



# Downs & West Community Support

a ministry of Sisters of Charity Community Care Ltd

ABN: 39 093 448 410



## The year in review 2024-2025

Edition 19 / August 2025

### Welcome

Welcome to our Annual Review, where we reflect on the year's achievements and challenges as we respond to the needs of our rural communities.

**OUR VISION:** Inspired by Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity of Australia, Downs & West Community Support (DWCS) responds to current and emerging needs of rural communities.



### OUR MISSION

To provide relief from suffering, distress, isolation, misfortune and helplessness through encouragement and discreet, personalised assistance to farming families and their communities in Southern Queensland who are severely affected by climatic conditions or family matters beyond their control.

We are motivated by a sense of responsibility to provide compassionate care and to share our resources as far as possible.

In carrying out its Mission, DWCS is committed to Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults, understood as the prevention of harm, with a special focus on care for children and adults who are at risk.



# Chairman's Report

It is my privilege to present the Chairman's Report for Downs & West Community Support for the year ended 30 June 2025.

## In Memoriam – Dr Christopher Muir

In June we mourned the loss of our former Chairman, Dr Christopher Muir, who served DWCS with dedication and compassion for over six years, the last three years as our Chairman. Chris was a generous and active member of the community, whose leadership, energy, and unwavering support of our Mission left a lasting impact. A man of humility, compassion, and quiet strength, Chris brought to DWCS the same spirit of service that defined his life across many spheres — from Rotary to education, health, and faith-based outreach. He will be deeply missed by the Committee and all who had the privilege of working alongside him. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Dymphna, and his family. Chris's legacy of service and kindness will continue to guide and inspire us.

## Challenges and Community Needs

The past year has brought significant challenges to the communities we serve across the Western and Southern Downs regions. A series of natural disasters, including flooding and bushfires, have deeply affected families and individuals, compounding existing hardships. These events have placed additional pressure on already strained resources and have contributed to a growing concern around mental health, which continues to be a major issue in rural and remote areas.

Due to health challenges faced by Sr Christine, we were unable to host as many Wellness Days, and our popular Dragonfly Retreat, as in previous years. Her absence in the country was deeply felt, however, she worked tirelessly in the background and stayed connected with our clients in a variety of ways. Despite these limitations, with support from our Advisory Committee and volunteers, DWCS remained steadfast in its mission, continuing to provide financial and pastoral support to many clients in need.

## Financial and Operational Highlights

In 2024–2025, DWCS raised just over \$40,000 in donations, while direct Mission-related expenditure exceeded \$65,000. We are proud to reaffirm our commitment that 100% of donations received are directed toward Mission-related activities, ensuring that every contribution makes a meaningful difference.

Please refer to our donors list further on in our Annual Review – we are truly grateful to all of our generous supporters.

We also very gratefully acknowledge the Sisters of Charity Foundation for their ongoing and generous support. Their contributions not only cover essential administrative costs but also funded additional Mission-related expenditure. In addition, the Foundation's committed team and Board continue to provide invaluable governance and advice, for which we are deeply thankful.

## Looking Ahead

As we look to the year ahead, DWCS remains committed to its core mission — to respond flexibly and compassionately to the evolving needs of our client communities. While our strategic goals remain unchanged, we aim to ramp up activities around Wellness Days and, grant funding permitting, host another Dragonfly Retreat to provide much-needed respite and renewal for those we serve.

On behalf of the Committee, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our volunteers, donors, partners, and supporters. Your generosity and belief in our mission make everything we do possible.

Warm regards,



**Chris Garnier**  
*Acting Chair,  
DWCS Advisory Committee*

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**In 2024-2025,**

**100% of your donations supported  
farmers and their local communities  
affected by drought, floods, fires, and  
other matters beyond their control.**

# Why we do what we do

## 2025 Queensland Floods

These floods topped the 1974 floods, displacing over 15,000 residents, causing at least 18 fatalities, and resulting in \$1.5 billion in damages. Thousands of hectares of agricultural land were affected, with significant livestock losses across the region, and wildlife had not a chance of survival.

**OUR VOLUNTEERS** organised delivery of goods via other transport services as roads were closed. The resilience of the people has been an inspiration, but they still need our help.



### Words from Farmers and Graziers:

*"We are terribly upset about stock losses and quite emotional about what the cattle have been through—weaners and calves and mothers. It was very frightening especially the children. It will take a long time to rebuild, restock, and relax."*

*"The loss of livestock will have a knock-on effect in the cities where the prices of meat will go up."*

*"The worst was yet to come, financially. None of us will have any way of selling our cattle for a long, long time."*

The floods exceeded 1974 levels in many areas, leaving farmers to replace essential fencing and rely on helicopter fodder drops to feed stranded livestock while assessing long-term damage to their operations.



## Anyone Can Experience Homelessness

Homelessness extends far beyond city areas. Travelling west of Brisbane, we observe people 'hidden' from public view. Isolated farm shacks, makeshift structures, couch surfing, or spaces beneath bridges become home for the rural homeless. This invisibility complicates social response to this serious problem. Unlike urban counterparts visible in city parks or shelters, rural dwellers face unique difficulties that worsen their situation.

Limited emergency accommodation prevents people accessing temporary housing when most needed. Lacking affordable, safe housing causes people to feel lost, alone and alienated. The psychological toll of such isolation cannot be overstated.

### OUR RESPONSE:

During severe winter weather, we were moved to act. We worked in collaboration with Tony's Rescue in July 2024, and in June 2025 we provided the homeless and others with basic winter necessities including:

100 pairs of socks	15 doonas
100 pairs of gloves	25 all-weather jackets
110 beanies	25 thermos flasks
56 pairs of shoes	10 pillows
30 blankets	5 sleeping bags

These items directly addressed harsh effects of sub-zero overnight temperatures and chilling daytime winds.

### OUR DONORS RESPOND:

The generosity of donors has made a huge difference in these lives. Every contribution helps recipients feel warmer and sleep soundly on freezing evenings with temperatures falling below -2 degrees Celsius. We will continue identifying and responding to these needs.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral Care is central to the support provided by DWCS. Giving people the space and tools to make sense of life for themselves is important for their wellbeing.

With each encounter, Pastoral Care is offered through attentive and reflective listening and seeks to identify an individual's own spiritual resources, values, hopes and dreams, and concerns and fears that collectively accompany an individual on their journey.

Much of this care was done face-to-face, however, when circumstances do not permit this, we connected through other avenues such as these:

500 telephone calls made	230 personalised letters of support written	6 face-to-face conversations	4 connecting people in aged care facilities and their families	17 people were visited in 12 different hospitals
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HOSPITAL VISITS AND SUPPORT

When individuals are airlifted from remote locations to major city hospitals for emergency care, the terror extends far beyond the medical crisis—it becomes profound isolation, being hundreds of kilometres from family when they're needed most. Once DWCS has been notified by families, we often wait at Brisbane hospitals for patients to arrive by air. As heart-wrenching as this is to witness, we offer support and comfort in these initial moments, ensuring patients know they are not alone and that family are on their way.

This year we supported **17 people** through these frightening experiences, providing a ministry of presence. We sat quietly alongside them, helped bridge the distance to connect them with loved ones, and attended to their immediate needs until family could make the journey from remote and rural Queensland.

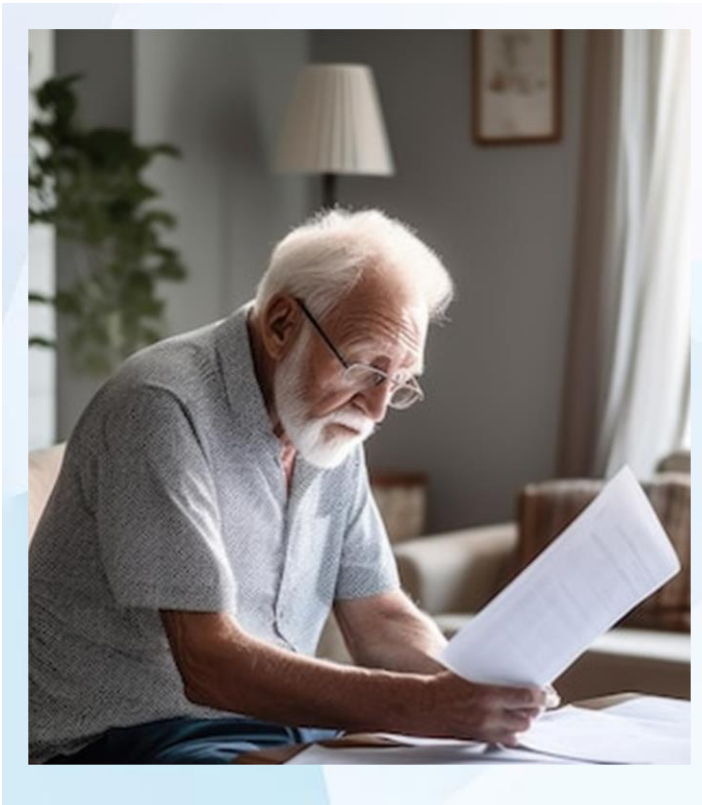
Sometimes the greatest healing begins not with medical intervention, but with the simple assurance that no one faces their crisis alone. In moments of crisis, presence matters just as much as treatment

THE POWER OF HANDWRITTEN LETTERS

To us, handwritten letters are a wonderful way to connect with all ages, and they often leave lasting impressions. To receive a written, personalised message can be incredibly special and shows just how important the recipient is to the sender. Letters and cards are rare, but a sense of excitement is felt when one receives mail which is not a bill or financial statement that causes stress and anxiety. This year we wrote **230 letters** to our people.

We have visited one elderly man and his wife since 2013, joining them as they fed the sheep, cattle, working dogs and locked up the chooks in the evening. We laughed, we cried, we shared a joke or two and talked about the severe weather conditions that impacted greatly on their lives! However, life became incredibly difficult when he sold his farm, and his wife died unexpectedly soon after. We have maintained this relationship through regular visits, phone calls and heartfelt letters.

*This elderly man texted: "I really like receiving your letter and card, it makes me sit down and I smile as I read the lovely words. You have made my day. I love the photos of little Harry. Give him a hug for me. I miss you both."*



Photos used with permission

# Supporting with Hearts and Hands

DWCS provides support with genuine compassion and practical assistance. By approaching each situation with understanding and without judging, we offer practical help that can lift people's spirits and help them face their circumstances. This enables people to feel more in control, stay connected with family and the local community, and be better able to make the decisions that need to be made. These are just a few ways we respond to individual and family needs with both heart and hands.

**Tidy up, washing, cleaning**



**Help with overdue bills**



**Offer essential packs + vouchers**



**Help with farm chores**



**Vehicle registrations & fuel**



**Connect family members**



**Provide pre-loved school shoes**



**Transport to appointments**



## Random Acts of Kindness

### 4,138 Reasons to Smile

When a volunteer told us about the Acts of Kindness campaign in March 2023, we knew our community would welcome a gentle touch of hope. We invited our crafty supporters to create tiny moments of joy with hooks, needles, felt, material and timber.

#### FROM HANDS TO HEARTS

Friends and Facebook followers began creating little animals, flowers, angels—anything that might prompt a smile. Each handmade treasure was paired with a simple poem from DWCS:

*Kindness is free and priceless to receive.  
I hope this brings a smile to your face and hearts filled with joy.  
Spread the love and make kindness go far.  
You could make something and place where others will find it.*

#### HIDDEN TREASURES

Our volunteers carefully wrapped each gift and poem in clear cellophane bags, then became community elves—hiding these treasures across seven Regional Shires. 4,138 little packets found their way to shopping trolleys, park benches, trees, fences, school gates and other unexpected places.

We aimed for 1,000 gifts, but generosity exceeded expectations. People knew that finding something lovingly made by a stranger can brighten someone's day.

#### THE RIPPLE EFFECT

This campaign has woven invisible threads of connection between gift makers and finders across our region. Hope doesn't always require grand gestures—sometimes it's as simple as a crocheted butterfly left on a park bench.



**Join our campaign and help brighten someone's day.  
Contact us to discover how you can spread hope.**

# Events

DWCS events have grown from the ground up—born from conversations with locals who know their community’s heart and brought to life by generous people who call these places home. This collaborative approach ensures each gathering serves its community while strengthening local networks.

DWCS events are offered at no cost — because connection, learning, and hope should not depend on the ability to pay. When people come without financial barriers, they come as they are, ready to receive and give in equal measure.

## Wellness Through Learning and Creativity Days 2024

We created spaces for **145 country women** across **6 Wellness Days** in **6 locations**, where they could simply come as they are. These gentle gatherings offered precious respite from the relentless demands of farm and town life — permission to pause, relax, and discover their creative spirit.



### DISCOVERING HIDDEN CREATIVITY

We invited women to let their creativity flow freely, opening doors to gifts they never knew they possessed. Hands weathered by managing livestock and farm budgets discovered they can craft beautiful Christmas hangings and paintings. The transformation was remarkable — not just in what they created, but in how they began to see themselves. Each day included a delicious light lunch featuring fresh local produce, feeding both body and soul.



### THE JOY OF DISCOVERY

One participant’s heartfelt words capture the essence perfectly:

*"I have never made anything in my life! I am so proud of this front door hanging and the pinecone decor, and they will make lovely gifts for people. Thank you so much for everything. I had a wonderful day."*

This is precisely why we gather — to help women uncover hidden gifts and remember that creativity and joy are essential parts of who we are.

# Events

## Pre-Christmas Gatherings

After a tough year of droughts, floods, fires, and personal losses, it was time to gather in joy with friendships that had dwindled in the busyness of the year. DWCS organised three events with the support of locals who volunteered in different communities. These communities needed time to breathe, laugh, reconnect, and forget the worries of each day.

### PURE MAGIC UNFOLDED

Over **320 people** attended our two pre-Christmas family BBQs, and the other was a Christmas dinner for country women across the Burnett and Western Downs regions. Old friendships rekindled, new ones sparked, and hearty laughter that hadn't echoed through these communities for months filled the air. Children played with joy while families watched with pure delight.



### MORE THAN A MEAL

The Christmas dinner brought our wonderful country ladies together over a delicious two-course meal, where conversation flowed as freely as the shared laughter. At the family BBQs, hearty fare sizzled on the grill while fresh salads were shared around the tables. For those precious hours, worries were set aside. Each family left with Christmas ham, gifts and festive treats to share, yet what they really carried home was something weightless but invaluable: knowing their community stands with them.



*Hams purchased from the local*

### THE HEART OF COMMUNITY

Receiving heartfelt feedback like this makes every effort worthwhile:

*"Thank you so much. This evening means so much to us all. Could we have another gathering next year please?"*

That question '*could we have another*', tells us everything we need to know. There's still nothing quite like the gentle healing power of neighbours gathering as one community under the Great Southern Sky.



*Tuny, Pat, Steve, Alan, Karen and Jan volunteered to help organise and prepare for these wonderful events*

# Our amazing volunteers

## MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE

Our small team of volunteers donated **1,245 hours** across our region, sharing their time and skills to support rural communities in need.

## HOW VOLUNTEERS HELP

Volunteers are those who give from the heart without counting the cost. Our wonderful volunteers offer to collect and sort donations, attend working bees, wrap gifts, pack hampers, price items and serve at our fundraising craft stalls. Some choose to work from home, creating beautiful craft items for our fundraising sales. Their generous support makes our work both possible and truly enjoyable.

Volunteering offers a meaningful opportunity to give back to your community while connecting with like-minded people who care. Whether you have a few hours to spare or are looking for a rewarding way to spend your time, there's a place for you with us.



*Sharlene at a working-bee*

## JOIN US...

Whether you're in Brisbane or the country, your skills can make a real difference.

Join us at: <https://www.downsandwestcommunitysupport.org/volunteer-with-dwcs/>

Contact details are included on the final page of this publication.



*Volunteers: Kathrine and Paula prepare for the fundraising craft stall with Mark from Mt St Michael's College.*



*Volunteer Karen completes the final touches for our event in the country for women.*



*Dr. Karan Varker, Sister of Chairty, wrapping gifts and pricing for our fundraising craft stall.*



*Julie and prince Harry have finished packing the van with blankets, doonas, sheets and towels. Ready for distribution!*

# Our Year at a Glance

## Downs & West Community Support received...

- ✓ \$51,722 in cash donations from individuals, schools, groups, and businesses.
- ✓ \$44,000 funding from Sisters of Charity Community Care Limited to cover 100% of the \$32,368 DWCS operating costs with the balance contributing towards DWCS programs.
- ✓ \$5,451 raised during various DWCS fundraising events.

**Because of this generosity,** DWCS has made a difference and spent \$67,496 on Mission related expenditure paid directly to, on behalf of, or for our clients. The pie chart below reflects a breakdown of the expenditure which can also be described as follows:

### HOUSEHOLD:

Provided groceries and essential household items including heaters, kitchenware, clothing and bed linen; covered overdue bills for medical care, pharmacy costs, rates, electricity and insurance; supported living expenses for those away from home; offered 142 petrol and 115 grocery vouchers; arranged car repairs; and provided warm clothing.

### FARM:

Covered outstanding veterinary and stock feed bills, council rates, and vehicle registration; replaced water tanks, farm gates, fencing and tools lost to floods and bushfires; distributed petrol vouchers to keep families mobile.

### CHILDREN:

Purchased bedroom essentials and school supplies so children could attend classes with dignity; supported families during hospital stays when children received treatment in the city.

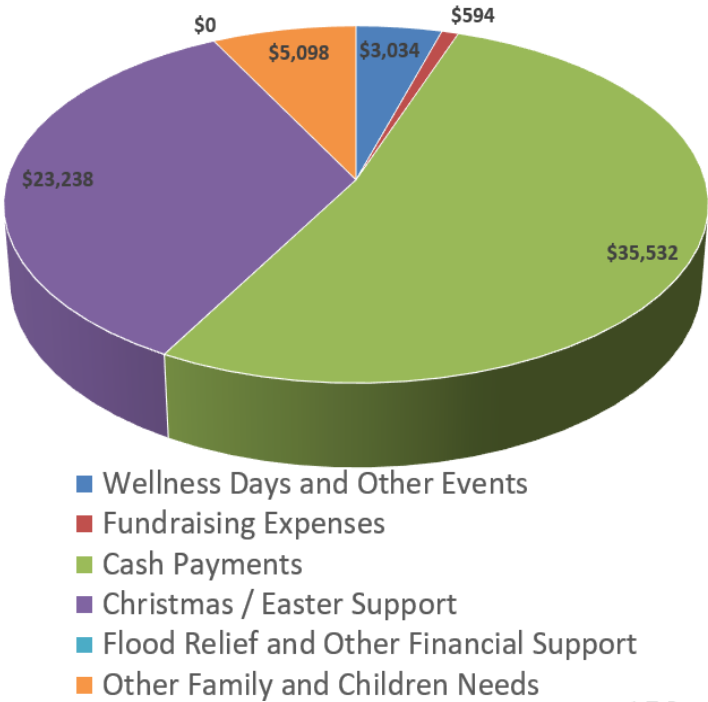
### EMERGENCY RELIEF:

Provided direct payments to bank accounts when families faced overwhelming financial crisis. This immediate support helped restore stability and reduce stress during their darkest moments.

### SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EVENTS:

Hosted 6 Wellness through learning and creativity Days for 145 women.  
Organised 3 Christmas gatherings for 320 adults and children.  
Supported 1 Mental Health Day for 25 men.

Downs & West Community Support Client Payments



## In-kind donations received and distributed, and their value:

65 Grocery hampers \$13,000	60 Christmas hampers \$11,500	35 pair Stylish Shoes \$7,000	1,438 Magazines \$4,608+	148 Care packs \$1,650
56 children + 6 adults Christmas gifts \$6,175	50 Exquisite quilts & crafts \$5,200	4,126 Random Acts of Kindness \$17,010		

# Our sincere appreciation

## Thank You

Your generous heart is making all the difference across country Southern Queensland. Because of your continued support, families are being fed, comforted, and finding relief from the weight of their struggles.

Every story shared in these pages - though sometimes heartbreaking yet filled with hope - exists because of your kindness and compassion.

Thank you for caring, for giving, and for helping us reach those who need it most.

Brady, Kerry  
Brennan, Ray  
Brennan, Raymond  
Burkett, Eileen  
Catholic Ladies Group Malany  
Chung, Elaine  
Creedy, Judene  
Cronk, Pam  
Durney-Lane, Amanda  
Enkelmann, Marg  
Fumei, Paul  
Greenaway (Meiklejohn),  
Courtney  
Greer, Noreen  
Happy Patchers, The Gap  
Hillenberg, Terri  
Hogan, Alan & Jenny  
Hull, John and Gay  
Jackson RSC, Coleen  
Jayawila, Lakshi

Jensen, Susan  
Kaur, Sukhbeer  
Marist College Ashgrove  
McGrath, Catherine  
McKeone, Diane  
Muir, Chris  
Muir, Dymphna  
Neville, Jaqueline  
Otto, Josephine  
Stanton RSC, Pauline  
St Vincent's Private Hospital  
Brisbane  
St Vincent's Private Hospital  
Northside  
SVCS Carseldine Staff  
SVHA Employees G4G  
Varker RSC, Karan  
Webster, Clare  
White, Georgia  
Wilkes, Paula

## In-kind donations

We are deeply grateful to our in-kind donors whose generous hearts for farming communities make our work possible.

Every family we can support and every life we can touch with hope exists because of the countless people who lovingly sew quilts, make beautiful crafts, and thoughtfully gather quality pre-loved items whenever we call.



# Words from the Heart

## TRAVELLING HUNDREDS OF KILOMETRES TO SHARE HOPE

In the first six months we travelled hundreds of kilometres across Southern Queensland, often arriving unannounced so families wouldn't need to prepare. On arrival, we unload the vehicle together, find a place for everything, then the kettle goes on for a hot drink.

There's something deeply moving about being offered coffee or tea and biscuits taken from the very hampers we had just delivered—families with nearly empty pantries still sharing with such grace. The children's faces light up at unexpected gifts, but it is these quiet moments over coffee or tea where the real connection and care happens. What a privilege it is to be welcomed into their homes during such difficult times.

## THE WEIGHT OF RURAL STRUGGLE

Many families we visit face challenges that test the strongest hearts. Long droughts, devastating fires, then the summer of 2025 brought record-breaking rainfall and flooding across outback Queensland. The impact goes far beyond towns, farms and businesses.

Climate extremes, mounting debt, threat of losing the farm, rising costs for everything from schooling to healthcare, and grief—these pressures reshape whole families. Rural isolation makes everything feel harder.

Men who have always been providers often feel crushed when they cannot support their families. Women stretch every dollar while fielding calls from creditors, often working off-farm to ease pressure. Children absorb the stress even when nothing is said.

Despite incredible resilience, these families need time and gentle support to rebuild their lives after each heartbreaking setback. The courage they show each day, continuing to care for their land and loved ones, is truly inspiring.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

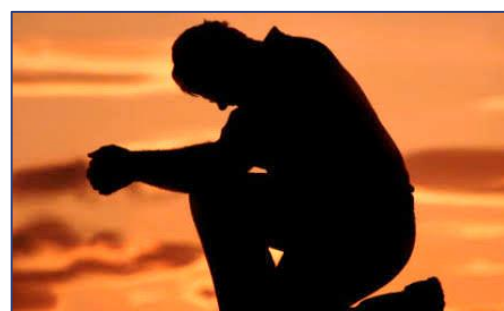
Mental health challenges in rural Australia happen twice as often as in cities. We may all face difficult times, but in remote areas, support is often hundreds of kilometres away and for some the pressure is too much to bear.

This reality moves us to act on two fronts: our Advisory Committee offers advice and guidance, while prince Harry, my toy poodle and I, together with our volunteers, load the vehicles again and again. We believe caring support and genuine connection can give families breathing space to find their feet and remember they're truly not alone.



**Sr Christine Henry RSC**  
*Executive Officer*  
*Downs & West Community Support*

## EVERY IMAGE TELLS A STORY





Our heartfelt thanks to St Vincent's Care for providing a Mazda CX-8 and to the Queensland Ambulance Service for the decommissioned ambulance—these vehicles make our ministry possible.

## Join Us in Building Communities of Hope

Every story you have read in this report was made possible by people like you  
who believe in the power of genuine care.

Whether you can give \$2 or \$200, your donation becomes part of someone's story of hope and rebuilding.  
It might be the transport that reconnects a family, the quiet presence that says, "you're not alone,"  
or the breathing space that helps someone make crucial decisions with dignity intact.

**Every gift matters because every person matters.**

Will you join us in carrying hope across Southern Queensland?

*\*All donations \$2 and over are tax deductible, with receipts issued promptly.*

### HOW TO DONATE

**Option 1: ONLINE DIRECT DEPOSIT:**

Visit: <https://www.downsandwestcommunitysupport.org/donations/>

Please email your details (name, address, donation amount) to [treasurer@dwcs.org.au](mailto:treasurer@dwcs.org.au) to ensure we can recognise your donation and issue your receipt once the deposit is processed.

**Option 2: GIVENOW PLATFORM:** Visit: [www.givenow.com.au/soccc](http://www.givenow.com.au/soccc) OR scan the QR code with your smartphone for secure online giving.



**Option 3: CHEQUE:** Mail to: **Downs & West Community Support.**

3/62 Rogers Parade West, EVERTON PARK QLD 4053

Please include your name, address, and email for receipt processing.

### LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY

Your bequest becomes a bridge between today's hope and tomorrow's healing. By leaving a gift in your will to Downs & West Community Support, you ensure our caring support continues to reach the most vulnerable members of our rural communities for generations to come.

For more information, please contact us: [treasurer@dwcs.org.au](mailto:treasurer@dwcs.org.au)

*designed and formatted by DWCS.*



**Downs & West  
Community Support**

A ministry of Sisters of Charity Community Care Ltd.  
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