



Lifeline Connect

Edition 6

In this issue, we wrap up a big year at Lifeline Mid Coast - one filled with change, teamwork, and moments that brought us closer together. We're celebrating the highs, acknowledging the challenges, and stepping into a new year with fresh energy, shared goals, and plenty of hope.

Thank you for being an important part of our Lifeline family.

CEO & Board Corner



Catherine Vaara
CEO

As we close out the final quarter of 2025, I am filled with gratitude and pride for what Lifeline Mid Coast has achieved together. This past quarter has been a time of growth and celebration. We were delighted to welcome Boni Lornie and Katlin Atkins to our team, adding fresh energy and expertise. Our staff and volunteers have shown incredible strength, delivering record retail results and successfully transitioning Lifeline's 13 11 14 crisis line to a new platform - an important milestone that ensures ongoing support for people in crisis.

The festive season brought our community together. Although we do not yet have a shop in Taree, our Taree Shop volunteers gathered to celebrate Christmas, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to rebuilding retail in the town.

We honoured the remarkable dedication of our volunteers, some of whose achievements will be featured throughout the newsletter.

Looking ahead to early 2026, we begin the year with strong momentum:

- Opening our brand-new Lifeline Shop in Kempsey.
- Launching enrolment and training for Crisis Support Workers.
- Beginning work for our annual accreditation process.
- Supporting sister centres as they deliver Eclipse and Bereavement Support After Suicide.

From the year that was, to the year ahead, I am proud to be part of such an outstanding community. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful difference.



Neville Parsons
Board Chair

As I reflect on the three months to December 2025, I note the continued implementation of our Strategic Plan, formally adopted at the Board Meeting held on 10 April 2025. This Plan was shaped by feedback from staff and volunteer surveys conducted in 2024, together with critical insights shared during three Manager Roundtable sessions in the final quarter of that year.

The strength of our organisation depends on this engagement and connection, and on our shared commitment to continuous improvement. This focus ensures we meet the needs and expectations of our community, partners, staff, and volunteers.

The Strategic Plan is guided by four key focus areas:

- Customers participants and community
- People and Culture
- Finances
- Systems and Processes

It is pleasing to note that actions over the past quarter have continued to deliver against the Action Plans developed under each of these areas.

Throughout this work, you - our staff and volunteers - have continued to live our values while providing the critical support that sustains our organisation. Lifeline Mid Coast functions because of your passion, commitment, and belief in what we can achieve together to enhance community wellbeing. This is achieved by connecting people with the care, comfort, and support offered across our services.

As Board Chair, I thank you for your dedication and wish you a healthy, rewarding 2026 ahead.

Board Member in Focus

Charmain Woods

Governance Committee Member



What inspired Charmain to join the Lifeline Mid Coast Board?

Charmain was drawn to Lifeline through both professional and lived experience. After many years in policing, she witnessed firsthand the impact of suicide and trauma on individuals, families, and communities. Joining the Board was a way to contribute earlier - supporting prevention, connection, and hope.

How long has Charmain been part of the Board?

Charmain has been a Board member for three years.

What is Charmain's role on the Board?

Charmain serves as Board Secretary and is a member of the Governance Committee, supporting strong leadership, ethical practice, and sustainable decision-making across the organisation.

Where do Charmain's strengths best support Lifeline's mission?

Charmain brings a unique mix of professional expertise and personal insight. Her background spans policing, law, risk management, governance, and strategic planning, alongside lived experience of trauma and suicide - all of which inform her thoughtful and compassionate approach.

What has stood out most to Charmain about Lifeline Mid Coast?

The volunteers. Charmain consistently highlights the compassion, resilience, and dedication shown by Lifeline Mid Coast volunteers, who give so much of themselves to support others in crisis.

Where might you see Charmain around the community?

Charmain is often out and about - speaking at community and business events, working in regional courts, or supporting local charities and homelessness initiatives. She's also a familiar voice in the podcast space, sharing conversations about life, law, and resilience.

What might surprise people about Charmain?

Beyond her professional roles, Charmain has a strong connection to physical challenge and endurance. In her younger years, she completed a run from Melbourne to Queensland to raise funds for terminally ill children - an experience that reflects her determination and commitment to giving back. She remains deeply family-oriented and is very devoted to her Cavoodle, "Queen's Counsel Kevin".

What's next?

Charmain is developing new podcast projects and working on her book, Tiger in the Corner, which explores trauma, strength, and leadership.

Leadership soundtrack?

Katy Perry - Eye of the Tiger.

AGM 2025 Recap

Our Team and Community Impact

At Lifeline Mid Coast, our work is made possible by 38 staff and 350 volunteers, including 10 Board members, who support our services and our community every day. Together, we provide care, support, and connection through crisis services, retail shops, and community engagement. Every role plays a part in ensuring people can access help when they need it most.

Resilience and Response

A key strength of Lifeline Mid Coast is our ability to adapt and respond to challenges. The teamwork and support shown during the May 2025 flood event reflected the resilience, care, and positive culture that exists across our organisation.

Major Projects

Burrawan Street Administration and Services Centre: Design finalised; Development Application documentation in preparation; engagement with the Uniting Church regarding project planning and financing.

Lifeline Shops and Funding

Our Lifeline Mid Coast Shops play a vital role in funding our services. The income generated through our shops helps sustain our operations, while also providing affordable, quality clothing and goods to members of our community. Our shops are also important spaces for connection. Volunteering in both our retail shops and crisis support services creates meaningful opportunities for community involvement and supports a strong sense of goodwill.

Current shop locations include:

Forster, Wingham, Wauchope, Port Macquarie (two locations), and Kempsey.

Financial Performance

Reflecting on the 2024–2025 financial year, Lifeline Mid Coast continued its transformation and delivered another strong financial result.

Profit for the year: \$1,065,234

This represents a decrease of \$124,905 (10.5%) compared to the previous year.

This result was impacted by temporary shop closures due to relocations and renovations, as well as the permanent closure of the Taree shop following the May 2025 flood.

Strategic Direction 2025 - 2029

Vision: An Australia free of suicide.

Mission: Committed to being a steadfast leader in crisis support and suicide prevention, we reach out to those in need and stand by our community through every season, fostering support and resilience.



19th November 2025 International Mens Day

International Men's Day is an opportunity for people everywhere of goodwill to appreciate and celebrate the men in their lives and the contribution they make to society for the greater good of all.

**MEN HAVE A SUICIDE
RATE 3 TIMES HIGHER
THAN WOMEN**

**MEN ARE NEARLY TWICE AS
LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM HEART
DISEASE THAN WOMEN**

**MEN ON AVERAGE
DIE 4-5 YEARS
BEFORE WOMEN**

**1 IN 3 MEN
EXPERIENCE
LONELINESS**

**1 IN 3 MEN HAVE BEEN THE
VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE**

Every year on November 19, International Men's Day gives us all a chance to pause and think about the issues, challenges, and contributions of men around the world. It's there to remind us that men's wellbeing also affects the health and harmony of families, communities, and society as a whole.

Story of Hope

Following a H2R referral, this participant first connected with support while admitted to the Kempsey Mental Health Ward. What followed was not a single moment of change, but a journey built on courage, honesty, and persistence. Through H2R supports, several cycles of the Eclipse program, and regular connection with the Friday Wellbeing Group, he continued to show up for himself and his recovery. Along the way, he worked closely with drug and alcohol counsellors and psychologists, building insight, skills, and trust in support systems.

His journey was not without setbacks. There were times of relapse, suicidality, and readmission to hospital. What stands out, however, is not the setbacks themselves, but the strength it took to re-engage with support each time. Choosing to keep going is an achievement in itself.

Alongside recovery, his creativity remained a source of strength. A talented artist, he continues to express himself through his work - a reminder that identity, purpose, and hope can grow alongside healing.

This is a story of resilience, self-belief, and determination. It shows that recovery is possible, support matters, and strength can be found even in the hardest seasons.



Lifeline SHOP



Over the Christmas period we celebrated with every individual shop.

These gatherings reflected the spirit of our Lifeline family and the strong sense of connection across our retail network. They also gave managers and staff the opportunity to openly express their appreciation for our volunteers. Awards were presented to recognise milestone achievements, with some volunteers unaware of the extraordinary dedication they had given over 5, 10, 15, 20 and even 25 years of service.

Across the year, our shops continued to be the heart of Lifeline Mid Coast. Each store is powered by people who generously give their time, skills, and compassion to support our lifesaving services. From sorting donations and serving customers to mentoring new volunteers and supporting store operations, every role plays a vital part in our shared mission.

In the past year alone, our shop volunteers contributed thousands of hours across the region, helping to keep our doors open and our services accessible. Together, our retail network supported:

317 active volunteers across all shops
6 shops supporting local connection
Over \$2 million raised from local shop sales

These achievements are not just numbers - they represent conversations held, kindness shared, and a community coming together with purpose. Every hour volunteered and every donation processed helps ensure that when someone reaches out to Lifeline, support is there.

Our Christmas celebrations were a reminder that while our shops raise vital funds, they also create belonging. They are places where friendships form, confidence grows, and people find meaning in giving back. We are deeply grateful to every volunteer, staff member, and supporter who continues to make our shops welcoming, resilient, and full of heart.



Kempsey Shop Grand Opening



The opening of the new Kempsey Lifeline Shop marks the end of a long, demanding journey and the beginning of an exciting new chapter - one made possible through dedication, teamwork, and an enormous amount of heart.



This transition to a new, main street location did not happen overnight. It reflects months of planning, problem-solving, and hands-on effort, particularly from our volunteers, who generously gave their time, energy, and care to ensure the move and fit-out were done right. Their commitment has created a space that is not only welcoming for customers, but genuinely supportive of those who work within it.



A heartfelt congratulations goes to Syd and the entire Kempsey team for seeing this journey through. From sorting and setup to opening day readiness, their perseverance and teamwork have been outstanding. We also extend our sincere thanks to the Lifeline Mid Coast Staff and Board members whose thoughtful, precise work behind the scenes helped bring this vision to life.



The new shop has been carefully designed with volunteer wellbeing and functionality at its core - from the organised back-of-house sorting area to the built-in seating behind the till, every detail reflects consideration, care, and experience. The result is a beautifully fitted space that supports efficiency, comfort, and connection.



The grand opening itself was a true celebration. With the Deputy Mayor, local media, radio representatives, friends, family, and supporters from across the region in attendance, the event felt like a big community gathering - warm, inclusive, and full of pride. Treats, freebies, prizes, and activities added to the festive atmosphere and reminded us just how deeply supported Lifeline is in Kempsey.



After a long and tiring journey, this opening stands as a moment to pause, celebrate, and say thank you. We warmly welcome the beginning of a bright future in a brand-new shop, perfectly positioned to welcome many more customers and continue supporting Lifeline's work.



When the Dust Settles

On October 30, 2025, members of our Lifeline Mid Coast team joined the Port Macquarie community at Majestic Cinemas for a powerful local screening of *When the Dust Settles*, hosted by the Outback Mind Foundation and Self-Seen. The evening also featured our own Kelly Saidey and Di Bannister, Lifeline Mid Coast's staff, who took part in a heartfelt Q & A session following the film.

The documentary sheds light on men's mental health in regional Australia - exploring how families, friends, and communities come together in the aftermath of loss, and how open, honest conversations can spark hope and healing. Its honesty and humanity struck a deep chord with our staff and volunteers, many of whom were among the first to purchase tickets for a film that speaks so strongly to the work we do every day.

While Lifeline Mid Coast wasn't an official partner, our presence was felt in the room. Several team members and volunteers attended, sharing resources, offering comfort, and being there for anyone who needed a listening ear. It wasn't just about showing up - it was about walking alongside those carrying pain, listening without judgment, and being part of a community that chooses care over silence.

Events like this remind us why connection matters. When we come together to talk about mental health - especially in spaces where silence once stood - we take another step toward breaking stigma and building understanding.

We're proud to have stood alongside our community at *When the Dust Settles*, and even prouder to see conversations like these becoming part of everyday life across the Mid Coast.



Genesys Launch

Service and Training Roles Update

Kelly, previously our Suicide Prevention and Postvention Manager, has stepped into the new role of Senior Services Manager, bringing together all Lifeline Mid Coast services under one leadership portfolio, including our Crisis Team. Di, who previously held the role of Training and Crisis Support Manager, has transitioned into specifically Training Program Manager. In this role, Di will focus on delivering high-quality training and expanding education opportunities across our community and surrounding regions, with a strong emphasis on quality, consistency, and growth.



Di Bannister



Kelly Saidey

Lifeline Launches New Platform for 13 11 14 Service

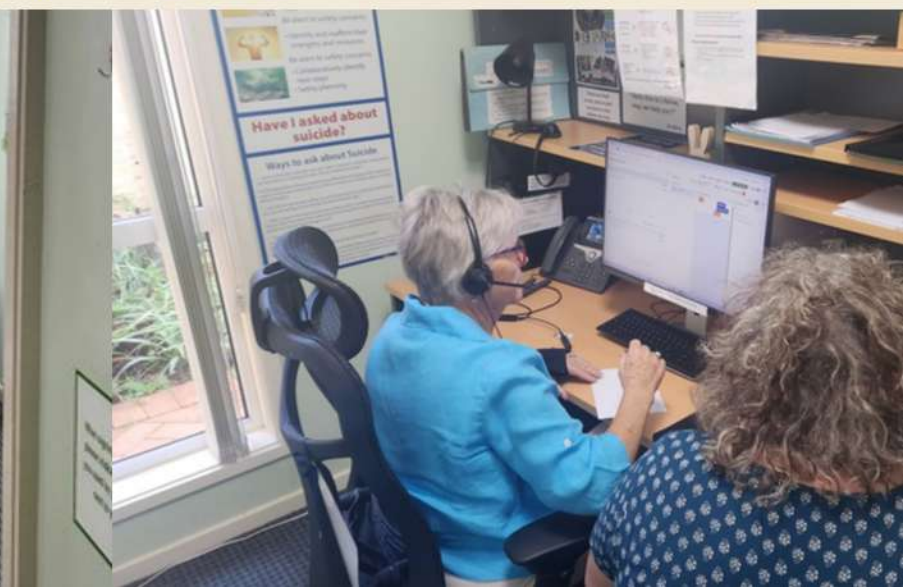
On 25 November 2025, Lifeline launched a new platform for the 13 11 14 service. Our crisis supporters rose to the occasion with remarkable resilience and determination as the Genesys CONNECT platform was introduced.

Genesys CONNECT was implemented to provide a more reliable and stable system to better support help seekers and keep them safe. It is a cloud-based platform now used by Lifeline Australia to deliver crisis support services. The platform serves as a single, integrated system across all Lifeline services - including Voice, Text, and Chat - ensuring consistent, high-quality support nationwide. All Lifeline services are now using the same system, creating a more unified approach to crisis support delivery and ultimately improving the experience for help seekers.

Our dedicated crisis supporters went above and beyond their usual volunteering commitments, completing online learning, in-centre practice sessions, and mentored shifts to prepare for the transition. We extend our sincere thanks to volunteers Dorothy, Karen, and Lynnette, who stepped in as Change Champions to help train and support their fellow volunteers through this significant change.

This has been the largest system change for crisis supporters since the transition from paper-based processes to a computerised system.

Pictured is Barry Braund, who took the very first Genesys call at our centre - a meaningful milestone marking the beginning of this new chapter. On the right is Di Bannister, Training Program Manager taking the second call.



Lifeline Mid Coast Services

Memorials

Throughout December we held two Christmas Memorials, one in Tinonee and another Port Macquarie for families impacted by the loss of a loved one to suicide. These gatherings provided a safe, compassionate space for families to come together, honour their loved ones, and feel supported during what can be an especially difficult time leading into Christmas and New Year. Families shared how grateful they were to Lifeline Mid Coast for offering this opportunity for reflection, connection, and care.

Christmas Hampers

Once again, our annual Christmas Hamper initiative supported participants who were doing it particularly tough over the festive season. For many, Christmas can be an isolating time, with a significant impact on mental health. When we reached out to our Telephone Crisis Support Volunteers and Office Staff for assistance, the response was overwhelming... donations came flooding in, and the true spirit of the Lifeline community shone brightly. Thanks to this generosity, Ebanie, Kaitlin, and Karen were able to deliver 15 hampers to vulnerable participants. This simple but powerful act of kindness reminded people that they were being thought of and helped ease some of the burden during a challenging time.



Eclipse Morning Tea

Our Eclipse participants also came together for an Eclipse Christmas Morning Tea. This gave staff the opportunity to do a final check-in before the Christmas break, ensuring supports were in place and participants felt connected and cared for.

Crisis Team & Volunteers

The Crisis Team hosted a beautiful Volunteer Christmas Dinner to thank our volunteers for their dedication and contributions throughout the year. It was a wonderful opportunity for connection, reflection, and some well-earned downtime, particularly as everyone continued settling into the new 13 11 14 Genesis platform. We are deeply grateful to the many volunteers who stepped up to take extra phone shifts over the Christmas period. Demand for support remains high during what can be a lonely and stressful time of year, and your commitment ensured help was available when it was most needed.

Groups and New Programs

As we move into the new year, it's a valuable time to reset and plan ahead. Suicide Bereavement Support Groups have now been scheduled for the year and are already beginning to fill. Our Crisis Supporters continue to grow in confidence using the Genesys platform, and I will be working closely with Lifeline Australia and other centres throughout the year to deliver several initiatives, including training more Eclipse and Bereavement Group Facilitators.

Thank you to everyone - staff, volunteers, and community - for your compassion, commitment, and care. Wishing you all good health and happy moments throughout 2026.

**Warm regards,
Kelly Saidey, Senior Services Manager**

Volunteer Spotlight

25 Years of Volunteering with Lifeline Mid Coast Kay Green

Kay started volunteering with Lifeline 25 years ago, not because she planned a long journey, but because it felt right.

"I started volunteering for myself. Giving has always been important to me, and it felt like a privilege. When I lost my cousin, suicide touched me, and Lifeline just seemed like home."

Over the years, Kay has watched Lifeline change and felt herself grow alongside it.

"I remember the old shop on Pulteney Street. We sorted stock along a bench at the back wall, and we'd always have clothes on the floor because we were so busy. We had no delivery trucks back then, just our own cars. As awareness around mental health grew, our shops became about so much more than selling affordable items... they became part of the hope Lifeline gives to the community."

Her role grew too... from sorting and serving, to managing the till, and eventually holding keys for more than 15 years.

"I didn't have a great education, but Lifeline taught me so much, even academic skills like maths while working on the till. They gave me faith and trust, and that gave me confidence. I'm extremely proud of that."

What's kept her volunteering for so long isn't just the work - it's the people.

"The friends I've made, the sense of pride in my achievements, and knowing my contribution matters. I've enjoyed every single day as much as my very first."

Some moments stay with her more than others.

"I'll never forget helping a grandmother who came in looking for a dress for her granddaughter's wedding. She needed something affordable at the last minute. We found her a beautiful dress, shoes, and a bag - what she didn't know was it was \$1

day, she was over the moon, and I got to personally give her the good news. Knowing that small moment made such a difference meant everything." Being part of Lifeline, Kay says, is about belonging. "Knowing I have someone to turn to. That I belong and I'm supported, no matter what."

Even after floods forced a move from Taree to Wingham, Kay never considered stepping away.

"I'm not ready to leave Lifeline - and I don't see that happening anytime soon. I'm not giving up. I'll keep showing up."

And at home, her commitment hasn't gone unnoticed.

"My grandkids absolutely love that I work for Lifeline. They call it my shop and always ask when I'm going back to find them some hidden treasures."

After 25 years, Kay's impact isn't measured in time - but in the quiet confidence, connection, and care she brings every day.



**Catherine Vaara (CEO), Kay Green (Shop Volunteer),
Sammie Ferris (Previous Shop Manager of Taree Store)**

Volunteer Spotlight

Our volunteers are at the heart of everything we do. The 2025 Volunteer Service Awards recognise individuals who have reached service milestones ranging from five to thirty years. Each year represents countless hours of care, listening, learning, and support for people in our community. We are deeply grateful for the commitment, compassion, and reliability our volunteers continue to bring to Lifeline Mid Coast.



5 Years - Eucalypt

*Janine Collar
Rita Field
Susan Norman
Wendy Middleton
Rosemarie Gourlie
Kerry Watson
Ken Ogilvie
Christine Bunney
David Gollan
Kim Kees
Jane Lohse
Kerrie Selby
Bettina Bettington
Brendan Date
Scott Deutscher
Kerrie-Lee Jensen
Craig Partridge
Kaye Raddatz
David Rupert
Saidee Talty*

10 years - Golden Wattle

*Denise Bianco
Carol Carnegie
Renita Connor
Patricia Macvean
Diane Pawlowsky
Margaret Worthy
Cherry Adams
Barry Braund
Kirsty Keep
Stephen Prohm*

15 years - Opal of Honour

Cherry Adams

25 Years - Lifetime Achievement

Kay Green

30 Years - Lifetime Achievement

Di Bannister

Why These Years Matter

Reaching a service milestone is more than a number. It reflects dedication to ongoing training, readiness to show up when people need support, and a shared belief in the importance of connection and hope. Every milestone contributes to the strength and continuity of our services.

Thank you

Thank you to each volunteer recognised in 2025. Your willingness to give your time, skills, and care - year after year - makes a real difference. We also acknowledge the support of families, workplaces, and loved ones who make this commitment possible. Lifeline Mid Coast is stronger because of you.

Out and About With LLMC

Headspace Shine Day

Headspace created a warm and inviting space for young people to relax and be themselves. There were gorgeous cakes and snacks, a cosy shaded tent with bean bags, bubbles drifting through the trees, and a circus workshop complete with the sweetest circus dog. Inside, talented mentors offered relaxed makeup sessions that felt supportive and fun. The care put into the day was clear. It was a thoughtful, welcoming environment that encouraged rest, creativity, and connection - an atmosphere that truly reflected the spirit of making space for mental wellbeing.

Reclaim The Night

The community came together with genuine unity to stand against domestic and gender-based violence. The atmosphere was warm and supportive, with music, art, and shared food creating a space for connection and reflection. Lanterns and handmade beanies added a thoughtful touch, reminding everyone of the courage behind gatherings like this. The guest speakers shared powerful insights that resonated deeply, especially as many people who are impacted by suicide have also experienced or been connected to violence in their lives. Showing up as Lifeline alongside others committed to safety and change felt incredibly meaningful. Their messages sparked hope, determination, and a shared belief that together we can build a safer, more compassionate community.

Colour Run

We were proud to be part of the International Day of People with Disability Colour Run, celebrating inclusion, connection, and the joy of moving together. The event brought out a real sense of playfulness - fitness became a moment of freedom, with everyone running, laughing, and embracing their inner child as colour filled the air. Being there as Lifeline, joining in the run and standing alongside the community, felt truly meaningful. It was uplifting to see so many people running with happiness and pride, creating a space where everyone felt seen, supported, and celebrated.

Out and About With LLMC

Headspace Shine Day



Reclaim The Night



Colour Run





January 2026 Lifeline Connect



Next Newsletter April 2026



Submission Due March 2026



Lifeline Mid Coast
We are local.