilitators.

'Volunteering is my way of paying forward the help that I have received. It takes a person who just gets it to support others in the village.'

Blackburn Peer Support Facilitator, Luise Topma



MS Plus Ambassadors

48 ambassadors donated more than **100** hours presenting across **31** events, to a collective audience of more than **2,000** people.

Our ambassadors are volunteers living with MS or caring for someone with MS, who educate others about the condition via corporate, school or community events.

Feel good moment



'You learn a lot through your MS journey, mostly that it's not the end of the world and you can still achieve so many amazing things.

'Selfishly, it also really helps me to talk about my MS. You learn a lot about yourself as you do that, instead of just sitting in your own mind. Talking to others and hearing their experiences is wonderful too.'

MS Plus Ambassador for the past 6 years, Joshua



Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS)

380 active ACVVS volunteers made **12,062** visits to isolated members of the community.

Each year we help to recruit, train and support volunteers on behalf of the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme (ACVVS). The program provides vital companionship for people living in government-funded aged care homes or living in their own homes and receiving a Home Care Package and who are at risk of social isolation and loneliness and volunteers are the backbone of the program. MS Plus' ACVVS program is fully-funded by the Australian Government.

'Last year Winnie told me that I'm her best friend, and she's not shy about letting everyone know about our special bond.'

ACVVS volunteer Dionne



Breaking down barriers to better treatments ...and a cure



OUR PASSION FOR THE MS COMMUNITY DRIVES OUR FUNDRAISING. THROUGH MS PLUS EVENTS, GIFTS IN WILLS, APPEALS AND COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING WE CAN ENSURE RESEARCHERS ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS — FINDING BETTER TREATMENTS AND HOPEFULLY, ONE DAY, A CURE.



Total raised: **\$1,361,949**
Total participants: **6,256**

The MS Gong Ride is Australia's largest fundraising recreational bike ride, fundraising money to support people living with MS.

The event has a long and successful history, however due to unprecedented weather in 2023, the event was cancelled at 5.55am, prior to the first wave of riders departing at 6am.

Due to multiple instances of debris on the roads caused by torrential overnight rain, it was decided by key stakeholders including NSW Police and Emergency Services that the event would be cancelled to ensure the safety of our riders. While bitterly disappointed, the feedback received was positive, with many emails and phone calls congratulating us on the brave, but wise, decision to cancel the event.

MSMEGA
CHALLENGE

Total raised: **\$471,929**
Total participants: **1,711**

The MS Mega Challenge is one of Australia's most popular fundraising events, where teams take on the ultimate team relay to change the lives of Australians living with MS by taking on a 12 or 24 hour challenge.

The first MS Mega Swim, located in Fitzroy, VIC, was founded in 2001 by Carol Cooke AM, Paralympian. Since then, the program has expanded to swims across ACT, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.



Total raised: **\$1,001,521**
Total participants: **6,171**

In May 2024, over 6,000 people took part in The MS Walk Run + Roll events, which take place in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Launceston and bring people together to celebrate the resilience and diversity of our amazing MS community.

During the 2024 event, participants completed a total of almost **41,622km** across the four events.

'It was lovely to see the incredible enthusiasm, determination and kindness of everyone involved, from event organisers and sponsors to participants and volunteers and of course our four-legged furry companions — a wonderful, joyous morning!'

Walk, Run + Roll participant



Total raised: **\$1,321,641**
Total participants: **19,768**

The 2023 MS Readathon was a resounding success, not only in promoting literacy development among young readers but also in raising an impressive almost **\$1.4 million** for people living with MS and their families across the country.

In 2023, MS Plus again oversaw this national campaign on behalf of the other state-based MS organisations. We were joined by over **19,000** individuals across Australia to read and fundraise for this important cause throughout the month of August.

do it for MS

Total raised: **\$551,221**

Every year fundraisers find new and exciting ways to raise funds, as well as using tried and true methods, within their local communities. The MS Plus Treks are a popular way for people to support the work of MS Plus and push their own boundaries!

In April 2024, **15** trekkers spent **6** magical days in New Zealand's scenic Southern Alps. They discovered awe-inspiring landscapes, from countryside to cities, canyons to coast, mountains to glaciers, of Aotearoa! The group bonded over the beautiful sites and made friends for life.

THE MAY 50K

Total raised: **\$2,433,381**
Total participants: **12,801**

The May 50k challenges encourages participants to raise funds with a 50km, 100km or 150km goal over the course of the month. The campaign is run on behalf of MS Australia and all funds raised benefit MS research. In 2024, 1,085 teams and 237 organisations took part.

'Life is full of unforgettable moments and my adventure in the Southern Alps was certainly one of them. The breathtaking landscape, trekking with a fantastic group of people, and the opportunity to raise funds for MS made it all more meaningful. It's experiences like these that truly change lives, and I hope everyone gets the chance to experience it at least once.'

Jimena Arango, Southern Alps trek participant (pictured)



MS Plus Community Shops

Our **294** community shop volunteers raised just over **\$2,000,000** and founds new homes for **470,000** items.

Our MS Plus Community Shops are opportunity shops with a difference, providing locals with quality, pre-loved goods, where all funds generated help to support people living with MS.

MS Plus would like to thank our donation partner, Donate It, who assist with supplying stock directly to our community shops, as well as donation bins to aid with collections.

MS Plus Future Planning

Total raised: **\$4,939,860**
Total Estates/Trusts: **69**

The generous donations we receive through our gifts in Wills program play a vital role in enabling us to provide vital services to people living with MS and re also an important source of funding for MS research. We thank all our incredible donors for their generosity and commitment to improving the lives of others.

All our supporters who leave a gift in their Will automatically join our Callistemon League. The League's emblem is the Callistemon Phoeniceus. We believe the beautiful Callistemon is a fitting emblem for a group of extraordinary people who are leaving a legacy of kindness, care, and ultimately transformation.

Feel good moment



'I love volunteering for MS Plus Shops! You get a lot of satisfaction knowing you are helping to raise money to find a cure for those with MS.

The friendships you make with fellow volunteers, donors and customers gives you something to look forward to every week.'

Anita, MS Plus Community Shop Geelong





Our commitment to funding research

Total specifically raised for MS research: **\$953,019**

MS Plus research grant: **\$1,000,000**

MS Plus provides funding specifically for critical MS and neurological research through the donations of our generous individual givers, including major donations through gifts in Wills, together with our major events program.

In the past 12 months, we have provided almost \$1,000,000 to MS Australia to help them to continue their incredible research work, helping to improve the lives of people living with MS as they work to find a cure.

In addition to funds raised through donations and events, MS Plus provided a further \$1M grant to MS Australia, to further fund life changing research.

Some of the projects we have helped to fund include:

- Associate Professor Anthony Don, The University of Sydney, NSW **Developing a blood test to predict and track therapeutic responses in MS**
- Associate Professor Anne Bruestle, Australian National University, ACT **What can blood cells tell us and how can we use this for new MS treatments?**
- Karen Zoszak, University of Wollongong, NSW, **Evaluation of dietary advice for multiple sclerosis**
- Associate Professor Simon Murray, University of Melbourne, VIC, **Understanding how myelin is generated**



MS Giving

Total raised: **\$1,660,448**
Total gifts: **10,550**

MS Plus donors enable us to continue funding better treatments, ongoing services and research that will empower people to better manage their condition. With their gifts, we can strengthen and improve our support network and MS specialist services. We can also continue to fund groundbreaking research that is unlocking new opportunities to halt disease progression, provide recovery from disability and ultimately find a cure for MS.

This year, MS Giving saw the strongest net surplus delivered to date, helped by a strong response to our Tax appeal raising **\$570,015** for services and **\$485,228** for research from **3,867** donors.



'The challenges I've been through are endless. Just endless. But you give life back to me. You will give life back to so many people living with MS.'

Thank you for helping support the research and services that transform the lives of all of us touched by MS.'

Ricky



‘When you’re diagnosed, there are plenty of times when you think, no I couldn’t possibly do that, but then I realised I am capable of stepping outside of my comfort zone. I don’t need to be wrapped in cotton wool, I can still achieve things if I set my mind to it.’

Vella

Annemarie Watson: transforming adversity into hope



Annemarie Watson didn't have the easiest life. Her once-happy childhood was scarred by World War II. Her first marriage ended sadly when her husband died of complications from MS. These events would shape her personality and her desire to help other people in the future.

An only child, Annemarie grew up in a loving home in Sydney with her parents, Hans and Annele Eckardt. The Eckardts were from well-off families in Germany and had met in Australia.

But Annemarie's childhood was disrupted in 1939, when she was seven years old. Hans, along with other German nationals, was interned during the war. Wartime austerity and Hans's absence made life difficult for Annemarie and her mother. When Hans returned after six long years, he was a changed man. Annemarie was also affected. She had become resilient but also cautious.

'Those wartime experiences made her careful with money. This lasted all her life,' recalled her cousin, Annele Schoeffel.

Educated at the Redlands school, Annemarie made life-long friends. She later trained as a stenographer. In the 1950s, she met Dr Keith Watson, a radiologist, and they found common ground as only children. They married and settled in Mosman but also travelled and lived overseas.

But they soon faced challenges when Keith discovered he had MS. It was the slow-progressing kind, so he was able to practise medicine and enjoy life for many years. But by his late 60s, he was in a wheelchair.

As Keith's health declined, Annemarie became his carer so he wouldn't have to go into a nursing home. She provided unwavering support throughout the various stages of Keith's illness. He died aged 69, 40 years after his initial diagnosis. 'She was devoted to him,' said Annele.

The couple didn't have children, so they decided to leave their respective estates to charities. Annemarie's frugality disappeared as she and Keith decided to generously support the MS cause.

'They wanted their respective estates to benefit MS Plus and local hospitals,' explained Roger Blackwood, Annemarie's accountant.

Annemarie found happiness in a second marriage, extensive travels and a busy social life. On her 90th birthday, she enjoyed a glass of champagne with Roger and Annele, her carer in her twilight years.

Sadly, Annemarie died only a few weeks later. In her Will, she provided funds to MS Plus. This reflected her wish to transform Keith's experiences with MS into help for

others with the condition.

'Annemarie didn't want others to suffer as Keith had. She knew her gift could help to accelerate MS research and bring us closer to finding a cure,' said Annele.



Annemarie's incredible gift to MS Plus will help to improve the lives of people in the MS community. Her resilience in the face of life-changing events and generosity at the end of her life is a shining example to others. Her generosity is also a testament to the difference people can make.



Celebrating our staff

WE PROVIDE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS, ENCOURAGING THEM TO BE THE BEST THEY CAN BE THROUGH UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES, REWARD AND RECOGNITION OPPORTUNITIES, STRONG COMMUNICATION AND RIGOROUS QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES AND PRACTICES.

Our staff provide consistent, high-quality care to our clients by working diligently within the newly-released Clinical Governance Framework. This framework ensures that all clinical practices are aligned with the latest standards and regulations, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability. By adhering to this framework, our team can effectively manage risks, enhance service delivery, and ensure the safety and well-being of our

participants. Through comprehensive training and ongoing professional development, our staff are well-equipped to deliver care that is both person-centered and evidence-based, ultimately supporting the best possible outcomes for our clients.

Planning and compliance

MS Plus Healthy Ageing maintains accreditation against three national standards and is committed to ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement. Accreditation provides assurance regarding the quality and performance of our organisational systems, processes, governance and management, and provides our clients, staff and community and funding bodies with certainty and confidence.

MS Plus accreditation programs involve an ongoing focus on performance evaluation and progressing improvement action plans. These cycles are embedded and support all teams to be ready for accreditation at any time, acknowledging accreditation standards as the baseline for optimum performance.

Our Care For You at Home/MS Plus Healthy Ageing team successfully completed a re-accreditation for Aged Care Quality & Safety Standards, in addition, MS Plus undertook a full re-accreditation against the NDIS Practice Standards, while Care For You at Home undertook a mid-cycle review NDIS as part of a three year accreditation cycle.



Annual Awards

The MS Plus Excellence Awards celebrate significant contributions to the quality of life of clients, residents, and communities with whom we work, and the success of the organisation led by our talented team. The six Excellence Awards each reflect the names of our organisational values: Creativity, Empowerment, Expertise, Community and Spirited.

Congratulations to our winners, announced in November 2023:

Community Award

Tasha Babet, Senior Exercise Physiologist Lidcombe.

Creativity Award

Darren Spooner, Senior Manager Finance.

Empowerment award

Ed Fitzgerald, IT Business Partner.

Expert Team award

Plan Management Team

Outstanding Volunteer

Amy Plush, Mildura community shop volunteer.

Spirited award

Natalie Bryant, Senior Manager Intake & Engagement Service.

Best Outcome Award

Marketing & Communications and the **Client Engagement and Wellbeing Teams** for the implementation of the Carers Strategy.

Well done also to **Jess Morris, Health Promotion and Wellbeing Coordinator** who was awarded this year's **Chairman's Travelling Scholar Award**. Jess used her scholarship funding to travel to the UK to attend the 2024 Multiple Sclerosis Trust (MS Trust) conference and spent some time with the MS Trust (UK) and the Brain & Spine Foundation.



Concise financials

Growth in direct service delivery to people living with MS

Direct service delivery includes those activities undertaken by the Group that delivers a service to people affected by MS or other neurological conditions and are primarily funded by fee-for-service arrangements or government grants. Over recent years, the funding environment has changed significantly through the introduction of the NDIS.

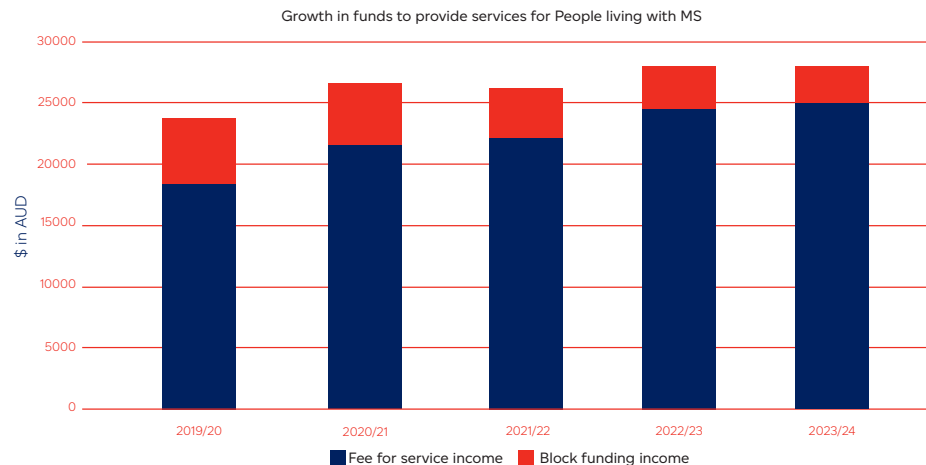
The Group’s NDIS service offerings include Support Coordination, Allied Health, Plan Management, Supported Independent Living and Specialised Disability Accommodation. Employment Support Services are government funded through the Disability Employment Scheme.

MS Plus’ subsidiary, MS Plus Healthy Ageing Pty Ltd (formerly known as Nursing Port Stephens Pty Ltd), provides private nursing, personal care and domestic assistance to aged care clients in the home and community.

The continued growth in service delivery funded by fee-for-service arrangements reflects the Group’s continued investment in the scale of these NDIS services.

In the early half of 2021-22, the Omicron wave impacted face to face service delivery which impacted revenue for our wellbeing centres and allied health services.

The chart adjacent highlights the five-year growth in funds available for MS Plus to provide direct services to people affected by MS or other neurological conditions. Government grant funding excludes JobKeeper payments received in 2019-20 and 2020-21.



MS Plus Ltd sources and uses of funds

The information presented below is intended to answer common questions about MS Plus’ financial performance.

Summary Financial Performance

Actual Financial Performance (\$'000)

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
MS Plus total income	56,271	48,591	44,096	58,236	52,401
MS Plus net surplus/(deficit)	9,527	2,180	(5,830)	9,396	1,089
Subsidiary / net surplus / deficit	590	589	117	99	(28)
Consolidated net surplus/deficit	10,117	2,770	(5,713)	9,495	1,061



Concise financials

Fundraising to support people living with MS

MS Plus benefits from its fundraising program, which supports the provision of those activities valued by its clients, but which cannot be funded by fee-for-service or other sources.

The financial year ended 30 June 2024 delivered a mixture of fundraising success across various channels. What the Group experienced was further, weaker performances in our traditional mass fundraising areas. Fundraising events and lotteries generally underperformed throughout the year, with the exception of the successful The May 50K and Fitzroy Mega Swim. The unfortunate cancellation of the MS Gong Ride due to high levels of rainfall forced another significant material impact, albeit one that was entirely unpredictable.

The background of an uncertain economic outlook with consequent changes to the behaviour of events participants and lottery ticket buyers, continued from the previous year. The budget for the current financial year is, therefore, greatly less reliant on events and lottery activities.

Despite the challenges and including non-operating income from Gifts in Wills, the overall net fundraising result was somewhat better than budget, at \$5.4 million versus a budget of \$4.1 million - an improvement of \$1.3 million. However, most of this improvement resulted from an outstanding year for Gifts in Wills. In 2023-24, MS Plus received \$4.94 million from Gifts in Wills.

MS Plus Events generated a net surplus of \$764,000, versus a budget of \$2.3 million, caused mainly by the forced cancellation of the Gong Ride, but also underperformance against budget in other events, such as MS Walk Run + Roll and Mega Challenges.

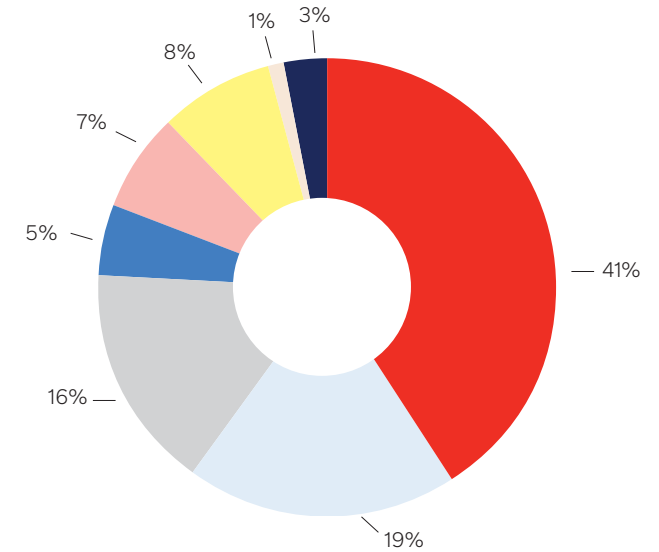
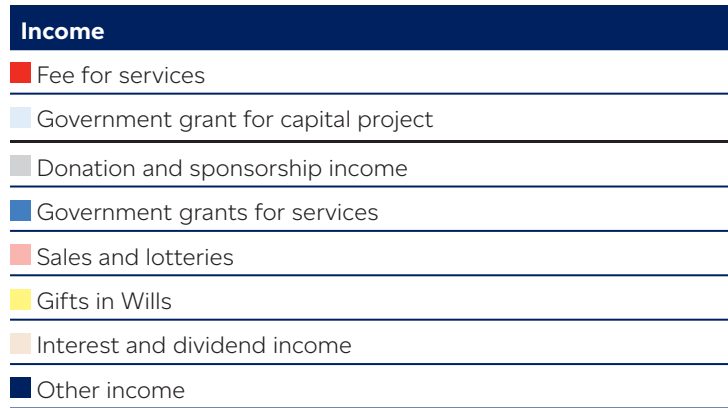
Individual Giving (excluding Gifts in Wills) generated \$76,000, and our MS Plus Cash Appeals did very well, achieving a net operating surplus of \$858,000 to budget of \$345,000. This was driven by much stronger creative direction and the introduction of research content broadening the audience.

Grants from Trusts and Foundations exceeded target (up by \$40,000) as did MS Community Shops. We were especially pleased with the performance of the Shops in the first full year under their new management team. The Shops made a profit after overheads of \$103,000.

Fundraising for research was strong, with The May 50K reaching its participation and profit target of \$2.5M.

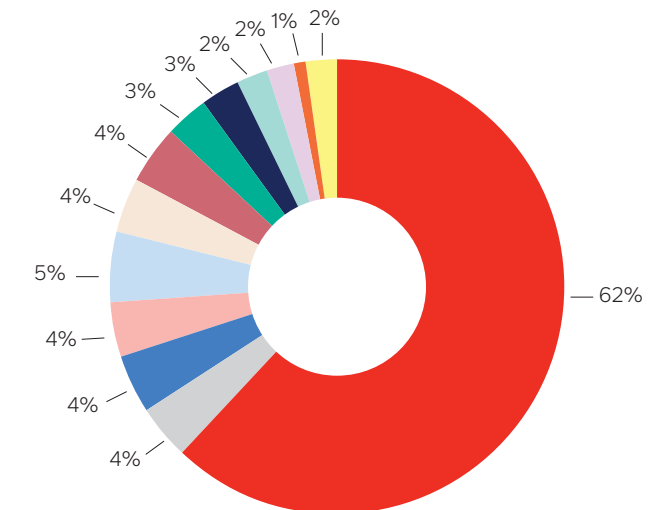
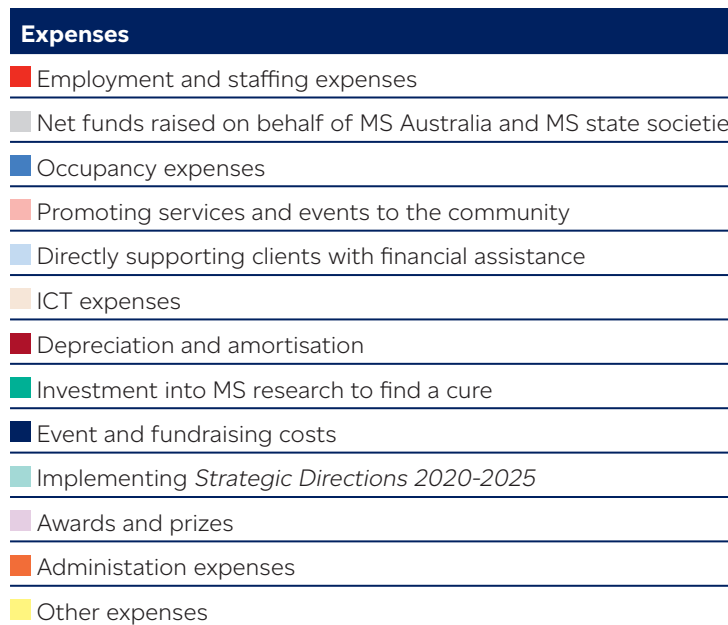
Where the money comes from

MS Plus relies on a broad range of funding sources to deliver its support for people living with MS. In total, MS Plus Group generated **\$61.2m** in revenue for the year (**2023: \$53.5m**). This income comes from government, fee for services and MS Plus' investment and fundraising activities. The chart opposite shows where the Group derived its income during the 2024 financial year.



How the money was spent

The chart opposite shows how the total expenditure for the 2024 financial year was allocated between the various activities undertaken by MS Plus Group.



MS Plus Ltd and its controlled entities

Consolidated statement of surplus or deficit and other comprehensive income

For the year ended 30 June 2024

MS Plus Ltd and its controlled entities

Consolidated statement of financial position

As at 30 June 2024

	Consolidated	
	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
Assets		
Current assets	11,150,751	21,859,545
Non-current assets	61,883,726	40,056,295
Total assets	73,034,477	61,915,840
Liabilities		
Current liabilities	12,966,608	12,473,912
Non-current liabilities	3,465,031	2,955,791
Total Liabilities	16,431,639	15,429,703
Net assets	56,602,838	46,486,137

	Consolidated	
	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
Revenue		
Government and fee for service revenue to deliver programs for people living with MS:		
Fee for services	25,121,298	24,805,793
Government grant for capital project	11,387,204	2,874,465
Government grants for services	3,016,894	2,849,973
Funds raised by MS Plus to support the delivery of valued programs not funded by Government:		
Donation and sponsorship income	10,043,772	12,333,065
Sales and lotteries	4,478,395	5,075,399
Gifts in Wills	4,939,860	3,486,650
Interest and dividend income	599,396	1,027,870
Net gain on assets classified as fair value through profit or loss	502,132	698,976
Specific purpose funding	192,002	50,584
Other income	898,690	267,870
Total revenue	61,179,644	53,470,645
Expenditure		
Employment and staffing expenses	31,822,434	30,426,914
Directly supporting clients with financial assistance	2,345,790	1,916,868
ICT expenses	2,174,603	1,888,895
Occupancy expenses	2,012,041	2,220,947
Depreciation	1,951,604	1,707,949
Promoting services and events to the community	1,859,825	2,167,570
Net funds raised on behalf of MS Australia and MS state societies	1,815,377	2,651,151
Investment into MS research to find a cure	1,648,812	1,678,889
Event and fundraising costs	1,639,051	1,549,048
Implementing Strategic Directions 2020-2025	1,207,720	1,264,386
Awards and prizes	864,840	999,269
Administration expenses	650,696	744,209
Amortisation	245,000	302,167
Other expenses	825,147	1,182,849
Total expenditure	51,062,943	50,701,111
Total comprehensive income / (deficit) for the year	10,116,702	2,769,534

MS PLUS BOARD



Garry Whatley
MS Plus Chair



Adriana Zuccala
Deputy Chair



Jennifer Bennett



Alison Brown



Sharlene Brown



Mathew Cleeve



Desmond Graham



Corinne Habel



Jeannette Lechner-Scott



Donna-Maree Vinci



John Blewonski
Chief Executive Officer



Kim Farrugia
Company Secretary

OUR BOARD COMMITTEES

Risk, Audit and Finance

Ally Long (Independent member)
Alison Brown (Chair)
Mathew Cleeve
Ron Brent (to April 2024)

Nominations, Remuneration & Governance

Adriana Zuccala (Deputy Chair)
Garry Whatley (Chair)
Karen Hayes (to November 2023)
Peter Day (Independent Member)

Infrastructure

Adriana Zuccala (Chair)
Donna-Maree Vinci
Garry Whatley
Scott McCorkell (to November 2023)

Program, Policy & Practice

Des Graham (Chair)
Ian Blair (Independent Member)
Jeannette Lechner-Scott
Jennifer Bennett

Fundraising & Marketing

Corinne Habel (Chair)
Fern Cargill (Independent Member)
Karen Hayes (Chair) (to November 2023)
Scott McCorkell (to November 2023)
Sharlene Brown

Community Engagement

Sharlene Brown (Chair)
Chairs of the local Community Engagement Councils

OUR SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Ben Holgate

Executive Manager Strategic
Fundraising & Marketing

Brita Van Heyst

Senior Manager Healthy Ageing

Caitlin Ireland

Senior Manager Client Outcome
Measurement

Darren Spooner

Chief Financial Officer

Herschel Parker

Senior Manager Retail Operations

Jo Sanders

Senior Manager Quality and Risk

John Blewonski

Chief Executive Officer

Kim Farrugia

Executive Officer & Company
Secretary

Kylie Osborne

Senior Manager Community
& Partnerships

Natalie Silvestro

Senior Manager NDIS & Allied
Health Services

Peter Opie

Senior Manager, ICT

Rhonda Cooper

Senior Manager Respite
& Residential Services

Rob McClay

Executive Manager Strategy
& Client Impact

Sally Dale

Senior Manager People & Culture

Stephen Jolly

Senior Manager Employment
Support Services

Special thanks

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Australian Government
 The Australian Capital Territory Government
 The Department of Health
 Department of Social Services
 Disability ACT
 Department of Families, Fairness & Housing
 Department of Family & Community Services – Ageing, Disability & Home Care
 Department of Health & Human Services
 Department of Premier & Cabinet
 National Disability Insurance Agency
 National Capital Authority
 The New South Wales Government
 NSW Health
 The Tasmanian Government
 The Victorian Government
 WentWest Primary Health Network
 Western Sydney Local Health District

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

New South Wales

City of Paramatta
 City of Sydney

Cumberland Council
 Inner West City Council
 Sutherland Shire
 Wollongong City Council

Victoria

Brimbank City Council
 City of Casey
 City of Greater Bendigo
 City of Melbourne
 City of Monash
 City of Port Phillip
 City of Whitehorse
 Greater Shepparton City Council
 Hobsons Bay City Council
 Mildura Rural City Council
 Yarra City Council

Tasmania

Central Highlands Council
 Circular Head Council
 City of Hobart
 City of Launceston
 Kingborough Council

Our Patrons

The Honourable Margaret Beazley AO QC — Governor of New South Wales and Mr Dennis Wilson

OUR SERVICE, EDUCATION & RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Alfred Health
 Carers Australia

Eastern Health
 Headspace National
 Hunter New England
 Maribynong Council
 Murdoch University
 Macquarie University
 Melbourne University
 Menzies Institute for Medical Research
 University of Tasmania
 Monash University
 RMIT
 Royal Melbourne Hospital
 University of Tasmania
 University of Wollongong
 Western Sydney Local Health District
 Westmead Hospital

OUR MEDIA PARTNERS

ABC News 24
 APN News and Media
 ATN, Australian Traffic Network
 Bossman Media
 Café Media
 Donor Republic
 Elevate
 Exuberance
 Free PR
 Home Made Digital
 i98 Radio
 Kaimera
 Marlin
 MCN Multi Channel Network

MSWA Network Ten
 Port Melbourne Football Club
 SBS
 SKY
 The Brand Agency
 The Reputation Group

OUR EVENT PARTNERS

Altona Badminton Centre
 Australian Capital Authority
 Badminton Victoria
 Bayside Council
 Bicycle Superstore
 Brooks
 City of Melbourne
 City of Sydney
 Destination Wollongong
 Doone Kennedy Aquatic Centre
 Funky Trunks
 Geelong Outdoor Living Show
 GTR Events
 Hillbrick Bicycles
 Kiwanis Australia
 Lend Lease
 Let's Go Motorhomes
 Lions Club
 Lowrance
 Maccabi Australia
 MeatStock
 Melbourne Marine Centre
 Nautilus Marine Insurance

New South Wales Institute of Sport – Cycling Program
 NSW Government
 NSW Police
 NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
 Parks Victoria
 Phill Bates
 Porter Davis Homes
 Property NSW
 Rotary
 Rovers Football Club
 Scarborough Public School
 Soulful Concepts
 Squash and Racquetball Victoria
 Sunderland Shire
 Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre
 Telwater (Stacer, Mercury)
 Transport for NSW
 Transport Sydney Trains
 UniActive
 University of Wollongong
 Weblease
 Westerfolds Sport Centre
 Wodonga Squash & Racquetball Club
 Wollongong City of Innovation
 YMCA NSW

Our Benefactors

We have received gifts in Wills from a total of 69 Estates/trusts. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for these wonderful gifts that make such an impact in the lives of people living with MS.

Some of our benefactors include:

- Rex Andrew Jeffrey
- William Gordon Angus
- Eugene William Rue
- Diana Ruth Middleton
- Edna May Kerr
- Margaret Rose Cook
- Annemaree Foley
- William Gordon Angus
- Vincent Ross
- Elizabeth Lillian Cook
- Peter Randall Siminton
- John Reed
- Walter Thomas Watterson
- Sarah Mark Taylor
- Ross Darvell
- Stanley James Pendall
- Graeme Robert Walker
- Edna Winifred Bird

- Julie Long
- William Gilbert Pybus
- Judith Bayliss
- Frank Whittle

Bequest Trusts and Foundations

- Mildred Nora Young Perpetual Charitable Trust
- The Isobel E and Francis J Hickmott Charitable Trust
- The Grace And Herbert Foulkes Charitable Trust
- Joe White Bequest
- Heather Margaret Ryan Trust
- Arthur and Doris Clayton Trust
- Joyce Adelaide Healey Charitable Trust
- Doris Thelma Rowe Charitable Trust

Trusts and Foundations

- The Anthony Costa Foundation
- Avalanche Foundation
- ATS Charitable Foundation
- Carers Victoria

- The Carolyn & Michael Gray Foundation
- Centenary Foundation: The Judith Hodge Fund
- Club Macquarie (Lake Macquarie ClubGRANTS Scheme)
- Community Enterprise Foundation
- Dobson Mitchell Allport (The Allport Bequest)
- DOOLEYS Lidcombe Catholic Club
- Guthrie Family Charitable Trust
- Liangrove Foundation
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
- Mirvac (South Eveleigh)
- Perpetual Foundation & Woodend Foundation
- The R A Gale Foundation
- Renee Pollack Foundation
- Rotary Club of Moorabbin
- The Russell Foundation
- Skipper-Jacobs Charitable Trust
- The William Angliss (Victoria) Charitable Fund



From uncertain to empowered: How Kellie found her support system

As a social worker, Kellie was much more comfortable providing support than receiving it. Then, after experiencing MS symptoms for 11 years, Kellie was finally diagnosed and realised she would need to begin reaching out for help.

'I was officially diagnosed 3 years ago but had symptoms for a long time before that.

Knowing when to ask for help

Once Kellie knew she had MS, she realised she had no idea what to do next and where to find the help she needed. She also had to overcome her own reluctance to reach out and to advocate for herself for the first time.

'My diagnosis was me getting that tap on the shoulder telling me that I need to put myself first. I was terrible at that.

'I've been a social worker for 20 years now and I run parenting programs. I tell parents the analogy of putting your own oxygen mask on first before you can help others, but like most people I was terrible at taking my own advice

'I've been a strong advocate for others for a long time, but I've really had to learn a lot about advocating for myself and how to push to get what I need and what services I need to access.'

Boxing her way to a better quality of life

Among the supports Kellie has accessed in the years since her diagnosis, she has found exercise to be one of the most critical components of her recovery. In particular, the Plus Boxing program, introduced in August 2023, has helped her to regain her coordination, strength, balance and — interestingly — her cognitive skills

'Having to remember different moves and sequences, all while you're talking, has been so helpful for me. Getting stronger and healthier has been so good but that cognitive aspect is a big part of it.'

'I've found boxing really helps with some of the executive functioning skills that people with MS do struggle with, plus it's really fun!'

Kellie was a passionate boxer before her diagnosis and took it up again with enthusiasm once she knew MS Plus offered the service. She now works with EP Caitlin, whom Kellie says has made a real difference to her overall wellbeing.

'Caitlin is amazing. She has such a wonderful way about her, in the way she encourages you challenges you, she has that empathy and understanding in spades. She's just lovely and engaging and encouraging.

Kellie says thanks to therapies like boxing she has regained the physical strength and stamina to do the things she enjoys.

'She gets me to step out of my comfort zone but with that encouragement that I can do this.

Finding her MS community

Building that all important network of supporters has also helped Kellie to feel understood and less alone.

'I think everyone should really know about the support services available to them.

'I think it's also feeling like you're part of the community MS Plus helps to create, it does support you in so many ways and you don't feel so alone, which is crucial.

'Everyone's experience is different and it's tough but it's a little bit easier when you're not alone and you can talk to others who really understand, it makes all the difference.

'At the MS Plus Family Camp we attended at Phillip Island last year, my daughter was speaking to another child about when their mums were both in hospital and it was such a wonderful moment of connection.'





Contact MS Plus

Phone: **1800 042 138**

Website and online chat: **msplus.org.au**

Email: **connect@msplus.org.au**

ABN **66 004 942 287**

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