

2021-2022

# WAYAHEAD ANNUAL REPORT



# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



Matthew Stanley, Interim CEO

It has been a year of change for WayAhead.

The year started with Sydney five days into a three-month lockdown due to Covid-19. Other parts of NSW would experience similar lockdowns. The loss of lives and livelihoods was compounded by isolation and the loss of connections that help us thrive. The pandemic caused an increased demand for mental health services and increased awareness of mental health at a community and individual level. It was also a catalyst for change in the way services were delivered, bringing both challenges and opportunities.

Throughout the year, WayAhead programs were delivered largely online with a combination of virtual meetings, webinars and live events used to engage with, and connect, communities across NSW. New digital resources were developed to support individuals, communities and workplaces dealing with the mental health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic. We're indebted to our staff and volunteers for their capacity to adapt and persevere in the face of these challenges. The new way of doing things also brought unexpected benefits.

The increasing popularity of our online anxiety support groups meant new participants were able to connect with peers in a safe, friendly, and supportive environment for the first time. The pivot online also meant more exposure via social media for the winners of WayAhead's Mental Health Matters Awards and the development of new online content for the Small Steps program.

WayAhead's long time CEO, Elizabeth Priestley, retired in October after 11 years in the role. Under Liz's leadership, WayAhead developed a greater emphasis on lived experience and evidence-based practice. Liz was also a driving force behind the Collective Purpose coworking and business services social enterprise.

Liz's departure brought with it renewed focus on WayAhead's future. New CEO, Heath Ducker commissioned a review, with consultants engaged to work with the board and senior staff on the organisation's strategic direction. The review included interviews with a range of WayAhead stakeholders who generously gave their time to share valuable feedback. It was also an opportunity for all of us at WayAhead to reflect on our goals and objectives and how best to achieve them. The lessons from the review will form the basis of a new strategic plan.

The year ended on the saddest of notes. Our friend and colleague Julie Leitch passed away after a serious illness. Julie was WayAhead's longest serving staff member. She started with WayAhead in 1995 when the Small Steps program was first established. Julie delivered programs in schools across NSW for more than 27 years while tirelessly advocating for people with lived experience of anxiety and OCD and their families. Julie's passion and dedication is at the heart of WayAhead's mission to help individuals make empowered choices in their mental and emotional wellbeing journey. We're eternally grateful for the inspiring example Julie set for us all.

I'd like to thank all of our staff and volunteers for taking the challenges of the past year in their stride and for their unwavering commitment to improving mental health and wellbeing for individuals and communities across NSW.

# MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD

The last year has brought a lot of challenges. Over the last three years we have learned how to communicate in new ways, and we have had to deal with loss and grief in different ways – both for people who have left us and land and property lost during disasters in our state.

One of our great losses this year was the death of Julie Leitch, a long-time staff member who was instrumental in the development and growth of our anxiety programs bringing her lived experience of anxiety and OCD to her work. We will never know someone else like Julie and we created the Julie Leitch Leadership through Lived Experience Award in her honour. I can only express my gratitude for people like Julie and our staff, for their commitment, passion and resilience during challenging times.



*Sharyn McGee, Board Chair*

Now, the world has returned to some kind of ‘normal’. However, it would be a pity if by returning to ‘normality’, we miss the opportunities that these challenges grant us: to “break with the past and imagine our world anew” (Arundhati Roy, 2020).

The need for mental health promotion, support and advocacy in the community has never been greater. In fact, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) suggests that mental health issues are increasing and are likely to increase further.

But as we know, a person does not need to meet the criteria for a mental disorder to be negatively affected by their mental health. The impacts of psychological and social distress are profound – rising cost of living and other economic problems, the effects of climate change which we are now experiencing, the potential for further pandemics and the war in Ukraine may all impact on our lives and mental/emotional wellbeing.

We, at WayAhead, work hard to provide evidence-based information and support related to mental and emotional wellbeing. Like every other CMO/NFP, we have had to adjust and innovate. But in addition, we have had to manage challenging internal changes.

This year, the Board focused on the strategic review which began under our then CEO, Heath Ducker. The review was an in-depth analysis of WayAhead’s strategic plan, our goals, values, programs, priorities, and future directions over the next three years. The Board is still in the process of working through the implications of all this data. Looking to our strengths, and opportunities for growth, it has laid a solid foundation for our future.



Throughout the turbulence of the past year, our team has focused on continuing our work in providing mental health information, advocacy, and support to the community of NSW. As a mental health NFP, the Board is committed to supporting our staff during difficult times, and we hope that we have achieved that.

The Board want to thank Matt as interim CEO and our entire team who have sustained the organisation throughout the year and of course, our colleagues on the Board, both longstanding and new, all of whom have contributed to the work of WayAhead. We also want to thank our colleagues in the organisations that make up Collective Purpose.

Personally, I want to thank our president, Meg; our Treasurer, Don; our Deputy Chairs, Anna, and Stephen; the Chair of the Anxiety Disorders Advisory Committee, Stephen; and the Transitions Sub-committee, Anna, David, Ryan, and Peter, who have worked closely with me (as the Chair) on steadying the ship during a challenging time.

We look forward to 2023 with some trepidation but we also hope that there will be many opportunities to strengthen our programs, to promote positive mental and emotional health and wellbeing, to challenge stigma and discrimination in our community and to collaborate with like-minded organisations in the community mental health space.

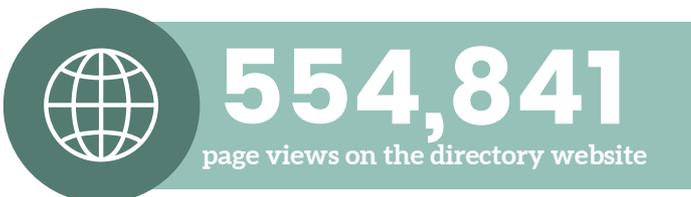
***“...break with the  
past and imagine  
our world anew.”  
-Arundhati Roy,  
2020***

# INFORMATION SERVICES

The Information Directory had an incredible year, receiving 554,841 page views for our services. This shows a real need for access to services across NSW and the importance of providing this resource. We had 16,552 downloads on our factsheets and 100,860 page views. This shows the value that education provides for people in NSW and the need for access to this information.

During 2021 the Information Services team concluded a trial agreement with MHCN to look after the Carer Connection Line and renewed the agreement for another year.

We continued our long standing agreement with Official Visitors Program and welcomed a new Information Services Program Lead, Paul Leonard.



# WAYAHEAD WORKPLACES

**101**

members around  
Australia

**16**

micro-business  
members

**167k**

total employees across  
all members

The WayAhead Workplaces team had a fantastic year, rounding it out with 101 members. As our annual forum in 2021 was cancelled due to NSW lockdowns we held a virtual forum in August. We held our quarterly member meetings in Oct, Dec, Feb and April.

Our April meeting was held in person for the first time since February 2020, marking a permanent shift into hybrid meetings to allow greater accessibility of attendance for those with time and travel constraints. The Workplaces Lead also travelled to Queensland to host our Brisbane meeting in early May.



We continue to sit on and co-host the NSW Workplace Mental Health Network group with Beyond Blue, made up of 12 key stakeholders to improve sector communication and working partnerships.

We collaborated with Transitioning Well to create a Post Lockdown Guide, offering support during the transitional period as lockdowns eased across Australia, exploring re-entry anxiety, hybrid work, vaccination mandates, the Great Resignation, and more.

**83 attendees**

Aug 2021 (Virtual)

**85 attendees**

Oct 2021 (Virtual)

**55 attendees**

Feb 2022 (Sydney only)

**47 attendees**

Apr 2022 (Sydney only)



# ANNUAL MEMBER FORUM

We held our 2022 Annual Members' Forum in June as a hybrid meeting, hosted by Lendlease in Barangaroo and sponsored by **SafeWork NSW**, **Benefit3**, and **Springday**. The event was opened by NSW Mental Health Commissioner Catherine Lourey, and had 78 attendees in person and online.

**89%**

of participants found the content was relevant to their work

**95%**

of participants found the content useful and interesting

**93%**

of participants found the speakers engaging

**95%**

of participants felt the event was well organised

*"A wonderful day of reconnection and inspiration. I took away lots of practical insights. The people participating are always so passionate and interesting too - it's a great community feel. Very good program and diverse thought."*

# ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY

**83%**

of respondents acted or intended to act on new knowledge learned as a result of being part of the program

**94%**

of respondents felt they knew where to find workplace mental health and wellbeing information and support for themselves and others as a result of being part of the program

**93%**

of respondents promoted WayAhead Workplaces to others in 2021



# ANXIETY SUPPORT GROUPS

2021 was a tough year for many reasons including COVID, natural disasters and staff shortages.

Despite this, however, the support group program was able to provide excellent support to people living with anxiety and their loved ones. A lot of credit must go to the volunteers for sustaining the program under limited supervision and allowing us to continue to provide support to people across NSW. The volunteers were flexible, dedicated and showed initiative in order to overcome the many obstacles faced in the last financial year.



We started a new support group in partnership with University of Wollongong, Liverpool Campus.

This group is facilitated by social work students as part of their placement. The students are trained by WayAhead to run the group and are encouraged to promote their group. Another University has expressed interest in adopting a similar relationship with WayAhead.

***Our volunteers were flexible, dedicated and showed initiative to overcome obstacles faced in the year.***

**32**

support groups

**1508**

attendees at support groups

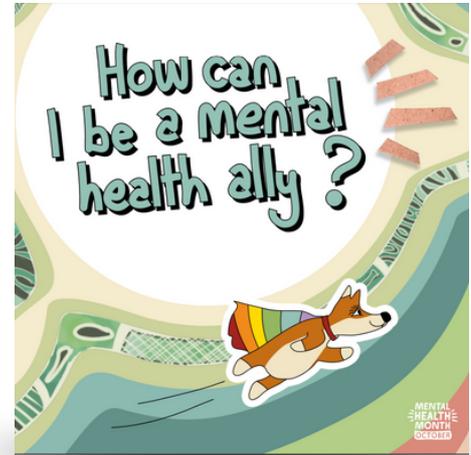
**6**

new groups across NSW

# MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

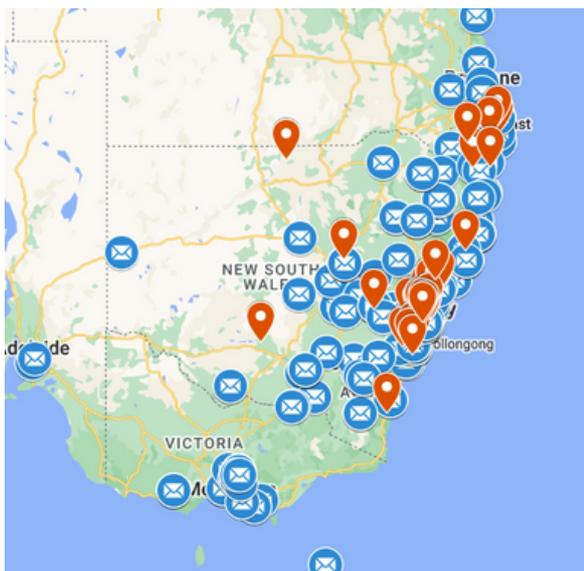
2021 was the second year of our “Tune In” theme for Mental Health Month, and this year we focused on tuning in to stigma. In addition to the new Tune in fact sheet, we created some exciting new resources in collaboration with people with lived experience. This included our “How to be an Ally Pack” and our “Mental Health Mythbusting” resource.

The Mental Health Promotion team held focus groups and workshops with people with lived experiences, representing a range of marginalised communities, to create these resources.



The Mental Health Promotion program collaborated with WayAhead Workplaces to develop physical and digital resources for this year’s Mental Health Month, including a workplace activation kit. We also produced merchandise available for purchase or as a gift with donations.

***We distributed 60,000 free resources and saw 36,000 downloads of digital resources.***



- Resource order location
- Grant recipient location

The Mental Health Month Small Grants Program saw 50 organisations across NSW supported to deliver Mental Health Month Activities. Due to the ongoing pandemic, WayAhead supported grant recipients to shift in-person events to online events where needed.



96

nominations

8

awards

50

grants received

# MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS AWARDS



We again held the Mental Health Matters Awards online, and in addition to our live winner announcement, we also hosted Q&A videos with each of the winners. We received 96 nominations, and presented eight awards. Our winners were:

**Trans Pride Australia for Friday Night Social**  
*Mental Health Matters Rainbow Inclusion Award*  
(Sponsored by ACON)

**Mark Spinks, Babana Aboriginal Men's Group**  
*Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Award*

**John Harper for Mate Helping Mate**  
*Leadership through Lived Experience Award*

**Blue Fringe Arts, in partnership with Springwood Neighbourhood Centre and Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre for Blue Fringe Art and Literature Exhibition**  
*Mental Health Matters Community Initiative Award*

**NOVA Entertainment for The Space podcast**  
*Mental Health Matters Media and the Arts Award*

**Legal Aid NSW for Mentally Healthy Workplaces Program**  
*WayAhead Workplaces Wellbeing Award*

**Newcastle Football for Mental Health Aware**  
*Outstanding Achievement in Mental Health Promotion*

**KidsXpress for The KidsXpress School Partnership Program at Hampden Park Public School**  
*Mental Health Matters Youth Award*



# SMALL STEPS

During the year, the Small Steps program was significantly effected by the impacts of Covid-19. To combat this, the program was redesigned to suit an online audience and three new modules were developed. Online delivery for schools saw limited uptake but over time as schools redirect resources and focus from Covid-19, these numbers will rise and it is envisaged that face to face delivery will also increase.



*84% of participants reported their intention to act on new knowledge learned via Small Steps seminars*

## REMEMBERING JULIE LEITCH

In 2022, our dear friend and WayAhead's longest serving team member passed away. Julie Leitch started with WayAhead in 1995 when the Small Steps program was first established. She delivered the program in schools across NSW for more than 27 years, advocating for and supporting people with anxiety and OCD and their families.

She brought lived experience, passion and caring leadership to our programs. Her commitment and passion continues to inspire the WayAhead team to carry on her mission.



# ANXIETY FORUMS

In 2021 - 2022 our anxiety forums reach a total of 150 people, negotiating covid restrictions. At each of our events our audience consisted of over 50% consumers & carers, and 50% mental health workers, all looking for a better solution for people with anxiety disorders.

The Let's Talk About Anxiety forums in NSW provide an opportunity for people to come together in the community to learn more about anxiety, hear from those with lived experiences and have the opportunity to meet the services in the area.

To present these forums, WayAhead is indebted to our Senior Clinical Psychologist Dr Rocco Crino, our speakers of lived experience, and the mental health services, who tirelessly work for better, more accessible mental health services in NSW.

*150 people attended our anxiety forums during 2021 in both Wollongong and Albury-Wodonga*



# LET'S TALK ABOUT ANXIETY WOLLONGONG

Acknowledging the lands and waters of the Wadi Wadi people of the Dharawal Nation, Wayahead partnered with local mental health service providers of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, (ISLHD), to present "Let's talk about anxiety in Wollongong".

Our Senior Clinical Psychologist, Dr Rocco Crino, engaged the public with his animated and personable style. Our mission in presenting these forums is to raise awareness of anxiety disorders, promote help seeking behaviour and connect people to local mental health services specifically treating anxiety.



WayAhead connected with a multitude of mental health services in Wollongong, who also got to know each other for the first time. Our speakers, Jenny Smith and Pam Clark, were outstanding in sharing their journeys as carers of people living with anxiety.

*Our mission is to raise awareness of anxiety disorders, promote help seeking behaviour and connect people to local mental health services.*

## MEET THE SERVICES

- Coordinaire
- Grand Pacific Health - head to health
- Flourish
- Neami National
- ARAFMI One Door Illawarra
- Stride
- Standby
- Family Services Psychology



wellways

STRIDE For better mental health

HEAD TO HEALTH



# LET'S TALK ABOUT ANXIETY ALBURY-WODONGA

WayAhead presented our anxiety forum, partnering with Local service providers of the Murray Public Health, and Murrumbidgee Primary Health Networks and the not-for-profit mental health services of Albury-Wodonga.

*Our mission is to  
raise awareness of  
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health services.*



## MEET THE SERVICES

- Gateway Health - Head to Health
- headspace - part of Grand Pacific Health
- Therapy Doggo and Hendrix ('Heni') the wolfhound
- Wellways New Access Program
- Albury Women's Centre

People living well

**wellways**

 **headspace**  
Albury Wodonga

**HEAD TO HEALTH**

**gateway**  
**health**



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