



2024 IMPACT REPORT

Together, we can ensure all Australian children read, learn and succeed.



UNITED WAY
Australia

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR & CEO



We are delighted to present United Way Australia's 2024 Impact Report. Our Report reflects the transformative power of community, collaboration and shared purpose in pursuing our vision to ensure every child in Australia can Read, Learn and Succeed.

Through our three flagship initiatives—**Ready to Read, Ready to Succeed, and The Hive**—we have delivered measurable change in the lives of thousands of children and families across the country.

The Imagination Library, our cornerstone early literacy program, reached over 47,000 children and distributed more than 445,000 books—fostering a love of reading, strengthening family bonds through shared storytelling and connecting children and families to their communities. This is a vital step in ensuring children start school well.

Our high school mentoring and corporate volunteering programs have played an important role in preparing youth for life beyond school, with students gaining confidence and skills to help them plan their pathway to employment or further study. These connections, powered by our generous network of volunteers and business partners, continue to demonstrate the vital role the private sector plays in social impact.

Meanwhile, The Hive, our place-based collective impact initiative in Mount Druitt, has driven systemic change—improving access to health and early education for children and advocating successfully for state-wide reform. Programs like CUBS and the Willmot Paediatric Clinic are now embedded in government systems, showcasing what is possible when community-led solutions are scaled for lasting change.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our partners, supporters, our communities and the families we walk alongside. Your belief in a better future for children and youth is what propels us forward. Together, we are building communities where every child has the chance to thrive.

On behalf of the Board and the team, we thank you for your continued trust and support.

Warm regards,



Liz Dibbs
Chair, United Way Australia



Clayton Noble
CEO, United Way Australia

ABOUT US



United Way Australia is a community impact organisation, focusing on preparing our young people for success in life. Guided by community voice and aspirations, we unite communities, business, government and philanthropy to help prepare children to read, learn and succeed.

OUR PROGRAMS

We deliver our purpose through our flagship programs:

READY TO READ

- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
- Wrap-around support in the early years
- Caregiver resources
- Whole of community engagement

READY TO SUCCEED

- Youth transitions from school to higher education and employment
- High school mentoring
- Corporate volunteering

THE HIVE

- Place-based community-led initiatives
- Targeted early years initiatives
- Advocacy for systems change
- Collective impact



READY TO READ



The Imagination Library is a proven, community-based initiative that provides one age-appropriate book each month to children from birth to age five. By providing books directly into homes and offering reading tips, the program encourages shared book reading—a key factor in early literacy development.

Putting a book in a child's hands opens a whole new world for them. It's a proven step towards opening the door to knowledge and opportunity, sparking curiosity, and building lasting family bonds.

In 2024, United Way Australia concluded a comprehensive global study of the Imagination Library, demonstrating how the program builds children's early literacy skills and fosters their love of reading.



THE IMAGINATION LIBRARY IN ACTION

Tamworth (NSW) has become Australia's largest literacy laboratory, testing an approach to home reading that is changing children's lives.

Since 2019, more than 98% of children born in Tamworth have been enrolled in the Imagination Library.

By participating in the Imagination Library, families, public libraries, health services and early childhood education services in Tamworth have created an entire community dedicated to building children's literacy.

Since 2019, the children in Tamworth have been read to more often, for longer durations and have collected more books in their homes than the average Australian child.

Through shared book reading with a caregiver, these children are more likely to know letters and words, and to show emerging literacy skills, by the time they are three years of age.



THE IMAGINATION LIBRARY - RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data we collected in Australia and around the world reveals the powerful impact of the Imagination Library in creating a love of reading in the family home.

We know that children in the Imagination Library:



are **8x**
more likely to
be interested in
books, after just
12 months in the
program

are significantly
more likely to
be read to
4+ DAYS
per week

are significantly
more likely to
demonstrate
**EMERGING
LITERACY SKILLS**
at age 3 years
or older

are more
likely to have
25+
BOOKS
in the home

Read the research: Galea, C., Robidoux, S., Salins, A., Noble, C., & McArthur, G. (2024). The Impact of Shared Book Reading on Children and Families: A Study of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Tamworth, Australia. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2024.2322731>

IMAGINATION LIBRARY - IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



445,823

books distributed



47,624

children on the
program



14,938

Imagination Library
graduations



458

Imagination Library
Communities

“ Since [my daughter] is able to walk now, she’s so keen to check the mailbox every day. She looks so happy when she opens the mailbox and there’s a book in there. She will open it right away and look at every page. ”

– Parent

“ This program has been a wonderful support in our aim to focus on children’s developing language skills with a particular focus on oral language and rich verbal interactions involving books. ”

– Educator

READY TO SUCCEED

United Way Australia's high school mentoring program plays a vital role in supporting youth as they transition from school to higher education and employment.

Through partnerships with businesses, United Way connects students with professionals who offer guidance, support, and real-world insights. These initiatives empower students to stay on track academically, explore career pathways, and develop the skills necessary for life after high school.



VOLUNTEERING IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



Total number of
volunteers engaged

135

High school
mentoring
volunteers

58

Event /
group activity
volunteers

77



Total hours
contributed

250



Young people
impacted

601

“ It was a great way to prepare myself for the job interviews, so thank you for letting us have the amazing opportunity to participate and learn new and such important things. You are just amazing! ”

– Student Mentee

THE HIVE



The Hive is the backbone organisation for a place-based collective impact initiative in Mount Druitt, western Sydney.

The Hive aims to ensure that all children in postcode 2770 start school well.

We partner with residents and with 30+ organisations to identify local priorities and collaborate on innovative solutions. Working together, we design and deliver 'social incubators': innovations that address the gaps in local early childhood systems and seek to improve outcomes for children.

We also amplify the learnings from our community development work and the outcomes of our social incubators, by advocating to governments for broader systems-level and policy changes.



CASE STUDY: TRANSITIONING CUBS INTO NSW HEALTH

During our community engagement, we realised that many children in Mount Druitt were not receiving developmental health checks, due to a range of barriers. This meant children were starting school with undiagnosed health and learning challenges, making it difficult for them to thrive.

In response, The Hive developed the 'Check Ups Before School' (CUBS) program. Led by a multi-disciplinary team – a Nurse, a Speech Pathologist and a Health Linker – CUBS delivered developmental assessments and associated health supports to children (0-5 years) at early learning centres and community sites.

We delivered the program as a pilot (2019-2022), with the goal of proving its worth and embedding it into mainstream service delivery. At the end of 2022, Western Sydney Local Health District (WSLHD) took over operation of the CUBS program, with The Hive continuing to play an advisory role on service delivery.

The NSW Government has acknowledged the impact of the CUBS program in its own policies. In late 2022, the Government began a pilot of early childhood developmental checks in preschools, expanding the program until it became statewide.

Today, all ECEC services in NSW are able to offer 4-year-old health and development checks, in partnership with their local health district.

THE HIVE - IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

HEALTH INITIATIVES

Child Health Linker Program:

Supporting families to overcome barriers and navigate the health system, including psycho-social support and case management around a child's developmental needs.

Check Ups Before School (CUBS) Program:

Helped families to access developmental assessments ('blue book checks') before their child started school. We successfully transitioned this program into the NSW Health system (see previous page).

Willmot Paediatric Clinic:

A place-based approach in Willmot that gives families access to paediatric support, led by NSW Health after advocacy work from The Hive.

EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVES

Early Learning Linker Program:

Supporting families to navigate options and overcome barriers to access early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Early Educators Network:

Professional development and relationship-building for early childhood educators across Mt Druitt.

Specialised support for early learners and their educators:

Supports ECEC services and playgroups with a high number of children with additional needs to access occupational therapy and speech pathology services - helping to increase the skills and capacity of their staff to support children.

Parent Story of Impact

Life does not feel like a fight anymore. She is responding to me when I put in place expectations, and she is enjoying me more. She feels more relaxed and her play and knowledge skills seems to be happening very quickly – she knows all her colours now.



THE HIVE - IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES

Community Leadership Program:

In partnership with local community organisations, The Hive is delivering a leadership training program for local Mt Druitt residents to develop their skills in leading change in their community. Areas of learning include interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, advocacy and communication.

Community Led Advocacy:

Working in partnership with local community to advocate to Government at all levels for positive change and investment in their community. This includes advocating for better public transport and more community infrastructure. This has led to a promise of a \$5 million upgrade of a local reserve.

Community Leadership Group Member

Before I came here I was shy. I didn't want to talk to people... The lovely (people) here gave me encouragement. They helped me see that there's really good people in our community, who are willing to help others. This made me think that I could do this too.

My life is a thousand times better now. I've got community. I've got great women to support me. I try to support them as well. It makes me feel alive, really alive.





OUR EVENTS

Our Partner companies have played a vital role in shaping and supporting **two major event initiatives that have become cornerstones of United Way's community engagement efforts.** These events, now key highlights on our calendar, reflect a strong whole-of-community approach—bringing together not only our core partners but also a broad network of businesses united by a shared commitment to social impact.



COMMUNITY CUP

Community Cup is a friendly round-robin soccer tournament that brings together corporate teams from the Macquarie Park business community for an afternoon of fun, friendly competition, and community spirit.

2024 Community Cup

\$ raised

\$44,000

of corporates

9

of participants

160



WALKATHON

The Walkathon is a relaxed and enjoyable 5km walk that unites corporate teams and hundreds of participants for an afternoon of connection and camaraderie. Along the way, teams take on interactive, scavenger hunt-style challenges—creating a vibrant celebration of teamwork, wellbeing, and community spirit.

In 2024, United Way proudly expanded its successful Sydney event to Melbourne for the very first time. The enthusiastic response and strong support from the Melbourne business community have set the stage for an even bigger return in 2025.

2024 Macquarie
Park and Melbourne
Walkathon Events

\$ raised

\$40,700

of corporates

18

of participants

840

CELEBRATING OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

BRINGING BUSINESS & COMMUNITY
TOGETHER  FOR GOOD

The **Macquarie Park Business Community Partnership** is a dynamic collaboration of corporate organisations united in their commitment to helping local children and young people reach their full potential. Now in its 11th year, the initiative has supported 2,421 children across the Ryde LGA through the Imagination Library, providing books and early learning tools that build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and success.

In addition, the partnership has empowered hundreds of young people through impactful mentoring programs, offering guidance and support as they navigate their paths to higher education and employment. With six dedicated partners and growing, the Macquarie Park Business Community Partnership continues to make a lasting difference in the lives of children and youth across the local community.

Johnson & Johnson



Medtronic

OPTUS



MAJOR SUPPORTERS

We sincerely thank our major supporters for their generous support and commitment to our mission. Your contributions are vital to helping us create lasting impact for children and families in our communities.

- **Allan & Gill Gray Foundation**
- **Lyone Foundation**
- **Local & Regional Councils**
- **Macleay Foundation**
- **Paul Ramsay Foundation**
- **State Governments**

Thank you to all our donors and supporters - your generosity powers our mission and makes everything possible!

UNITEDWAY.COM.AU



Led by a proactive and strategic Board, and a passionate Leadership Team, United Way Australia is made up of 30+ dedicated people located in Sydney and greater NSW with the vision to ensure every child in Australia can Read, Learn and Succeed.

OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Clayton Noble
CEO



Shelly Mohan
CFO & CoSec



Rubie Ireson
Director, Place-based
Initiatives



Fiona Mitchell
Director of Programs



Cheryl Nolan
Operations Manager



Julie Johnson
Head of Major Gifts



Amanda Walsh
Director of Strategic
Partnerships



Claire Galea
Head of Research



Grace Pestonji
Head of Corporate
Partnerships & Marketing



Steve Pederson
Community Development
Lead



Leo Krikmann
Chief Ambassador
Officer

OUR BOARD



Liz Dibbs (Chair)



April Palmerlee



Brett McGrath



Charles Woodall



David Baynham



David Harrison



Jenny Abood



Dr Lyndsey McKee



Dr Michelle Locke



Nicole Wearne



Robyn McKern



Wayne Weaire



Amy Lyden



Matthew Crocker



Gavin Fox-Smith