

VALUED Lives

2025

Annual Report

THE LIFE **I** CHOOSE

Returning to our roots



In the spirit of reconciliation, Valued Lives acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Western Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

THE LIFE **i** CHOOSE

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Message from Chairperson – Returning to our roots, big C capacity building



At Valued Lives, our purpose has always been clear: to walk alongside people with disability and their families, helping them build strengths, connections, and the confidence to live the Good Life – a life of their own choosing.

Amid ongoing NDIS change, we cannot control the turbulence, but we can return to our roots. Our focus is family leadership, lived experience, and capacity building. Money alone does not create the Good Life – resilience, belonging, and hope do. That is why we pursued a bold capacity building agenda this year, supporting people and communities to grow leadership and strengthen inclusion.

This year we transitioned out of direct support and support coordination – a difficult but thoughtful step. Every participant and worker was personally supported to choose their new provider, earning strong positive feedback.

With Lotterywest's support, we launched Empowered Connections, a co-designed digital hub shaped by lived experience. It now offers resources and a safe space for families and peers to connect and share knowledge.



VLF members, Board Directors, IAP members, and CEO, attending the end of year dinner in 2024.

Our innovative employment work was recognised as a WA 2025 Community Services Awards finalist. We advanced customised employment approaches, job redesign, and inclusive hiring, and launched a disability arts collective. Alongside our NACBO partners, these efforts position us strongly in the Centre for Inclusive Employment consortium.

Partnerships also thrived. We again led My Home My Way workshops, inspiring individualised living, and deepened our role in the national ILA Community of Practice, supported by Marita Walker's leadership.

As a family-founded organisation, we continue to invest boldly for a sustainable and innovative future. New fee-for-service products launching in 2026 will open fresh pathways while staying true to our roots.

Despite turbulence, our focus remains steady: walking alongside people with disability and families as they define and pursue the Good Life.

The past four years have been a time of transformation. Guided by our Boards and CEO Jane Forward, we have achieved so much together. As Jane concludes her role, we thank her for steering Valued Lives with courage and vision, leaving us well placed for the future.

Cole Vindevoghel
Chair, Valued Lives Foundation

A Message from the CEO



As I reflect on the past year - and on my time with Valued Lives - one word comes to mind: **courage**.

This has been a year of courage for our organisation, as we made bold choices to step away from direct support services and re-focus on our roots: capacity building, family leadership, and lived experience. It was not an easy path, but it was the right one. We took every step with care and dignity, ensuring that each person and family we supported could transition in a way that honoured their choices. The feedback we received from participants reminded us that compassion and respect matter most.

For me personally, it has been a year of deep pride. Pride in our small but mighty team, who continue to show what can be achieved when people with disability and families lead the way. Pride in the resilience and innovation that shine through even in challenging times. And pride in the countless stories of courage and hope I have had the privilege to witness.

As I conclude my time as CEO, I do so knowing that Valued Lives is in a strong position for the future. The foundations we have built will allow the organisation to continue growing, innovating, and staying true to its roots. I leave with immense gratitude to our Board, our Independent Disability Advisory Panel, our dedicated staff, and most of all, to the people with disability and families who welcomed me into their journeys.

The Good Life looks different for everyone, but what unites us is the belief that it is possible. Thank you for allowing me to walk alongside you in pursuit of it.

With respect and gratitude,
Jane Forward
Chief Executive Officer

Farewell to our direct support families

In October 2024, we said our final farewells to the 106 individuals and families we had the privilege of journeying alongside. It was a time of reflection and gratitude, as we came together to celebrate the many relationships built over the years.

Each farewell carried with it stories of resilience, trust, and shared achievement. For us, it was never just about providing support — it was about walking together through challenges and triumphs and creating the foundations for people to live the life of their choosing.



We want to honour every individual, family, ally, and colleague we have been fortunate enough to know. Your courage, generosity, and commitment have left a lasting impression on us. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the support workers who went above and beyond, often becoming part of the family story. As one family told us:

“The team didn’t just support our son — they believed in him. That belief gave us hope.”

Another parent reflected:

“We will always remember the kindness, patience, and humour your staff brought into our home. They felt like part of our family.”

These words capture what we witnessed daily — small acts of care, connection, and persistence that made a big difference in people’s lives.

As we close this chapter, we do so with deep respect and gratitude. Though our formal role as direct supporters has ended, the connections and lessons we’ve shared will always remain part of the Valued Lives story. We wish every family the very best as they continue to shape and live the Good Life in their own way.

2024 Strategic operational plan

In 2024, Valued Lives launched a new three-year plan shaped by families, people with disability, staff, and partners. It keeps lived experience at the centre while guiding our growth, sustainability, and impact.

Strategic Priorities			
Capacity Building & Leadership	Innovation & Growth	Connection & Inclusion	Partnerships & Influence
growing skills, confidence, and peer leadership	developing new approaches, including fee-for-service products.	creating spaces for sharing, belonging, and inclusive practice.	collaborating to shape policy and ensure lived experience leads.

Year one progress (2024–2025)

- ✓ Transitioned out of direct support to focus on capacity building.
- ✓ Launched Empowered Connections digital hub for resources and peer discussion.
- ✓ Expanded employment innovation – including a disability arts collective – and recognised as a WA 2025 Community Services Awards finalist.
- ✓ Strengthened partnerships through My Home My Way workshops and the national ILA Community of Practice.

Looking ahead

By 2027, we will launch new fee-for-service products, deepen peer leadership programs, and expand opportunities for people with disability and families to influence systems and policy.



Right to Left: Staff and Family Leaders - Minky, Jane, Rita, Amy, Karen and Jen attending the Lifelong Capacity Building Conference, Queensland

Voices of experience, driving change

Formed in January 2024, the eight-member Independent (Disability) Advisory Panel was established to elevate the voice of lived experience across all areas of our work. The panel brings together diverse perspectives from people with disability and families, ensuring that lived experience is not only heard, but actively shapes our priorities. Their guidance has been instrumental in keeping our efforts focused on what matters most – creating meaningful change for people with disability and their communities.

Independent Advisory Panel members



Jen's story: Leading with passion and purpose



Jen Harland, IAP member

I was late-diagnosed as autistic in 2011, and since then I've become actively involved in the autistic and disability communities. I've contributed to research projects, co-design and reference groups, and public speaking, and in 2024 I join as an inaugural member of the Valued Lives Independent (Disability) Advisory Panel (IAP).

Through the IAP, I've had opportunities to grow and feel included. I attended the CRU Symposium in Brisbane, where I learned about different pathways to employment, such as customised employment and microenterprises, and about the importance of friendships and freely given relationships.

Valued Lives also supported me to complete a Public Speaking Course and a Creative Facilitation Workshop, which boosted my confidence and gave me new tools to share my story and lead groups. I also contributed to a research evaluation of Good Sammy's employment pathways, sharing my lived experience to influence positive change.

Being recognised as a leader in the disability community is an honour, and I'm proud of the ways I've been able to contribute. I will continue this journey with passion and purpose, always working to make the world a better place for people with disability.

Peers supporting peers

Life with disability and the NDIS has many ups and downs – but connecting with people who understand makes a difference.

The 1800 Support Hub is a free, confidential phone service where you can talk with someone who has lived experience. Our peer supporters listen, share stories, and offer information that brings hope.

This year, calls rose by 300%, highlighting the value of peer-to-peer support for people seeking understanding and guidance.

"It was the first time I felt like someone really understood me – not as a client, but as a person." – Caller



Minky's story: The Power of Peer Connection

I arrived in Australia in 2004, knowing no one. Moving straight to the Pilbara — our fourth country and first new continent — was daunting, especially after leaving behind a big, close family. In Newman, we found connection through the local church and began to build community. Two years later, after a difficult birth, I started my own daycare to keep my youngest son, Lukas with me, as it became clear he was different from his siblings. Although we never received a formal diagnosis in that small community, the support around us was strong.



Minky and her son, Lukas.

When we later moved to Perth, the challenges grew. Lukas's difficulties with social connections became very obvious, and while autism was suggested, it took years before we finally had a diagnosis and the right support. At my lowest point, I was introduced to Valued Lives — a true light in the dark. Through peer mentoring and the Byford peer group, I met other parents who understood. Together we shared knowledge, built confidence, and supported one another to imagine a good life.

This peer connection changed everything. With encouragement, I stepped into leadership, first as a facilitator, then as a Peer Project Officer. Valued Lives recognised what it

means to be a working mother of a child with disability and supported my growth. Now, through my role, I share my story and walk alongside others as they navigate their own journeys. I believe everyone should experience the power of peer groups — they are life-changing. Access to the right information, and the right people, has transformed both my life and my hope for Lukas's future.



My Home My Design: Making Individualised Living Arrangements Real

At the heart of a good life is a place to call home — safe, connected, and truly your own.

In 2024, Valued Lives proudly delivered the *My Home My Design: Making ILO Real* project, helping people with disability and families imagine and create living arrangements that reflect their vision of home.

Through workshops, peer support, one-to-one conversations, and the ILO Toolkit, more than 6,000 people across Australia explored new pathways. Families described the project as “life-changing” and “a lifeline,” as it gave them confidence, knowledge, and hope.

Stories like Michael moving out for the first time, or Sophie designing a home that kept her close to friends and community, showed what’s possible when people are supported to lead. With the right guidance and peer connection, independence and belonging become real.

Valued Lives and its peers in the National Alliance of Capacity Building Organisations (NACBO) are committed to developing quality resources to support your unique and individualised living arrangement.

For more information:

<https://www.ilotoolkit.com.au>

<https://www.nacbo.org.au>

Meaningful Employment: One Size Does Not Fit All

The pathway to meaningful employment for people with disability is as individual as it is for anyone else in the community. Careers are journeys — and there is no single pathway that works for everyone. With more than a decade of supporting people to establish microenterprises, Valued Lives has been investing in new approaches that carve out more pathways and create more opportunities for meaningful work.

Spotlight on the LEAP Project



Jane Forward, CEO, with LEAP team members at the 2025 Community Services Excellence Awards

LEAP (Leadership, Employment, and Participation) a Valued Lives' flagship project designed to break down barriers to employment for people with disability. The project focused on customised employment approaches — working directly with individuals to identify their strengths, interests, and talents, and then collaborating with employers to redesign jobs, carve out new roles, and build confidence in inclusive hiring practices.

Through LEAP, we developed partnerships with employers, supported job design tailored to people's unique abilities, and piloted new models of workplace inclusion.

The recognition of LEAP as a finalist in the **2025 Community Services Excellence Awards** was a powerful acknowledgment of the team's vision, innovation, and drive. It demonstrated that when employment is approached differently — with people at the centre and employers as partners — new futures become possible.

Matt's Story:

The journey to paid employment



When I joined the LEAP Project, I wanted meaningful work where I could use my organisational skills and calm, focused nature. With the support of my Job Designer, I began a tailored work experience placement in the Logistics Department at St John Ambulance WA.

At first, my tasks were simple, like assembling supply kits and helping with inventory. Over time, as my confidence grew, my responsibilities expanded. I

began preparing and assembling first aid kits for ambulance crews, supporting stocktakes, and helping organise storage systems.

I quickly felt part of the team and was valued not only for my accuracy but also for my humour, which contributed to a positive workplace culture. One of my colleagues said:

“Matt has become a valuable member of the team, contributing directly to the performance and output of the Logistics Department. His humorous nature has also contributed to a positive cultural uplift.”

With support, I was able to transition into a casual paid position as a Logistics Assistant. This experience has built my skills, confidence, and sense of belonging in the workplace.

Spotlight on the Inclusive Digital and Arts Project

The Inclusive Digital and Creative Arts Project strengthens community participation by supporting arts-based microenterprise owners to design and deliver workshops. It shows how art and digital media can create new opportunities for employment, self-expression, and connection.

Grace's story: Making wellness accessible



As a blind artist, I often struggled to connect with the wider arts community and find platforms that supported my growth. Through Valued Lives' Inclusive Digital and Creative Arts Project, I discovered new ways to share my work and build confidence. A highlight for me was presenting at the Deaf and Blind Society – an empowering and affirming experience.

Being part of the group has given me the confidence to run workshops and the right support to do this kind of work. Just as important has been the sense of belonging I've found. I've really enjoyed being part of the community of disabled artists that we are building.

Impact

You told us that as a result



93% of surveyed participants acquired new information



91% of surveyed participants acquired new skills



75% of surveyed participants feel more confident to participate and contribute to community

Touch points

We provided over



7,427
touchpoints of support



491
touchpoint of 1:1 support



15,827
unique website users



3755
social media users



300%
Increase in calls to 1800 support hub

Meet the Board



Cole Vindevoghel (he/ him)

Cole joined the Valued Lives Board in 2023, bringing extensive global experience in technology and project management. He contributes strong governance, process improvement, and systems expertise to help the organisation thrive.



Dr Rita Kleinfeld-Fowell (she/her)

Rita joined the Valued Lives Board in 2020 and is an inspiration to many. Legally deaf and blind, she overcame barriers to earn a first-class law degree, a doctorate, and now leads the Disability Law Practice at Sussex Street Community Law Centre. Her lived experience and work as a Support Coordinator bring powerful insight into building dignity, choice, and inclusion.



Colin Twist(he/him)

This year we said goodbye to Colin, who joined the Valued Lives Board as a dedicated father of a young man with autism. His lived experience and advocacy kept the Board grounded in the realities of families, while highlighting the importance of creating pathways for people with disability to live with purpose and inclusion.

“Being part of Valued Lives has taught me so much about leadership, inclusion, and resilience. It’s a fabulous organisation, and I’m excited to see the great work continue.”



Frances Moon (she/her)

I joined the Valued Lives Board this year, bringing governance experience from Down Syndrome WA and the Country Women's Association, alongside lived experience as a Family Leader. My insights are shaped by supporting my daughter to live an independent life, and by a professional career in education and school leadership. I aim to use this knowledge and empathy to strengthen opportunities, inclusion, and capacity in our community.



Ross Kyrwood(he/him)

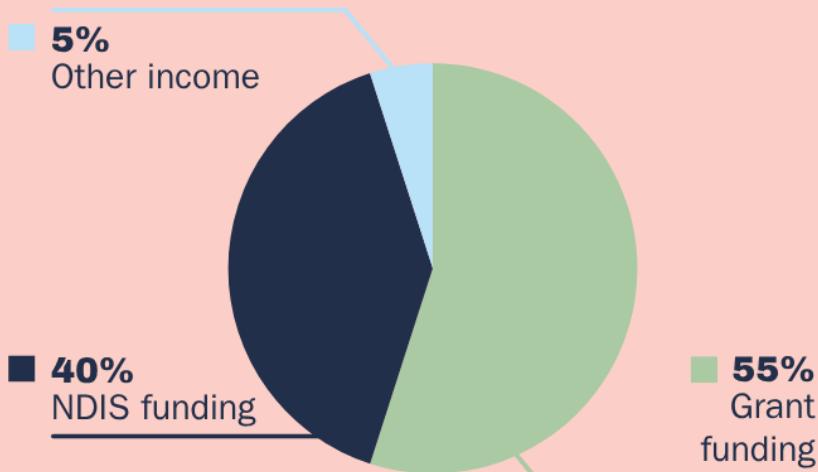
Ross joined the Valued Lives Board in early 2024, bringing over 35 years' experience in human services, including roles as youth worker, senior leader, and CEO. He is committed to ethical leadership, innovation, and person-centred support. As a Director, Ross focuses on creating opportunities for people with disability to pursue their goals and contribute as valued members of inclusive communities.

Our Finances

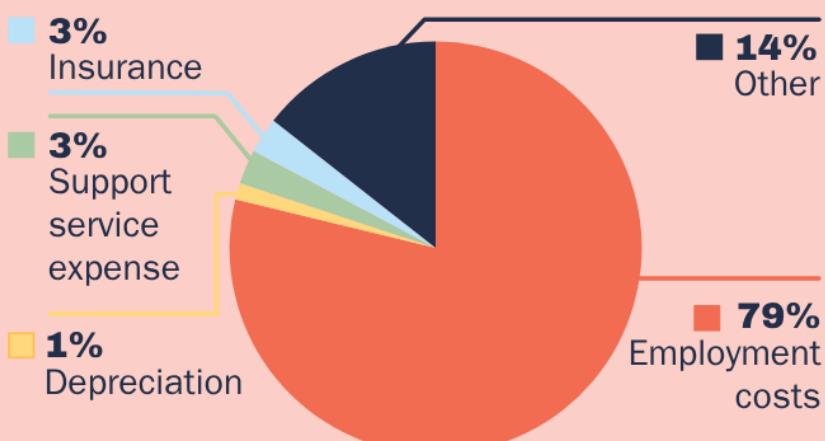
Income and Expenditure

Valued Lives Foundation remains in a stable financial position, reflecting prudent financial management and continued investment in initiatives that build individual and community capacity.

Income Total \$2.782M



Expenditure Total \$3.103M



Assets and Liabilities

Valued Lives Foundation continues to maintain a strong balance sheet with low debt levels and healthy reserves.

Current assets

A total of **\$3.12 million** in cash and cash equivalents (restricted and unrestricted), including transaction, savings, and term deposit accounts, as well as prepayments and other short-term assets.

Current liabilities

Accrued expenses, employee provisions, and other short-term obligations **\$0.15 million**.



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